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Meet the MasterMinds: Seth Godin Takes the Prize (and Gives One Too)

MCNews welcomes back Seth Godin, author of *Permission Marketing*, *Unleashing the Ideavirus*, *Survival Is Not Enough*, and *Purple Cow*. Godin is a contributing editor for *Fast Company* magazine and a frequent speaker.

His new book is *Free Prize Inside: The Next Big Marketing Idea*. Godin makes the case for “soft innovation” as the best way to grow a business, instead of relying on big ads or big innovation. He says that anyone can think up clever, useful, and small ideas to make a product or service remarkable, that is, worth talking about. He calls this kind of innovation a free prize because it generates much more revenue than it costs to implement.

Finding and implementing a free prize doesn't involve standard brainstorming, but “edgecraft” and a champion. According to Godin, “Edgecraft is a methodical and measurable process that allows individuals and teams to inexorably identify the soft innovations that live on the edges of what already exists.” Once identified, a soft innovation needs a champion, or sponsor, to help convince others of the value of the idea and show the path to implementing it.

Godin believes “the future belongs to people who can invent, implement, and sell the ideas—the free prizes—that become purple cows.”

We asked Godin how to apply the concepts of the free prize, soft innovation and edgecraft to consulting.

MCNews: You've said that advertising is no longer an effective way to grow a business. Why do so many businesses, including consulting firms, cling to advertising as a means for growth?

Godin: Because that's what the boss used to do. Because it used to work. Because it's an easy way to take action without taking responsibility. Because it's not measurable. Because it's fun.

MCNews: Many consulting industry pundits suggest that the lack of the “next big idea” is stunting the industry's growth. Do you agree, or would you suggest looking elsewhere for growth?

Godin: I don't think big ideas are the answer. I think ideas are cheap and pretty easy, actually. What's difficult is finding someone to champion an idea. Simple example: Why don't major consulting firms seize the opportunity to work with gurus who have hot books and hot ideas (like Jim Collins), and unleash their hundreds or thousands of consultants to implement those ideas for

their clients? Because they're stuck. And because the people of influence who could implement an idea like that are too afraid or too stuck to champion it.

MCNews: Is there a distinction between a free prize and a gimmick? Could you think of an example of a free prize a management consultant might uncover and offer to clients?

Godin: A gimmick is just a gimmick until people start talking about it and demanding it. Then, like frequent flyer miles at the airlines, it becomes a free prize. The idea I mentioned in response to the previous question is an example of one for consultants. Another might be a consulting firm that works only for progressive non-profits. This needs a lot more thought, of course.

MCNews: In the first sentence of the introduction to your e-book, *The Bull Market*, you say, "I actually don't think much of Consulting." Why do you think most consultants fail to cause real change to occur and what can a consultant do to address this issue?

Godin: I don't think Consultants (with a capital C) get hired because of the advice they give. I think they get hired because it makes the hiring executive look good. It also gives her a lever to help her implement the changes she wants to have happen. Consulting (capital C) is often about many feet on the street, detailed spreadsheets, lots of "proof" and not an awful lot of action. But if that's what the client wants, it's hard to blame the consultant.

MCNews: You made the point that great ideas need champions to make them happen. How can consultants foster cultures that encourage champions, both in their own organizations and those of their clients?

Godin: How do the big consulting firms decide which consultants to promote? How do they decide on splitting the profits with the partners? People who are working their way up pay attention to stuff like that. Until consulting firms put their money where their mouth is, they shouldn't be surprised if their organizations are astonishingly stuck and conservative—smart people, all paralyzed, no one willing to take what feels like a chance but is actually quite a safe strategy.

MCNews: Can you train people in what you call edgecraft? What "edges" might, for example, a strategy consultant look for?

Godin: Of course you can. It's not very hard. It's about doing the difficult work of digging deep and finding the next superlative, the way of being bold and getting ever close to the edge of what your clients want.

MCNews: What's on your personal reading list these days?

Godin: Hmm. *Unstuck* by Keith Yamashita. *The Skeptic* magazine.

MCNews: Thanks for your time.

Find out more about Seth Godin, his books and services at www.SethGodin.com. You can read a previous MCNews interview with Godin at http://www.managementconsultingnews.com/godin_interview.php.

Godin's Free Prize: *The Bull Market*

MCNews readers can download Godin's free 500-page e-book, *The Bull Market*, by clicking on the link below. His new e-book is a collection of hundreds of resources to help you shake things up, including freelancers, agencies and consultants. You can download the book at <http://www.sethgodin.com/bull/download.asp>.