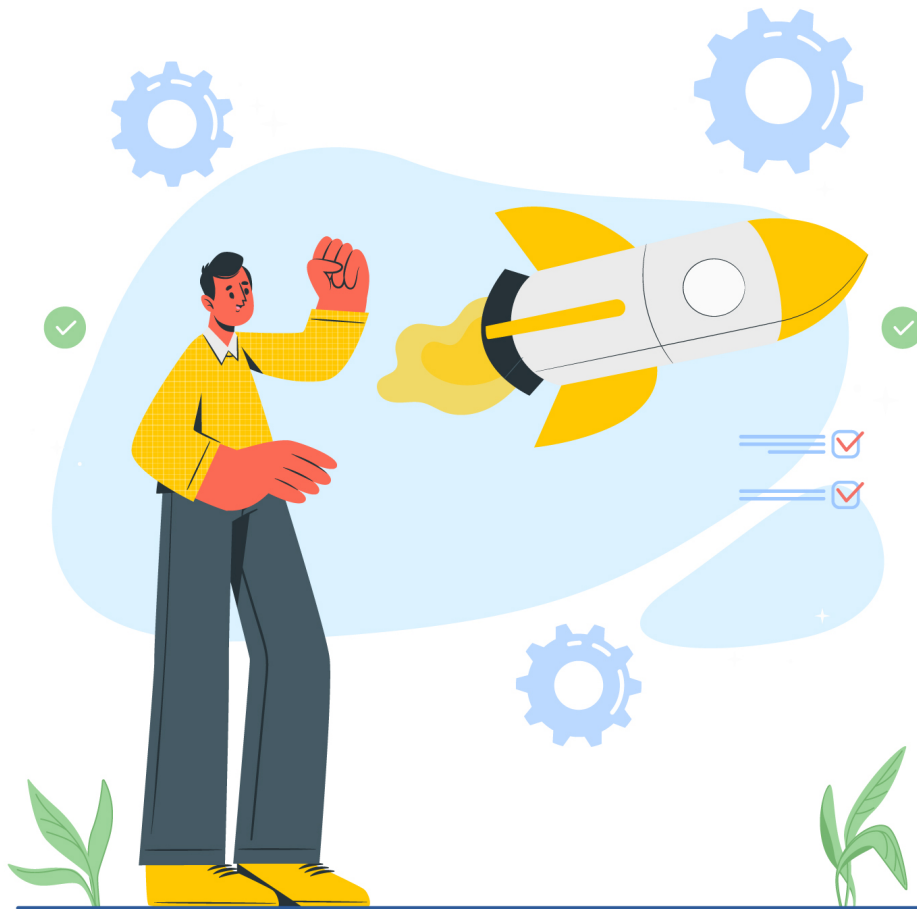


SUMMARY

START SOMETHING THAT MATTERS

BLAKE MYCOSKIE



Summary of “Start Something That Matters” by Blake Mycoskie

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Unlock your potential to make a difference in the world.

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Introduction

What matters to you? If you're like most new entrepreneurs, you might answer that question with, "Starting my own business!" And that's an awesome answer! But Blake Mycoskie wants to challenge entrepreneurs to think about that question in a different light. Sure, your business matters to you... but how is it going to matter to other people? Put simply, are you going to become another cookie-cutter corporation, existing for profit and notoriety? Or do you want to start something that truly makes a difference in someone else's life? Throughout his career, the author has sought to develop a balance between those two extremes. And having established himself as the founder of TOMS Shoes-- and branded himself as "Chief Shoe Giver" rather than CEO-- he's written *Start Something That Matters* to document the answers he's discovered. So, keep reading to learn how you can make a lasting difference and make money too.

You Can't be Ruled by Fear

Did you ever play the game “Would You Rather?” as a kid. A particularly challenging and icky question game, the options fluctuate between two extreme outcomes that you definitely don't want. For example, common questions might include, “Would you rather... be itchy all the time or sticky all the time?” or “Would you rather... eat poison ivy or a handful of wasps?” Of course, no one wants either of those things to happen, so the trick is doing some mental gymnastics to try and imagine which outcome you would hate less. And the sad fact is that sometimes life is like a game of “Would You Rather?” Sometimes, we feel so paralyzed by fear or our circumstances that we feel as though we're constantly trapped between two options we don't want.

Unsurprisingly, this often keeps us from pursuing our passions or achieving our life's potential. But Mycoskie argues that it doesn't have to be that way! So, how do we break free? Well, the author argues that we need to start by acknowledging that fear is normal. We often prefer to ignore this fact in favor of telling ourselves things like, “That shouldn't bother me” or “I could stop any time I wanted to.” But of course, we're only lying to ourselves and masking the real problem. So, instead, we should start by recognizing our fears and admitting that fear is a natural response to the scary or unfamiliar. We can also dig a little deeper and confront the role fear plays in our behavior. For example, if we're especially scared of something, we might avoid it to avoid triggering our fear.

So, if you want to start your own business but you're afraid of failing, you might avoid the risk and simply never attempt to launch your start-up. Of course, by doing so, you'll miss out on a potentially awesome opportunity, but you'll also miss out on confronting your fear. That's why Mycoskie invites readers to consider the direction of their futures and the goals that are truly important to them. You can even think about it this way. Would you rather... live your life in fear and never reach your true potential or start your own business and maybe fail? Sure, you might not want either of

those options, but one might be better than the other. (Hint: taking the risk is the better option!)

Pin Down Your Fears

If you really want to conquer your fears, however, you have to dig a little deeper. So, start by identifying the thing you're truly afraid of. This is a skill that can benefit us throughout our lives, but it's one we rarely practice. For example, think back to your childhood. Were you ever afraid of the dark as a kid? Many of us were, but we rarely dug deeper to consider the true origin of our fears. Although we thought about it in terms of "being afraid of the dark," a more developed explanation might be that we were afraid of what the dark was hiding. Perhaps we were afraid that there were dangers we couldn't see. Perhaps we worried there might be monsters under our bed. And if we had identified the ultimate source of our fear, we could have taken the next step: conquering it.

Now, hopefully, today we're over our childhood fears of the dark and monsters under the bed, but the silver lining is that the principle of conquering our fears is still the same. So once you've identified what we're really afraid of, you can start by making a list of all the reasons you're afraid of that thing. That's what Mycoskie did when he launched his start-up, TOMS Shoes. Even though this business was his dream and what he believed to be his life's purpose, he was also terrified. He didn't have unlimited resources at his disposal (or many resources at all, actually) and he had no business acumen to rely on. All he had was passion and a dream. And although that might seem glamorous and idealistic, like the sort of rags-to-riches success story we romanticize in movies, to the author, it was actually very scary.

In fact, it was so scary that he frequently wondered if he should abandon the whole thing and just give up. But deep down, he didn't really want to do that. So, he started by making a list of his fears. He categorized it by two columns: one which listed the things he was afraid of and one outlining the possible outcomes if his worst fears came true. For example, his biggest fear was that no one would buy his shoes. People buying your shoes is, after all, kind of the whole point of a shoe company, so if no one wanted his shoes,

that was the worst thing that could happen. He would lose all his money. He would have to give up on his dream. He would be forced to accept that his dream wasn't actually as special as he'd hoped.

And sure enough, it was the worst thing he could think of. But he found that when he put it down on paper, it took a little bit of power out of his fear. Staring at his fear on the page motivated him to fight it with logic and consider some other possibilities. Okay, sure, that was the worst thing that could happen, but... even if it came true, he had still tried, right? He had made new friends along the way. He'd taken a shot. At the end of the day, even if the worst came true, he would learn something new and become a better person for it. And suddenly, he wasn't so afraid anymore.

Accept Uncertainty and Move On

Because human beings fear the unknown, it's natural for us to crave predictability and certainty. That's why it's also understandable that we might be apprehensive about a new business venture, which is characterized by risks and the unknown. But the author has learned that this fear is also unnecessary. For example, in analyzing the source of his own fear, he discovered that some of his anxiety stemmed from the assumption that he needed to possess significant resources or experience in order to be successful. Without it, he feared he would fail. But as he quickly discovered, nothing could be further from the truth!

All the money and business classes in the world can't shield you from the unpredictability of life. They don't serve as insurance against surprises. So, since it's impossible to be prepared for every eventuality, the author advises that we learn to accept uncertainty and move on. That's because the only way to truly conquer your fear is to move through it. The things you're worried about might never go away but you can disempower them by embracing the unknown. So, instead of preparing for every possible outcome, prepare for uncertainty! Prepare to take risks and boldly move forward in the direction of your future.

Make Your Limits Work For You

It's tempting to look at limits as a bad thing. When we think about what we could accomplish with unlimited resources, it's easy to get angry or feel as though our limits hold us back. But the author found that, actually, our limits can inspire creativity! As we've discussed in previous chapters, when he launched TOMS Shoes, Mycoskie had very little money and very limited resources. In fact, he had so little that he couldn't even afford to buy business cards to promote his start-up! But by applying a little creative problem-solving, he realized that that didn't have to hold him back. So, he started by writing his contact info on the backs of other people's business cards and handing out his new, recycled promos!

Although he worried that this might reflect badly on him, communicating to potential customers and investors that he was poor or lazy or just weird, the results actually proved the opposite! Instead, they communicated that he was savvy, thrifty, and creative and people were intrigued as a result! That's why the author invites readers to apply these same principles to their own start-ups today. Because advances in technology have generated a new wealth of resources that wasn't accessible to him, he argues that it's easier than ever to make the most of limited resources. For example, maybe you can't afford to film a commercial or rent out a billboard, but you can start your very own social media campaign for free! You can launch a blog, find apps to help with graphic design, or use resources like Doodle, Zoom, and Google Docs to set up meetings and connect with business partners! As the author's own story proves, your possibilities are endless, even if your resources aren't.

Be a Good Company

How do you define a good company? Think carefully, because the way you answer this question will define the future of your start-up. So, in your estimation, is a good company simply one that's good at turning a profit? Is it one that's controversial but profitable? Or is it one that strives to make a difference? Mycoskie was aiming for the latter and he hopes that you will too. Because that's the only definition that will guide you to start something that matters. So, how do you do that? Well, for starters, you have to have a cause: something that matters to you on a personal level, something you want to change.

In Mycoskie's case, that meant using his shoe store to make shoes accessible to the underprivileged. If you think about it, shoes are a pretty basic human right; after all, most businesses have signs which read, "No shirt, no SHOES, no service." So, what do you do if you can't afford shoes? Mycoskie decided that he didn't want to just sell shoes for a profit, he wanted to help those in need. So, for every pair of shoes he sold, he aimed to donate one pair to an Argentinian child in need. And even though he made this choice out of purely altruistic motives, it had the awesome benefit of boosting his business!

That's because Mycoskie learned that storytelling is a far more effective business tool than leading with boring facts. For example, it would be factually true if he said, "TOMS Shoe store sells shoes." He could even embellish it by adding, "We sell nice shoes." But would that really entice people to come and spend their hard-earned money on his shoes? But what if he flipped that approach around and personalized it by saying something like, "Hi! I'm Blake. I love shoes and I'm passionate about selling them. But most of all, I'm passionate about making sure that shoes are accessible to every child who doesn't have them. That's why I'm donating one pair of shoes to a child in need every time you buy one through retail." Would that make you more interested? That's pretty much what he did and he turned out to be an incredible strategy!

In fact, his story was so inspiring that it even caught the attention of a major Los Angeles newspaper who sent a reporter to check it out. They wound up interviewing Blake and, before he knew it, business was booming overnight! People were crazy to buy his shoes not because they just wanted shoes that badly but because they wanted to be part of an inspiring story. They wanted to know that they were making a difference. That's why Mycoskie always asks new entrepreneurs: what story do you want to tell? What will help you be a "good" company? That cause might look different for everyone and it might be tough to find the right one for you, but you can do it. Your story is out there and you can use it to do something that matters.

Final Summary

Starting a business can be scary, but as Blake Mycoskie's story shows, you don't have to have substantial resources or business knowledge to succeed. In fact, it's okay if all you have is passion, a dream, and a whole lot of fear. As the author learned firsthand, fear is natural, but it can't control your life, especially not when you have a dream to do something that matters. So, if you're scared, simply start by identifying your fear and making a list of all the reasons you're afraid. You can compare this with a list of the worst possible outcomes so that you can use logic to disempower your fear.

And last but not least, you can learn to make the most of your limited resources by employing creative problem solving. With just a little bit of innovative thinking-- and the help of social media-- you can write your own success story and spread the word about your startup. Because when you want to start something that matters, nothing can stop you from finding the cause that means something to you and sharing your story with the world.



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