



How to Turn Your Dreams into Reality— with the Stroke of a Pen

Nora Herting & Heather Willems

Have you ever dreamed of doing something big in your life—like maybe starting your own business? Have you also had trouble pursuing that dream because you didn't know where to start? Rest assured, you're not alone.

Some 67 percent of millennials are interested in starting their own business, while about 54 million Americans now consider themselves freelancers.

But turning a great idea into something that will actually earn you a living can be intimidating. You kind of know what you want, but maybe you have a hard time explaining it to other people, let alone knowing if someone would be willing to pay you in return for your product or service.

If only there were a way to break it down into more manageable chunks—something you could do that would allow your brain to fully activate in coming up with the answers you need.

It turns out there is a first step you can take to start to make your big ideas and dreams come true: You can pick up your pen and start drawing.

Let us explain.

There are many reasons why people find themselves drawing—for creative self-expression, to strengthen an idea, to communicate, to memorialize, or to lead people. We have drawn for these reasons, too, and in the process, we have taught what we know to the business community. Both artistic children, we went to art school, where we met in an art history class. We were alike in our work ethic, or innocent ambition to become professional fine artists, and our deep desire to help others express their artistic side. (Outside of class, Heather was teaching photography to business professionals through a community art gallery in Minneapolis, while Nora was an art teacher to 500 students on Chicago's South Side.) A few years into school, we were delighted to learn we had each received a full fellowship for teaching undergraduates while we pursued our master's degrees in fine art.

Years later, our background as visual artists and art educators brought us work in a very unlikely place. This place was filled with toys, games, books on business, art, and novels. It wasn't a children's classroom, but a collaborative space run by an international consulting company. Despite the fun atmosphere, real work was being done there, but it was done differently. Creativity, collaboration, and action were the fundamental guiding principles.

Here we were trained in the powerful practice of aiding creative work through real-time visual transcription, or what is called graphic recording. Having drawn, up until that point, as an act of creative expression, we now began to experience the power of drawing as a social act, as a way to increased understanding in a group and gain clarity of ideas and purpose—as a new way to facilitate.

We were both attracted to graphic recording because it combined creative expression and collaborative energy. More important, it fulfilled a real and deep need in the business community. In 2009, we redirected our efforts from working with the consulting company to focusing on our own visual art—by starting ImageThink.

Visual Learning Makes You Smarter

We are graphic facilitators, which means that we help stoke creativity through real-time visual transcription. What we do is also called visual notetaking, sketch-noting, doodling, mind-mapping, graphic recording or, dare we say, “ImageThinking.”

Our business, ImageThink, works with 35 percent of the Fortune 50 companies—including big names like Google, Pepsi, and IBM—helping them tackle huge mergers, corporate reorganizations, innovative directions, and implementing new strategies. How? We draw visuals to help them clarify, communicate, and collaborate in their search for solutions. We jog their creativity and inspire them to think differently about the problem at hand. Our clients hire us because they have come to appreciate how powerful visual learning of this kind is at tackling big problems and achieving hard-to-reach goals.

“It turns out there is a first step you can take to start to make your big ideas and dreams come true: You can pick up your pen and start drawing.”

What we have come to learn is that when you draw out concepts, you engage in four different learning modalities—visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), kinesthetic (moving), and tactile (touching). Contrary to the popular notion that creativity originates solely in the right side of the brain, visual thinking activates the entire brain, because you are processing both analytically and aesthetically at the same time.

In fact, visual learning activates the prefrontal cortex of your brain, which is responsible for all of your complex cognitive behavior and decision-making. Think of it as the CEO of your brain. The act of drawing stimulates this most powerful part of your brain in a way that makes it more effective at processing information and problem solving.

Even better, when you have fun with your sketches, or make a visual note of a joke, you are adding emotion into the mix—which makes it far more likely that you will remember the experience of capturing that information long after you first encounter it.

Consider that numerous studies have shown that people who doodle retain roughly 29 percent more information than people who keep their pen down. There's also the fact that students who studied the arts for four years ranked an average of 50 points higher on the SATs in both the verbal and math sections than non-art students.

What neurologists, artists, and designers know can work for you, too. Why do creatives turn to sketching during the ideation phase of a project? It is a quick way to articulate a concept and stimulate cross-cognitive brain function. In other words, drawing out your ideas leads to a deeper understanding of a problem and faster decision-making.

Because we are wired to perceive the world visually, mapping ideas spatially allows multiple concepts to exist simultaneously. It uses our spatial minds to create associations, hierarchies, and relationships between thoughts in a way that linear language cannot. In the end, you're not just documenting information but creating a map that reveals the interconnection between concepts for more holistic thinking.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, why many of the most successful organizations on the planet today think that fully activating the brains of their people, to solve their biggest challenges through visual learning, is a good idea.

Drawing provides you with a symbolic visual of your goal and can motivate you in a way that simple text cannot. Once you commit that visual to paper, you are invested in a small but powerful way, because you have put your idea out into the world.

Making Your Dreams Come True

It's worth noting that we never saw ourselves as entrepreneurs; we were artists to the core. That led us down the path of turning our passion for creating visuals into a thriving business.

But deciding to start a business was intimidating. Like many, we didn't know where to start. So we began by doing what came naturally to us—we started to draw. Eventually, by using the same processes we bring with us when we work with our clients, we were able to come up with a visual blueprint for our business.

It's been a rocketship ever since, which has taken us around the world to work with our clients and to participate in events like South by Southwest Interactive and the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. Thanks to visual learning, we have made our dreams come true.

“Drawing out your ideas leads to a deeper understanding of a problem and faster decision-making.”

With our new book, *Draw Your Big Idea*, we took the process we went through to start our business and turned it into a series of 150 creative exercises that, with the help of a pen, or whatever writing implement you prefer, you, too, can make your dreams come true.

But these aren't exercises for the faint of heart. You don't have to be skilled at drawing, but you do need to be willing to dig deep down inside yourself and explore things you may not have considered in some time, like:

- **Get to Your Happy Place:** What allows you to intensely focus and lose track of time?
- **Collect Data about Yourself:** Connect the dots between what you wanted to be when you grew up at different ages. What is the common thread?
- **Learn from Others:** How do those who know you best describe your passion or strengths? Who do you find inspiring? Why? Do you have similar characteristics?
- **Remove the “Shoulds”:** What can you scratch off your bucket list so that you can free up energy for other pursuits?

Asking a series of tough questions like these, each building upon the next, will lead you toward your goal. The good news is that, once you've completed exercises like these, you will have built a solid platform to launch the venture of your dreams—and turn your passion into a success. But let's also be clear: we aren't promising to give you any answers. And you'll still need to put in a lot of work on the ground to make it happen.

You have passion and you have a purpose. Great. Now it's time to sketch out all of your ideas and assess them in relation to the world beyond. What problems do you see that need solutions? What do people need and what do they want? Imagine your idea, fully realized and out in the marketplace. Whom does it benefit? How does it generate revenue? Who are the paying customers? Are other people offering the same solution to the same problem? Answering these questions helps you identify your market. Before you act on your idea, you need to be able to clearly picture this market and your place in it.

“ You don't have to be skilled at drawing, but you do need to be willing to dig deep down inside yourself and explore things you may not have considered in some time.

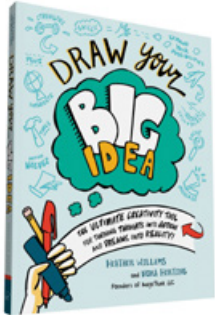
You can't do it alone. You will need support. The good news is that you already have a tremendous amount of resources in the form of people, places, and ideas.

Start local. Take a look around. What is in your neighborhood and community that can help you along the way? Which coffee shops are quiet and have good wi-fi? Which ones are more lively and have good pastries for coffee dates? What free services and classes are available near you? Does your neighborhood library have conference rooms or host meet-ups? The people who run all these locations, events, and activities are valuable resources. Get to know your local business owners, community groups, and neighbors.

A strong network can help you along your way. Fortunately, you already have many fantastic people in yours and it is larger than you think! Your network is a web of relationships. These connections can be established through a variety of commonalities and can have different dynamics and outcomes, resulting in a web that extends much farther than you realize. As you inventory the resources you have and the fortuitous way they entered your life, remember that *putting energy into* the people that can help you is just as important as finding people who can help you.

But, in the end, the big important answers aren't in a book or in others minds. They're inside you. You know yourself best, so you're your own best advisor. 📖

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [Draw Your Big Idea](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS | ImageThink is a graphic recording and facilitation firm founded in New York City in 2009. Featured in TED Talks, on the *Today Show*, and in *Forbes* and the *Wall Street Journal*, ImageThink has visualized the big ideas of some of the most influential companies and thought leaders on four continents in thirteen countries. ImageThink cofounder **Heather Willems** is a business strategy consultant with a background in art and education. She lives in Brooklyn, New York. ImageThink cofounder **Nora Herting** is an award-winning artist with a history in education and facilitation. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

→ **SEND THIS** | [Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

→ **SUBSCRIBE** | [Sign up for e-news](#) to learn when our latest manifestos are available.

This document was created on September 14, 2016 and is based on the best information available at that time. The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](#) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. Cover image from [Adobe Stock](#). You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.

About ChangeThis

ChangeThis is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

800ceoread

ChangeThis is powered by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at 800ceoread.com, and keep up with the latest developments in business books on our review site, [In the Books](#).