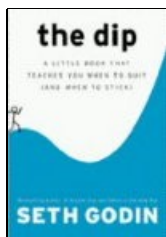


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Book Review

The Dip

A Little Book That Teaches You When to Quit (and When to Stick)

by [Seth Godin](#)

Reviewer: [Geoff Wisner](#), Staff Reviewer
Posted: September 13, 2007

The Dip is Seth Godin's shortest book yet. It doesn't give you a whole new way of looking at marketing, the way [Purple Cow](#) did, but it does address an important question: When do you quit what you're doing and

try something else?

Achieving anything valuable is generally hard. If it weren't hard, everyone would do it and the prize would no longer be scarce and therefore valuable. In the quest for the prize, the fun of getting started and being praised for it often gives way to a period of great difficulty and not much support. (For would-be doctors, this is organic chemistry.) This is what Godin calls the ♦dip.♦

As Godin has argued in his other books, to gain attention and succeed in today's crowded marketplace, you have to be remarkable. One basic way to be remarkable is to be the best in the world at something. (For this purpose, ♦the world♦ means the world that's important to you. That might be the world of Thai restaurants in Cleveland.)

However, many of us have a number of projects and challenges going at the same time, each with its own dip. If we're using all our energy coping with all them, we won't have the resources we need to be the best in the world. Therefore it's necessary to quit the things that don't matter and concentrate on those that do.

So how do you know what to concentrate on? Godin's answer to this question involves a critique of the idea proposed in Chris Anderson's book *The Long Tail*, which is summarized in its subtitle: *Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More*. ♦Long tail♦ advocates argue that Amazon, for instance, could be profitable even if it didn't offer bestsellers. It could just sell small numbers of many obscure titles to the niche markets that want them. (Amazon allegedly gets half its revenue from books that Barnes & Noble doesn't even carry.)

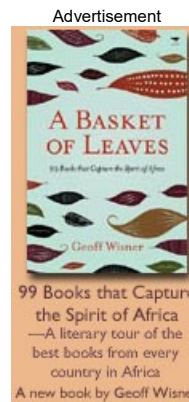
The long tail exists, Godin argues, but the big head is still more important. If you look at the popularity of ice cream flavors, for instance, you find that vanilla is the most popular flavor by a long shot: more popular than all other flavors put together. It's the big head on the distribution curve, with chocolate, rum raisin, pistachio, and other flavors making up the long tail.

Godin maintains that even *within* the long tail, the profit comes from a few items that are the *best* in the world. Not every Lithuanian language tape will sell, only the best Lithuanian language tape. There's no substitute for being the best. Once you are recognized as the best, anyone who insists on the best will choose you. This inflow of quality seekers helps you dominate your market, and as you do so, you take advantage of what Godin calls ♦cumulative advantage♦: You become popular because you're popular.

There's more, but that's the gist of Godin's argument: Find an area where you can be the best of the world. Make sure it's potentially profitable, and difficult enough so that not everyone will have the fortitude to get through the dip. Then quit doing everything that isn't essential, commit yourself to getting through the dip ♦ and become the best.

About the Reviewer

[Geoff Wisner](#) is a freelance writer and staff member of Indigocafe.com. He is the author of [A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa](#). Visit his website at www.geoffwisner.com.



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