

SUMMARY

THINK LIKE

ZUCK

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Summary of “Think like Zuck” by Ekaterina Walter

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Learn the success secrets that motivate Mark
Zuckerberg.

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Introduction

What do you want to be when you grow up? As kids, we're asked this question all the time, but we sort of stop answering it once we really do grow up. Often, that's because we get bogged down in the demands of "real life," most of which strongly imply that whatever our dream job was as a kid, it's never going to come true. We learn to trade our dreams for inventing the next Google, becoming the next Steve Jobs, or pioneering the next Facebook in favor of a solid day job that will help us pay off our mortgage. But what do you really want to be when you grow up? And what if you really could launch the next tech giant?

The author believes you can if you simply have the right information-- the keys to success which will help you understand why some start-ups succeed and others fall short. That's why Thinking Like Zuck exists. Because if you want to be the best, you have to learn from the best! And who better to learn from than the guy who pioneered a service we use literally every day? Walter posits that if you take a close look at the best practices implemented by other CEOs, you can learn to emulate their success. So, over the course of the next few chapters, that's what we're going to do.

Passion Lead us Here

If you were to build a successful start-up-- launching from nothing only to one day make it to the top-- and you had to design a campaign with the slogan, “Passion lead us here,” what would that look like for you? What would that passion be? And where would it take you? Identifying your passion and then allowing it to inform the future direction of your business is critical for success. And that’s exactly what Mark Zuckerberg did.

Because before there was Facebook, there was Zucknet. Zucknet wasn’t available to the public, however-- it was an in-house messaging system Zuckerberg designed as a pre-teen. Zucknet was invented before instant messaging services like AOL Messenger were around and it connected his family’s computers and his dad’s dental practice. In an interview with Vox.com, Zuckerberg explained the system by saying, “Growing up, one of the neat things was that [my dad’s] dental office was actually connected to our home. The dentists and hygienists needed to share data on the patients. So I built a system where he could communicate with folks across rooms, and also communicate with me and my sisters upstairs— and I called it ZuckNet.” At the time of its invention, he was only 12.

Now, although we can see that Zuckerberg started early, the key take-away from this story is not that you have to be a pre-teen whiz kid. Rather, this story is meant to highlight the fact that Zuckerberg’s passion-- connecting people through technology-- has been evident from the start. And if you have a passion for anything in life, yours will be pretty evident too. So, what’s your passion? And where do you want it to lead you? These are good questions to get you started but it’s important to remember as you ask yourself these questions that it’s okay if the answer isn’t clear right away. Sometimes our greatest ideas and biggest successes don’t pop into our heads fully formed; sometimes they take a lot of time and effort and brainstorming.

In fact, that’s exactly how it happened for Zuckerberg. This fact sometimes gets dwarfed by Facebook’s success but Zuckerberg has always been clear

that Facebook was never the dream company he wanted to start. Facebook was a hobby that he worked on with his friend Dustin Moskovitz during their sophomore year at college. During the previously mentioned interview with Vox, Zuckerberg acknowledged, “I remember that Dustin Moskovitz and I explicitly talked about, one day, we might start a company — and this was after we’d started Facebook ... [Facebook] was obviously not the company that we were going to create.” This remained their perception even when they went out to Silicon Valley for a summer. Zuckerberg told interviewers that he and Moskovitz went to Silicon Valley just to check it out, with nothing more than the intention of gleaning some wisdom from the tech gurus who populated Silicon Valley. They no more intended to move there than they intended for Facebook to be their passion project. But we all know how their story ended up! And it just goes to show you that your passion can lead you in surprising directions if you’re simply willing to follow it.

Zuckerberg’s story also shows that you can derive inspiration from surprising places. For example, at the time of Facebook’s invention, there were already two prominent social networks that people used: MySpace and Friendster. There was no question that these sites would be considered the competition if you wanted to launch a new social platform. So, what do you do when you have some strong competition? In Zuckerberg’s case, you do two things: look for what they’re doing right and look for what they’re doing wrong. As a general rule, there will almost always be a gap that your competition has left unfilled and that’s where you can come in. You can also draw inspiration from looking at your competition’s success.

At first glance, that might sound like you’re stealing ideas from someone else, which is always unethical and always a bad idea. But that’s not at all what we’re advocating here. Rather, the author advises that you simply learn from what others are doing well. For example, if you really wanted to create a new type of social network, it wouldn’t be wrong to look at examples like Facebook and Instagram and take stock of the features that their users enjoy. Do people want a fun, fast, and user-friendly way to instant message their friends on the site? Okay, great; that’s something you

can incorporate into your new platform! But you can make it original by putting your own spin on it, whether that involves a cool design, new features, or something else that's totally unique. Because no matter what industry you want to break into, a variation of your idea is already out there. But if you follow your passion and create something new, there's no harm in taking top tips from your successful competition; you can simply blend desirable features into a totally new idea to create something all your own.

Being led by passion will also help you when you're encountering setbacks (which you inevitably will), Success and failure go hand in hand, so don't be surprised and don't give up when your idea hits a few speed bumps along the way. Zuckerberg learned this firsthand when he created Facebook's predecessor: a site called Facemash. Instead of being globally available, Facemash's target audience was limited to Zuckerberg's fellow students at Harvard. And it wasn't a social network in exactly the same style as Facebook; instead, it was a tool for students to share and rate photos of each other. Unfortunately, however, it left out one crucial ingredient: consent. Because the site was meant to be affiliated with Harvard and it used photos of students without their permission, the university (unsurprisingly) thought it was a bad idea and the disciplinary board shut it down in a hurry. So, even though Zuckerberg's first experiment failed, it also taught him a valuable lesson about what to do differently if he wanted to succeed. And that lesson informed the future success of Facebook!

What's Your Vision?

So, now that we've discussed the importance of passion, it's time to take a look at the next ingredient necessitated by our recipe for success: a vision. Establishing a vision for your company is vital because passion is awesome, but a vision is what gives it legs and enables it to rise up and take action. So, as an entrepreneur, you need to begin by asking yourself two questions: what's your personal mission? And what is your mission for your company? The answers to these questions will bleed together and influence each other so it's important that you know-- and feel good about-- these answers. That's because your vision for your company is a key means of connecting with customers.

Customers know, of course, that pretty much everybody wants to make money and sell stuff. But, like all of us, they hope for a little more than that. Your customers want to know that your company has some substance to it, a cause or a set of values that inspires you to be your best. Your customers want a story to believe in. And that's why it's crucial for you to find your story. And if you want to use an obvious example-- like starting a social network-- let's think about the core values that inform a company like Facebook.

What would motivate you to develop a new social network? Is it because Facebook is famous and you think it would be cool to be that famous too? Or does your start-up have a meaningful vision at its heart? For example, do you want to start a social network because you believe in the power of connecting people? Because you're passionate about transparency in social media? Because you want to make the world a better place?

That's why Zuckerberg started Facebook. In fact, the site's very motto is, "To make the world more open and connected." This short and sweet mission statement is of critical importance because it's the standard by which you measure all of your company's decisions. Making decisions can sometimes be confusing, especially when you're faced with financial

problems, controversial topics, or the potential to make a lot of money. In moments like that, it can be tough to know what to do and you may feel like you don't always know the right answers. But if you have a solid mission statement at the heart of your company, you can run all your decisions through that filter and ask, "Does this match up with our mission statement?"

You can also do yourself a huge favor by employing this ideology in your hiring decisions. That's exactly what Facebook has done and it's paid off! Zuckerberg realized that your company is unlikely to succeed if the people running it don't care about your mission statement. That's why he doesn't choose the most experienced or the most brilliant candidates to help operate Facebook-- he chooses people who are passionate about his vision of making the world more open and connected. And if you really think about it, it's easier to onboard a new employee and train them in the technical aspects of their job than it is to make a highly skilled professional care about a mission they're not invested in. So, when you're making hiring decisions, it might pay off to abandon your traditional protocols; don't just hire the first person who meets your requirements and needs a job. Look for someone who shares your mission, who will view their role in your company as more than just a job. It may take you longer to find those people, but it'll pay off when you do!

Your mission can also help to provide morale and this is especially true when you have the right people at your company's heart. Because just as your customers want something to believe in, so do your employees. Everyone wants their lives to be about something more than the daily grind of buying, selling, and productivity. At the core, we want to know that we're making a difference. So, if you have a mission that you and your employees can be enthusiastic about, your company will thrive because everyone will be excited about coming to work!

How do You Hire The Right People?

If the last chapter really resonated with you and you're now fired up about finding the right people, the good news is that we're going to explore that a little more in this chapter! So, who are "the right people?" And how do you find them? The key to this strategy is to start by defining your company culture. Your company culture is closely connected to your mission statement in that it taps into the core values that characterize your company. So, if you want to define your company culture, start by asking yourself what core values are most important to your company. For example, is your goal to be playful? Fun? Compassionate?

These are just a few of the core values which can motivate the heart of your company and in turn be reflected by your company culture. And if your goal is to embody these traits, then this will inform how you treat your employees. After all, if your company's "thing" is being playful and compassionate, you wouldn't force your employees to work 18-hour days, disregard their mental health, and punish them for the slightest infraction. Instead, you might provide soothing music in your offices, a dedicated hub for naps, breaks, and moments of relaxation, and you would work to make your employees feel valuable and wanted. Put simply, your treatment of your employees should reflect the core values you claim to have.

And if you have good values-- like making the world a little more open, connected, or kind-- employees will naturally flock to you. But not all of them will be right for the job. So, how do you know which people are the right ones for you? To answer this question, the author provides some examples of some of the quirky ways companies like Facebook have interviewed new candidates. Rather than going with the stodgy traditional questions of your grandad's interview experience, Facebook, Google, Apple, and Amazon ask questions that are designed to test an applicant's creativity and critical thinking skills.

For example, a common interview question at Apple might be, “If you were a pizza delivery man, how would you benefit from scissors?” Likewise, Amazon often asks, “How would you solve problems if you were from Mars?” And Facebook throws out hypotheticals like, “25 racehorses, no stopwatch. 5 tracks. Figure out the top three fastest horses in the fewest number of races.” Another company called Zappos evaluates candidates in terms of their attitude by asking them how lucky they view themselves to be. Candidates rate their answer using a scale of 1-10 and Zappos uses this system to eliminate anyone who scores under 7. The logic behind this strategy is that if you view yourself as being severely unlucky, you’re probably a pessimist. And as a result of that worldview, you probably don’t try to look on the bright side or seek moments of joy and beauty in the everyday. This arguably makes you an unpleasant person to work with and, therefore, not someone Zappos wants on their team.

Put simply, these quirky hiring strategies matter because they help you find the right people for your company. If you dare to go beyond the traditional and try to really get to know your candidates, to really see them for who they are, you’ll get a better picture of who you’re working with. And in so doing, you’ll be able to see if that person really shares your company’s values. If they do, you can know they’ll be a great fit for the team! And if they don’t, you’ll know that you can do better. But if that still seems like an unnecessarily complicated process that’s probably not worth it, take a moment to think about your company culture as well and remember that the people you hire have a tremendous impact on it. Because even if you work to make it a positive place and hire loads of people who share your values, all it takes is one pessimistic employee who complains about everything to bring down everybody’s mood and ruin all your hard work. So, make sure you hire the right people and then take care of them! When you really think about it, it’s just as simple as that.

Final Summary

It's easy to think that becoming the successful CEO of a company like Facebook is the stuff of fantasy, a dream that only comes true for a select handful of people. But the truth is that this opportunity is available to anyone who wants to start their own business! All you need is the right information and enough determination to make it happen! By taking success secrets from people like Mark Zuckerberg, you can learn to emulate the best practices of top CEOs and launch your own thriving startup.

The author affirms that thinking like Zuckerberg is actually pretty simple; all you need to do is identify your passion, be prepared to draw inspiration from surprising places (even if that means your competition!) and find your company's vision. This will help you to define your mission statement, discover your core values, and hire the right people so you can assemble a team who will help your business succeed. And once you've completed these steps, you can work on defining a company culture that will make your workers feel valued and inspire new candidates to flock to you in droves. These strategies might seem simple, but because they're grounded in creativity and passion, they'll help you stand out and get ahead of the competition. So, if you can put these principles into practice, you'll find that you're thinking like Zuckerberg and therefore, thinking like a successful CEO.



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