Book Summary: The Magic of Thinking Big, by David J. Schwartz

Learn the key points in minutes.

This is a preview of the Shortform book summary of The Magic of Thinking Big by David J. Schwartz. Read the full comprehensive summary at Shortform.

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The Magic of Thinking Big covers a wide range of ideas on what contributes to success. At a high level, the ideas split into two categories: 1) mindset, 2) behavior.

### The Mindset of Thinking Big

**Success Requires Believing in Yourself**

Success means something different for all of us because we all have different goals. But regardless of the goal, successful people have one thing in common: they believe in themselves. Disbelief in your own abilities makes failure a self-fulfilling prophecy. In contrast, believing in yourself generates the energy to achieve your goal and overcome obstacles.

**What Does Thinking Big Mean?**

"Thinking big" means not limiting your possibilities — knowing you are capable of reaching lofty goals and achieving success. There are four key strategies to thinking big:

1. Don’t sell yourself short. Realize how capable you really are.
2. Develop a “big thinker’s vocabulary” of positive words. Talk about yourself and others using positive, favorable words. Don’t bring yourself down with negative words.
3. See the possibilities in a situation, not just what’s in front of you. Imagine what can be, not just what is.
4. Don’t sweat the small stuff. Don’t let petty arguments and perceived insults derail you from your course.

**Stop Making Excuses**

Unsuccessful people make excuses about why things haven’t worked out. They blame their health, or say their age is holding them back. They blame their lack of intelligence or luck.

Big thinkers don’t fall back on these common excuses. Instead, they focus on what they can do, not what they can’t. They don’t let circumstances hold them back, and use setbacks to propel themselves forward.

**Build the Confidence Habit and Kill Fear**

Everyone faces fear at some point. Fear in all its forms — worry, tension, embarrassment, anxiety and panic — can be crippling, blocking you from reaching your goals.

Successful people know that confidence is the antidote to fear, and confidence is a habit anyone can develop. Big thinkers first isolate their specific fear and pinpoint what exactly is making them afraid. Then they take some form of action to conquer that fear.

Other techniques for conquering fear include thinking positively, gaining an understanding of people, making moral choices, and showing confidence even if you don’t feel it.

**Think Creatively**

Big thinkers don’t just amass knowledge. They think creatively. Creative thinking is about finding innovative solutions to problems. There are six steps to develop creative thinking:

1. Believe it can be done. You have to believe something is possible for it to be achieved.
2. Know that there's more than one way to do something.
3. Always think, "I can do better." Find something you can improve every day.
4. Understand you can do more; you have a greater capacity than you think.
5. Talk less, listen more. Be curious and absorb more knowledge to think of new ideas.
6. Get some mental stimulation. New experiences generate new ideas. Explore interests outside your occupation; interact with people outside the mold of your social circle.

The Behavior of Thinking Big

By Default, Take Action

There are a lot of great ideas and plans floating around out there, but if you don't act, nothing will happen. Successful people take decisive action on their ideas. Action-takers understand that:

1. Action cures fear. If you're nervous about something, often starting to do it makes the anxiety melt away.
2. Conditions are never going to be perfect, so don't wait for perfection to act. Don't use "things aren't perfect right now" as an excuse for inaction.
3. "Now" is the default time to take action. Not "someday," not "tomorrow."
4. Taking initiative means taking action without being told to take action. This is universally respected and sought after.

Find a Victory in Every Setback

Highly successful people use setbacks as fuel and motivation to move forward. Successful people handle setbacks productively:

1. They salvage something from every "failure." They find the lesson and apply it.
2. They don't blame others for a setback. Instead, they ask themselves, "What could I have done differently?"
3. They try something different in their approach if things aren't working out. It's great to be persistent, but you also have to experiment with different ways of doing things.
4. Even if the setback is someone else's fault, go easy on them. Don't expect perfection from people, since this sets you up for disappointment. Figure out how you can adjust yourself to match them.

Set Specific Goals for a Motivating Target

Goals are energizing and motivating. They give you a target to work toward, and you work harder than if you're aimless. Big thinkers set and achieve goals with these key strategies:

1. Figure out what you really want to do. You are only going to be great at something you can put your whole heart and soul into.
2. Visualize your ideal future 10 years from now in three areas: work, personal/home and social.
3. Make progress one step at a time. Every big accomplishment is the result of a steady series of little accomplishments.
4. Create a 30-day improvement guide. Set little goals for yourself for the next 30 days to build positive new habits and destroy old bad habits.

Create a Magnetic Attitude

Your facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language all convey your attitude. Other people pick up on your attitude; if it's negative, you drag yourself down and look bad in the process. Successful people convey three attitudes:

1. Enthusiasm: You have to be enthusiastic if you want anyone else to get excited. Approach little interactions like handshakes with energy. Spread good news with joy.
2. YOU-are-important attitude: Others react positively to you when you...

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The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 1: Success Requires Believing in Yourself

What is success? It means something different for all of us because we all have different goals. But if you look at people you view as successful, regardless of their goals, you'll see they all have one thing in common: They believe in themselves. They believe in their abilities. They believe they can accomplish their goals, no matter what obstacles arise.

Believing in yourself isn't about wishful thinking, though many people confuse the two. You can't simply wish yourself into a promotion or a bigger home. You can, however, fuel yourself with an "I know I can do it" attitude, which creates the energy needed to propel you forward. With the right attitude, you'll observe how other people succeed, and you'll see all the opportunities for yourself to succeed. The "how" comes naturally if you believe you can do it.

Why Thinking You'll Fail Is Harmful (#why-thinking-you'll-fail-is-harmful)

When you're talking with someone who has failed, you may often hear, "I had a feeling it wouldn't work out," or, "I wasn't really surprised it failed." From the very beginning, these ventures were seeded with failure.

When you start out with a mindset of, "I'll give it a try but it probably won't work," you've already given up. You have a subconscious will to fail. Because you don't truly believe, you find more and more reasons to support your lack of belief — more reasons to give up. If you believe you can't do big things, you won't do big things. If you believe you're worth little, you'll receive little. Disbelief causes our opinion of ourselves and our possibilities to shrink.

This also affects how the world sees you. Others see us as we see ourselves, so we shrink in the view of others. If we don't think we can do it, others certainly will agree. This makes it harder to attract other people to you.

When You Believe in Yourself, You Gain Power

Here's what happens when you believe in yourself and adopt an "I know I can do it" attitude:

- You generate the energy, skills and power to set and achieve your goal. The American space program...

Shortform Exercise: Building Mr. Triumph and Destroying Mr. Defeat

Use this exercise to replace a "defeat" mindset with a "triumph" mindset.

Think of an area of your life where Mr. Defeat tends to run your thought process. What does Mr. Defeat say in your head?
The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 2: Stop Making Excuses

Unsuccessful people have a tendency to make excuses about why things haven't worked out. But if you look at successful people, you find they may have experienced those same roadblocks, but they don't dwell on them. They don't make excuses. The roadblocks weren't even a factor.

The author calls the tendency to make excuses the "disease of excusitis." Like a physical disease, excusitis can get progressively worse. At first, the person might know the excuse is just a convenient lie - but the more she repeats it, the more she believes it. Soon, she uses that excuse to justify every problem in her life, instead of taking responsibility and solving the problem.

People tend to make excuses centered around four areas: health, intelligence, age, and luck. We'll look at each area in detail, but the pattern is this: people use personal traits they can't change as excuses for not trying. To overcome this, invert your attitude: don't waste time regretting what you don't have; instead, make the most of what you do have.

A disadvantage with the right attitude will beat an advantage with the wrong attitude.

Health Excusitis

What it is: You surrender to your health woes and use an illness or condition as an excuse to stop reaching for your goals. "I've now got this disease - my life will never be the same." "I don't have the energy/health to do what I really want to do."

Why this thinking is flawed: There's no such thing as a perfect human specimen. We all have, or will have, a physical limitation. It's our attitude about our health that matters. We can dwell on our ailments, falling victim to "health excusitis," or we can keep a positive attitude and keep moving toward our goals.

You can imagine someone with heart disease who puts his life on pause and becomes depressed. Contrast this with another person who recently had a pacemaker installed who is bursting with energy and vitality, ready to pursue his dreams, grateful to get a second shot at life. The first person surrendered to health excusitis, while the second person remained optimistic...

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What Our Readers Say

This is the best summary of The Magic of Thinking Big I've ever read. I learned all the main points in just 20 minutes.

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Shortform Exercise: Cure Your Excusitis

Stop using excuses to limit yourself. Use this exercise to vaccinate yourself against excusitis.

What excuse do you use often to justify your own lack of success? Describe what goal you want, and what excuse you use to explain why you haven't succeeded.

READ FULL SUMMARY OF THE MAGIC OF THINKING BIG

SIGN UP FOR FULL EXERCISE

The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 3: Build the Confidence Habit and Kill Fear

Fear in all its forms — worry, tension, embarrassment, anxiety and panic — is crippling, paralyzing you from taking action and blocking your success. Fear is real, and no amount of advice such as, “Don't worry,” or “There's nothing to be afraid of” will cure us
Why is fear so self-defeating? Think of an infection in your body. If left untreated, it spreads unabated, causing more physical harm and pain and damaging more and more areas of your body. Fear is an infection of the mind, and when it spreads it stops you from taking chances and jumping on opportunities. It blocks your chances at success. Fear stops you from speaking up when you have something to say, and its incarnations such as anxiety and stress can actually make you physically sick.

So how do we treat this mental infection of fear and stop its spread? **Confidence is the antidote to fear**, and the good news is that confidence is a skill you can develop. No one is born totally confident. Confident people acquire that confidence over time — and you can too.

There are five steps to take to build the confidence habit:

1. Isolate your fear and take action.
2. Think positively.
3. Gain a better understanding of other people.
4. Make moral, right choices.
5. Act confidently, even if you don't feel like it.

**Isolate Your Fear and Take Action**

This step has two parts. First, isolate your fear. **What exactly are you afraid of?** Describe it in very specific terms.

Next, take action. There's an action to counterattack any type of fear. Prompt, decisive action conquers fear. Postponing and procrastinating is like pouring fertilizer on fear, helping it grow.

Think of a sales executive terrified of losing her job amid plunging profits and a tenuous company atmosphere. She may think there's nothing to do but hope for the best, but hope is not enough to change the situation or remove her fear. Instead, she could **take action**.

- She could investigate the reason for slipping sales and rally her team.
- She could seek the advice of other managers and formulate a plan of action to...

**Shortform Exercise: Building the Confidence Habit**

Use this exercise to pinpoint a fear and begin to replace that fear with confidence.

Think of a specific fear you carry. Pinpoint it. What exactly is making you afraid? What are you worried about?

**The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 4: What Does Thinking Big Really Mean?**

**You are bigger, more important, more capable and worthier than you think.** Where success is concerned, being “big” isn't measured in inches or degrees or family background. Rather, it's measured by the size of your thinking. How big do your ambitions get? How confident are you in your abilities?

Unfortunately, many people can't see themselves as the boss, or in that big house, or in that career. They settle for less and sell themselves short.
What's wrong with thinking small? When you think small, you miss out on opportunities.

- You see an advertisement for a job and think, “I’d love that! It’s perfect.” But you don’t apply because you automatically think you’re not good enough. Why bother?
- You know a certain sales prospect would be a great fit with your company, but you don’t bother to go for the account. They’re probably too big for you.
- You meet someone you really like, but you don’t follow up or make plans. They’re way out of your league.

When you think too small, you become focused on your inabilities, and you don’t seem to recognize your abilities. (Being aware of your inabilities is healthy, it’s fixating on them that’s problematic.)

When you think big, you are fully aware of your abilities. You have the self-respect and confidence to know you’re worthy of the job, the relationship, or the promotion. You know your possibilities are endless.

Five strategies to help you think big:

1. Don't think little of yourself. Concentrate on your assets.
2. Use positive “big thinking” words.
3. See possibilities in every situation and every person, including yourself.
4. View your work as important.
5. Don’t sweat the small stuff. Focus on what's really important.

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**Big Thinkers Don't Think Little of Themselves**

It's easy to fixate on your weaknesses and ignore your strengths. This can be self-limiting, if you feel less capable than you really are.

To accept your full worth and stop selling yourself short, try this fun exercise. It helps you do a reality check and realize just how capable you really are.

1. Write down your...

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**Shortform Exercise: Think Bigger**

Learn how to think bigger about yourself.

Write down your five best “assets.” Pick things that your trusted friends and colleagues would agree with.

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**The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 5: Think Creatively**

Creative thinking is about finding innovative solutions to problems, employing new and improved ways to do something.

Too often people associate creative thinking with something major, such as writing a novel or inventing some new world-changing device. But give yourself more credit. Anytime you figure out a way to make something better, you are creatively thinking. Stopping an argument before it starts, finding a new way to save money, or streamlining a business task are all examples of creative thinking.

Here are six ways to develop creative thinking.

1. **Believe it's possible.** Never think something is “impossible.”
2. **Stop traditional thinking.** Be experimental.
3. **Ask yourself,** what can I improve today? Keep getting better.
4. **Ask yourself,** how can I do more? Increase your capacity.
5. **Ask and listen.** Don’t talk too much.
6. **Stretch your mind.** Get stimulated.

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**Believe It’s Possible**

If you think something can’t be done — liking a person, solving a work problem, creating world peace — your mind goes to work for you, bolstering your arguments and beliefs that this problem is impossible. Your brain shuts down thoughts of a possible solution.

If you truly believe something can be done, your mind also goes to work for you — only this time it finds ways to help you prove a solution is possible. Belief releases creative powers, enabling constructive thinking and bringing inspiration. You find ways to like the annoying coworker, fix the sales problem, or send your child to college.

Here are two tips to help you develop creative power through belief:

1. **Get rid of words and phrases such as “impossible,” “can’t do that,” and “no way.”** These negative words set your mind in motion to create more negative thoughts.
2. **Think of something you want to do but always felt like you couldn’t.** Write down a list of reasons why you can do it.

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**Stop Traditional Thinking**

Traditional thinking is the belief that there is one, proven way to get something done, and that’s that. When you think like this, nothing gets innovated because you do the same thing...
Shortform Exercise: Thinking Creatively

Use this exercise to stimulate your creativity.

What is something you want to do, but think it’s impossible? Describe it. Then write down a list of reasons it could be possible (even improbable wishes are fine). Reflect: does it now seem more possible?

SIGN UP FOR FULL EXERCISE

The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 6: Think Yourself Into Importance

Have you ever noticed that some people seem to walk around commanding respect from others? Doors are opened, salespeople hover, and coworkers listen to every word. Other people, however, don’t get the same treatment. They can walk around virtually ignored or simply tolerated. What’s the difference?

The author proposes a simple answer: thinking. If **you believe, deep down, that you’re not worthy, you’ll act like an unworthy person**. This basic feeling of inferiority and lack of confidence will shine through no matter how you try to hide it, and others will react to you without a high level of respect.

If, however, you truly **believe you are an important and valuable person, you’ll act with importance**, carrying yourself with confidence — and others will react to you with respect and deference.

To gain the respect of others, we must first show a high level of self-respect and self-confidence. There are four specific ways we can increase our self-respect so that others can see us as a self-confident and important individual.

1. Look important.
2. Believe your work is important.
3. Create and deliver your own pep talk.
4. Think like an important person.

Look Important

Your appearance says volumes about how you feel about yourself and how others perceive you. If you present a careless, slovenly appearance, especially in a job setting, you’ll be perceived as a non-entity. Your appearance is telling others, “Don’t mind me. I’m used to being pushed around.”

If, however, you look your best, you’ll be perceived as someone who is important and capable. **Your appearance is saying, “I’m used to being treated with respect.”** Others will fall in line and treat you with the respect you’re commanding.

**Your physical outside influences your mental inside.** When kids wear a costume, they start acting the part, whether it’s a superhero or a princess. As adults, we shouldn’t think we’re immune to this effect. If you’re an executive, dressing like an executive makes you feel like one.

Dressing differently also influences how other people perceive you....

READ FULL SUMMARY OF THE MAGIC OF THINKING BIG

Shortform Exercise: Create Your Own Pep Talk

Create your own commercial to market yourself to you.
What are your greatest assets? What sets you apart from other people? List up to five.

**The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 7: Make Sure Your Environment Is “First Class”**

We’ve all heard the old expression, “you are what you eat.” This means that our well-being is tied directly to the food we use to fuel our bodies.

The author proposes that your mind is also a product of what it is fed, and what feeds your mind is your environment. The people you surround yourself with, the clothes you wear, the neighborhood you live in, and the food you eat all shape you into the person you are.

Most importantly, the size of your thinking, your attitude, and your goals all are the products of your environment, particularly the people around you. If you are surrounded by petty, negative people, you will likely pick up the habits of negative, petty thinking. If you are surrounded by positive, ambitious people, you will begin to reflect those traits, as well.

**Your environment changes how you think. Improve your environment to improve how you think.**

There are three aspects of your environment to change: your internal environment, your social environment, and your physical environment.

### Recondition Yourself for Success

The biggest obstacle to success is thinking you’re just not cut out for any major accomplishment. “Big things are just not in the cards for me.” Too many adults are conditioned toward this sense of mediocrity.

Children don’t dream of someday getting by in a dead-end job. Kids set high goals and fully expect to do exciting, important things. But as they grow up and gain responsibilities, these free-thinking children often become short-sighted adults. They’ve likely been bombarded with the advice of others to “quit dreaming,” and “be practical.” They’re told they’ll never get ahead because they don’t have the luck/money/connections/character traits.

Some people surrender completely to this input. They settle for a job they don’t love and rationalize themselves into a rut from which there’s little chance of escaping.

Others surrender partially at first, holding out hope that someday big things will happen. As time goes by, however, this group loses their fight and decides that greater success isn’t worth the...

**Shortform Exercise: Revamp the People in Your Environment**

Is there a negator in your life? It’s time to lose that negative influence.

Think of a person in your life who is often negative. What kinds of things this person say or do?

**Shortform Exercise: Going First Class**

It’s time to up your success game by going first class with your buying decisions.
Think about something low-quality and cheap that you own, and something high-quality that you own. How does each make you feel when you use it?

The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 8: Create a Magnetic Attitude

Our facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice betray our thoughts and attitudes. A co-worker sitting slumped at his desk sighing radiates boredom and unhappiness. Another co-worker sitting up, alert, engaged in a discussion conveys energy and interest in what she’s doing.

The second a customer service agent picks up the phone, his tone of voice can convey sincere interest in helping you, or pure disinterest and annoyance.

Our attitudes speak for us, broadcasting disinterest and boredom, or energy and success.

Successful people hone three specific attitudes to help them lead people effectively:

1. “I’m activated.”
2. “You are important.”
3. “Service first.”

The “I’m Activated” Attitude

Being activated means being enthusiastic. You have to be enthusiastic if you want anyone else to get excited about your cause. Students will tune out a monotone, unengaged teacher, but an enthusiastic, activated teacher will capture their interest. A fundraiser who is truly passionate about his cause will generate more donations than someone going through the motions.

You want other people to look at you favorably as someone who's alive, purposeful, and enthusiastic.

You can develop the enthusiasm skill in three ways:

- **Learn more about something you find uninteresting.** You might find something boring only because you don't know enough about it. When you dig enough, you'll dig up enthusiasm and interest.
  - If you're not enthusiastic about a subject, learn about it. It's likely way more interesting than you thought.
  - If there's a person you don't get along with, learn all you can about her. You'll find your interest and enthusiasm toward her grow.
  - Have a task you are avoiding? Dig deep and learn everything you can about it.

- **Add more life to everything you do.** Practice enthusiasm in your actions and words.
  - When you shake hands with someone, grasp their hand firmly, make eye contact and smile. They’ll feel great and you’ll feel engaged.
  - When you say “thank you,” or “how are you?”...

Shortform Exercise: Convey the “I'm Activated” Attitude

Boost your enthusiasm toward an aspect of your life you’re lukewarm about.

Is there something in your work or personal life you’re just not that enthusiastic about — but there's no avoiding it?
The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 9: Be Likeable and Others Will Help You Succeed

Your success in any endeavor depends on the support and acceptance of other people; you're not going to achieve your goals alone.

- In sales, you need people to buy your product.
- If you're running a big project, you need team members doing their jobs well.
- If you're writing a book, you'll need an editor, marketing team, and readers.

To gain this support, you have to be likeable. Likeability is a factor in all aspects of your life, particularly your career. If you have the technical skills for a new job but you're deemed unlikeable, you won't get the position. You have to fit in with other people to achieve success.

Likeable people like other people. They show genuine friendship and kindness to others. You can't fake likeability or bribe your way into others' good graces; you'll end up just creating contempt in the people whose support you're trying to gain.

To cultivate likeability, successful people:

1. Take the initiative to build new friendships.
2. Don't expect perfection in other people.
3. Tune in to “Channel P” and not “Channel N.”
4. Don't monopolize the conversation. Let others talk.
5. Don't blame others when there's a setback.

Take the Initiative to Build New Friendships

When you take the initiative to introduce yourself to other people, you build more friendships and relationships, gaining more support.

Successful people go out of their way to meet people and put others at ease. There are six ways to emulate this:

1. Introduce yourself to other people at every opportunity, whether it's a work event, on an airplane or on an elevator.
2. Make sure the other person hears and knows your name.
3. Make sure you know the other person's name. Know how to pronounce it correctly.
4. Make sure you know how to spell the other person's name. Write it down.
5. Follow up with a note (email or text if appropriate). If you want to know them better, it's important to follow through and take the next step.

Average people wait for others to introduce themselves. Successful...

Shortform Exercise: Tuning Into Channel P

Learn to tune into “Channel Positive” instead of “Channel Negative.”
Think of a common situation in your life, whether work or personal, where you tend to tune into Channel N, getting your feelings hurt or becoming angry. Why do you think you react this way?

**The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 10: By Default, Take Action**

There are two types of people: Mr. Activationist and Mr. Passivationist. Mr. Activationist is a "doer" who accomplishes big things. Mr. Passivationist is a "don'ter." He postpones things until they are no longer a viable option.

Mr. Activationist plans a vacation and then takes a vacation. Mr. Passivationist plans a vacation but ends up postponing it indefinitely because the timing isn't right. Mr. Activationist wants to start a new business venture, so he does. Mr. Passivationist also wants to start a new venture, but talks himself out of it before he ever gives it a shot.

**Successful people are Activationists; they have developed the habit of taking action.** Mr. Activationist adopts these action-oriented mindsets:

- Nothing is ever going to be perfect, so don't wait for perfection to act.
- Action cures fear, and fear is what is stopping you from taking action.
- Don't wait for inspiration. Just start acting, and inspiration will come.
- Think "now," not "later."
- Take initiative. Other people will respect this.

**Nothing Is Ever Going to Be Perfect**

Many Passivationists want to wait for everything to be perfect before they take action. But conditions, timing, and other people are never going to be perfect.

- People will never be perfect.
  - A man in his late thirties wanted to get married and have a family and a perfect life. He wrote a prenup detailing everything from his future wife's behavior to what kind of friends they would have. His fiance balked and called it off, saying "for better or for worse" was good enough for her.
  - Successful people know that people are not perfect; working through the inevitable problems is worth it in relationships.
- Timing will never be perfect.
  - You and your partner dream of buying a house, but you think if you wait, the market may improve. But waiting may not be the answer; it could very well be the wrong time later for other reasons.
  - Successful people think creatively and find ways to make their goals, such as buying a home, a reality even when issues crop up.

**Shortform Exercise: The Action Habit**

Build the habit of taking immediate, decisive action.

Think of something you've been putting off. What is it?
The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 11: Find a Victory in Every Setback

Everyone meets with opposition and setbacks. Unsuccessful people allow these setbacks to defeat them. They use opposition as an excuse to throw in the towel and say it just can't be done, whether it's buying a house, starting a business, or getting a promotion.

Successful people, in contrast, use setbacks as motivation to move forward, more determined than ever to reach their goals.

There are three keys to handling setbacks constructively:

1. Salvage something from every failure.
2. Don't blame others or bad luck for a setback. Don't beat yourself up, either.
3. Boldly experiment with new approaches to overcome setbacks.

Salvage Something From Every “Failure”

Setbacks can be upsetting. Our first impulse is often to quit or react with anger. But reacting emotionally robs us of a chance to learn from that setback.

Successful people pull a small victory out of every defeat. They find the lesson and apply it, learning what went wrong.

- After a plane crash, the FAA examines the data to figure out what went wrong so it never has to happen again. This is a small victory pulled from a tragic setback.
- A student fails a course. She could be angry at the professor and feel outraged at the injustice. Or, she could figure out where she went wrong. Maybe she didn't work hard enough or study properly. Maybe she should have asked for extra help. If she applies these lessons to the next course, she'll be more likely to succeed.

"A failure is a man who has blundered, but is not able to cash in on the experience." - Elbert Hubbard

Similarly, don't see a setback as a permanent condition that destroys a path for you forever. Learn from it, get better, then try again.

- Imagine you're driving in a car and hit a dead end. You wouldn't give up and set up camp there; you'd find an alternative route, even if you have to backtrack.
- If an airport is closed due to weather, a plane wouldn't circle aimlessly - it would reroute to another airport.

Successful people take detours in stride. They keep going, even if they have to find a new path toward...

Shortform Exercise: Learning from a Setback

Salvage something from a recent failure.

What's a recent setback that you've had? Describe it.

Sign Up for Full Exercise

Shortform Exercise: Experiment with New Approaches

Switch up your approach to an old problem.
Think of a goal, whether work or personal, that you are dedicated to and persistent about, but that is not working out as successfully as you’d hoped. What is your current process?

The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 12: Set Specific Goals for a Motivating Target

Without goals, we stumble around, surviving day to day but never truly knowing where we are going. Goals set a specific target for you to aim toward. You know where to direct your effort, and you aim for concrete results.

If you walked up to an airline ticket counter and said, “Give me a ticket,” the agent wouldn’t know how to help you. You can’t buy the ticket until you know your destination. It’s the same with your life goals. You can’t get started until you know where you want to go.

Think of yourself like a business. Businesses plan ahead, researching and developing new products and services, keeping an eye on changing trends. They have a plan for how to respond to new conditions, and they set goals to target.

Successful people are like businesses, with talents and skills as the products. Success depends on developing yourself, producing product, and marketing yourself. Like a business, you need a long-term plan to do this effectively.

When you set goals, don’t be afraid to be ambitious. Don’t be intimidated by your past or where you are today. Don’t think small thoughts like, “look at where I am now - there’s no way I can reach my goal.” Your current situation don’t matter when you set a goal. What’s important is where you want to go.

Here’s how successful people treat goals:

- Understand the power of goals:
  - Goals both big and small give purpose.
  - When setting career goals, surrender to your true passions.
  - Goals give you automatic guidance to stay on course.
  - Progress toward goals is made one step at a time.

- Set goals throughout your life:
  - Write out a 10-year plan for life in the areas of work, home and social.
  - Have a 30-day improvement plan for small goals.

The Power of Goals

Goals Big and Small Give Purpose

No matter how big or small, goals have incredible power. Focusing on a goal immediately boosts energy, cures boredom, and unleashes physical power. Think of a weekend morning when you wake up with nothing to do. Sounds nice, but on days like this we accomplish...

Shortform Exercise: Visualize Your 10-Year Future

Think big picture about what you want 10 years from now. Picture your most successful possible self.

Shortform Exercise: 30-Day Self-Improvement Plan

To meet your big goals, start by setting smaller goals. Create a 30-day self-improvement plan to gain positive new habits and break old, negative habits. After you set these, commit to doing them for the next 30 days.

What negative habits do you want to break? Write down two to four.

The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Chapter 13: Think Like a Successful Leader

Success and the ability to lead others go hand in hand. You don't find success alone; rather, the support of others helps lift you to success.

There are four important principles of leadership. When you master these tools, others will respond to you as a leader and support your ideas.

1. Put yourself in the minds of the people you're leading.
2. Think about the “human way” to handle a situation.
3. Set an example of making progress.
4. Take time for yourself to think.

Put Yourself in the Minds of the People You’re Leading

If you want to gather the support of others, you must look at the world through their eyes. Ask yourself, “What would I think of this situation if I were the other person?” Consider what other people care about. This will give you the key to convincing them.

- Example: An advertising executive is creating a children’s shoe commercial. He includes his favorite type of music and upscale imagery. But parents are unimpressed. These commercials don’t appeal to their kids or to them. Had Ted put himself in the minds of his target audience, he would have created a clearer, catchier commercial that showcased the shoes.
- Example: Politicians often fail to connect with voters because they don’t take the time to understand the issues dear to voters’ hearts. They appear “out of touch” to the constituents. If their opponent speaks to those interests, she has a much better chance of being elected.

Consider these situations of seeing through the eyes of people you want to influence.

- If you're training a new employee, put yourself in their position. Are you being clear and concise, or are you unfairly expecting them to know too much?
- If you're giving orders, think about how you would like hearing those orders.
- If you're giving a speech, think about your audience's interests.
- If you're throwing a party, think about the music and food your guests would like.

Constantly ask yourself, “If I were the other person, how would I react to this situation?” Then take the course of action that would connect with you if you...
Shortform Exercise: Act Like a Leader

Become a better leader and set a good example for those you lead.

Think about something you have to convince another person of. Put yourself in that person's mind. What do they care about? How would they react to what you’re saying? How can you change what you say to be more convincing?

The Magic of Thinking Big Summary Troubleshooting by Thinking Big

We've covered a lot of concepts and suggestions. They're not easy to remember in the moment when you need them most. Here are a few specific situations that might require you to think big.

When other people try to bring you down:

- Stay big. Don't engage with small people. You won't win when you fight, but you win when you refuse to fight.
- People who try to bring you down have other personal issues. They're insecure or jealous, and it has nothing to do with you. Pity them. Don't engage them.

When you don't believe you have what it takes:

- Remember that if you think you can't do it, you can't. If you think you can, you can.
- Remember your assets. Repeat that commercial you wrote to sell yourself to yourself.
- Withdraw from your positive memory bank. Think about previous examples that prove you can do this.
- Remember that other formidable people are just people with their own strengths and weaknesses, just like you.

When you get dragged into an...