

Nach Christus gepürt. 1513. Jar. 2di. 1. May. Hat man dem großmichtigen Kunig von Portigall Emannell gen Lysabona praecht auß India/ein sollich Rhinocerus. Das ist hye mit aller seiner gestalt Abcondertset. Es hat ein farb wie ein gespieckelte Schildkrot. Vnd ist vö dicken Schalen vberlegt fast fest. Vnd i Aber nydertrehtiger von paynen/ vnd fast weh afftig. Es hat ein scharff starck Horn vorn auff der nasen/ Das begyndt es albeg zu wezen wo es bey staynen ist fangt todt seynde. Der Helffande furcht es fast vbel/dann wo es In ankumbt/ so laufft Im das Thier mit dem kopff zwischen dye fordern payn/ vnd reyst den he nñ erwürgt In/ des mag er sich nit eruern. Dann das Thier ist also gewapent/das Im der Helffande nichts kan thun. Sie sagen auch das der Rhinocerus Schnell/ Graydig vnt



DÜRER'S RHINOCEROS: STRATEGY AS A SKETCH OF WHAT MIGHT COME NEXT.

Seth Godin

About 500 years ago, Albrecht Dürer made a poster of a rhinoceros, a creature that almost no one in Europe had ever seen in person. Each detail is finely rendered, but not quite right. But if you look at it for a while, the essence of a rhino comes through.

Strategy is often an unseen option, apparently too sophisticated, expensive, or elitist for most of us. But once we see it, our next steps become clear. We have what we need to make better plans.

Strategy is the soil, the seed, and the gardener working together over time. Strategy is our chance to make an impact.

***Who will we become,
who will we be of service to,
and who will they help others to become***

This is strategy.

A strategy isn't a map—it's a compass. Strategy is a better plan.

It's the hard work of choosing what to do today to make tomorrow better.

This is the point. This is at the heart of our work and the challenge of our days.

Toward better.

SEEING (AND CHANGING) THE CHOCOLATE SYSTEM

The farmers who grow chocolate are some of the lowest-paid workers anywhere. In Ghana and the Ivory Coast, two of the largest producers of chocolate, a commodity system grinds people down, pushing them into endless hard work, and not rewarding them for the taste, innovation, or quality of the chocolate they produce.

Commodity chocolate is cheap, and needs to be sold in volume to people who care more about the convenience, price, and social interactions than they do about the flavor or the impact of their choice.

There are several systems at work here. The corporate-industrial complex, which pushes for scale, profitability, and stability. The government regulatory system, in which bureaucracies balance social good with pressures from industry as well as a desire for stability. And of course, the marketing system, responding to consumers who prize convenience and promotion.

Turning Halloween into a cultural phenomenon benefits the largest producers of chocolate. It's not unusual for 15% of their annual sales to be associated with this single celebration. The key metrics for them are market share and profit, not flavor or sustainability.

In 2003, Dutch journalist Teun van de Keuken reported on slave labor in the commodity chocolate market. His initial plan was to use publicity to shame the government and large chocolate companies to change the system.

His frustration with the system led him to become a producer, and he founded Tony's Choclonely (named this way because he was the lonely voice speaking out). Tony is now one of the largest chocolate makers in the Netherlands, with nearly 20% of the Dutch market. Their chocolate is fully vetted, from bean-to-bar, offering consumers a different story, a more delicious option, and a better way forward.

Shawn Askinosie took a similar path in the US, combining open book management, ethical sourcing, and dramatically higher wages for chocolate growers (it helps that it's more delicious chocolate as well). Shawn brought commitment and bravery to a new industry and, as a result, changed the standard for how it should be done.

A third enterprise, Original Beans, seeing the possibilities in a new system, committed to pushing it further, making bars that are vetted, using profits to regenerate the landscape, and also embracing once-lost flavor profiles that some people happily pay extra for.

“Better” is a tricky goal. The system wants what it wants until leverage points are found that enable cultural shifts to happen over time.

Neither Shawn nor Tony nor Original Beans is going to change Halloween. But the options they create put pressure on the system at every step. Governments are no longer easily persuaded that it's not possible to trace chocolate back to the producer. Retailers realize that they can make a profit year-round without pushing junk for a few weeks a year. And consumers in search of status and affiliation can engage with this new story, particularly when friends and colleagues highlight the options.

"Better" is a tricky goal. The system wants what it wants until leverage points are found that enable cultural shifts to happen over time.

Horizontal change is harder to see than brave leadership, but even more important.

The movies need heroes. Corporations need CEOs. Inventions need inventors.

And yet, culture is the driver of most systems, and culture is the result of the interactions between and among people. Strategies stumble when they depend on someone with power dictating how things will occur.

If you want grow a garden, you'll need to plant seeds, but it's the ecosystem and the climate that will determine what happens after that.

Our job is to find a plan and then create the conditions for our project to spread from person to person, within and across the systems that already exist.

BIG PROBLEMS DEMAND SMALL SOLUTIONS

Big problems get big because systems amplify problems and make them sticky.

It's tempting to decide that a chronic problem is big enough that we ought to declare war on it, drop everything, hyperinvest, hold our breath, and do nothing until it is solved. But that's not how the problem got here and it might not be the best way for the problem to be solved.

Strategy demands humility, because accurately predicting the future is impossible.

We have the agency to decide and the chance to choose our path forward. But it's a path—a stepwise approach to a long-term impact. Too often we focus on power, the sudden windfall, and the big win. But what might be needed is community action to adjust the rewards and information flows involved in the system we're part of.

These small changes get deep into the workings of how the nodes in the system make decisions. System changes are more permanent and resilient than the more satisfying broad strokes we often embrace.

Important solutions aren't the work of right now. They are the persistent yet impatient work of building a strategy that works.

SEEING STRATEGY CLEARLY

Strategy is a flexible plan that guides us as we seek to create a change. It helps us make decisions over time while working within a system.

Strategy is interesting because of the complexity of its two companions: time and systems. Time resets each day, bringing with it new chances to make new decisions. And systems involve the interconnections of multiple people (and their interests) over time.

A key aspect of strategic planning is understanding opportunity costs, which are the benefits foregone by choosing one option over another.

Strategy demands humility, because accurately predicting the future is impossible.

Strategy also involves anticipating and planning for the actions and reactions of other actors within the system. This means considering not only the direct effects of strategic choices but also the indirect effects that come from the responses of competitors, customers, and even the environment. The success of a strategy is contingent not only on your actions but also on the actions of others.

If you sell your time at the lowest possible price, you'll always be busy helping someone else get to where they're going.

Successful people figure out how to trade their time and their effort for the change they seek to make in the world.

"EVERYONE" IS ELUSIVE

We can't have an impact on everyone. None of us can.

But that doesn't mean we can't make things better for someone.

Implied in that statement is that our strategy is going to leave someone behind, ignore folks, or even be criticized.

The need for a unanimous standing ovation is a trap.

There's a way out: The people who need you, the someone who will benefit—if you hesitate to ship the work because it might not be perfect for everyone, you're actually stealing from the someones who need you.

We can't succeed with a strategy that requires everyone else to care enough to come to our point of view. Perhaps the best we can do is to help people get to where they've wanted to go all along.

STRATEGIES REQUIRE EMPATHY

Not sympathy. You don't have to agree with how any node in a system will choose to act.

And not, "If I were you," because you're not them. Only they are them.

This is the empathy of, "I don't know what you know, see what you see, or believe what you believe. And that's okay."

We can't succeed with a strategy that requires everyone else to care enough to come to our point of view. Perhaps the best we can do is to help people get to where they've wanted to go all along.

If the change is important, you'll need to find the empathy to acknowledge that the system (and many of the people in it) doesn't want what you want or even believe what you believe.

You can be right or you can make progress. It helps if you're right, but progress actually comes from helping other people feel as though they're right.

It's easier to help someone get to where they're going than it is to persuade them to go somewhere else.

BACK TO THE RHINO

When Dürer made his woodcut of the rhino in 1515, he hadn't seen it in person, or even a reliable first-hand drawing (there were, of course, no cameras). Instead, he made assertions about what he was hearing, piecing together elements of rhino-ness, and would up creating a pastiche of what a rhino might be.

So many prints from the woodcut were made that it became the definitive European image of the animal for centuries to come.

The future sends us reports on what it's going to be like. None of us have seen it, but it's possible to make assertions about what is to come.

We may have to walk away from our drawing tomorrow, no matter how hard it was to create, but the sketching pays off because it offers context and structure for what might come next.

The future is unknown. Any project we take on, any change we seek to make, might not work.

We can't do strategy without embracing the knowledge that we're taking a risk. 📌



Info



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Seth Godin is the author of 21 international bestsellers that have changed the way people think about work and art. They have been translated into 38 languages. His breakthrough books include *Unleashing the Ideavirus*, *Permission Marketing*, *Purple Cow*, *Tribes*, *The Dip*, *Linchpin*, *The Practice*, and *This is Marketing*.

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