



# Better and Faster

## The Proven Path to Unstoppable Ideas

Jeremy Gutsche

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## Rating

8

9 Applicability

8 Innovation

8 Style

## Focus

### Leadership & Management

Strategy

Sales & Marketing

Finance

Human Resources

IT, Production & Logistics

Career & Self-Development

Small Business

Economics & Politics

Industries

Global Business

Concepts & Trends

## Take-Aways

- Change never stops. If you rest, you face extinction.
- Resist the innate tendency to grow complacent with success; look relentlessly for your next opportunity.
- Seek “patterns of opportunity” in your environment. Don’t chase obvious trends. Look within trends for hidden, “niche” opportunities by using these strategies:
- “Convergence” occurs when you combine disparate ideas to create a new one.
- “Divergence” means you buck a trend deliberately to exploit a niche.
- “Cyclical” is exploiting cycles, such as the return of a previous generation’s fashion, or taking advantage of a recession to launch a business.
- “Redirection” calls for “spinning” a negative in your favor or using psychology to change people’s thinking.
- “Reduction” means simplifying a successful idea or carving out a microniche within a larger phenomenon.
- “Acceleration” is going all in on a trend or idea quickly to seize the market.
- Look for ideas in other industries and apply them to your own.

# Relevance

## What You Will Learn

In this book summary, you will learn: 1) Why resting on your laurels and “farming” your familiar ground are dangerous; 2) How to resist natural tendencies toward “complacency,” “repetition” and defensiveness; and 3) What strategies will help you spot hidden opportunities and “hunt” for your next big idea.

## Review

Ideas and opportunities abound. People surprise you all the time with brilliant new things – concepts you never thought of, or if you did, you were too cautious to pursue them. Most people till their familiar “farm”; that’s your DNA at work. You study to gain a skill, work to attain a position and reap what you sow. But things change so fast today that your comfortable job might disappear or your company could crumble around you. Trend hunter and entrepreneur Jeremy Gutsche urges you to abandon – or, at least, seek beyond – what got you there and to “hunt” aggressively for what’s next. Though you’ve probably heard some of his case histories before, Gutsche’s cautionary tales and amazing success stories fuel this adventurous guide to modern entrepreneurship. *getAbstract* recommends his change-making enthusiasm to entrepreneurs, business owners, managers and investors.

# Summary

*“By learning to find patterns in all sorts of unusual places, you can benefit from advances in other industries, accelerate your search for new ideas and better realize your potential.”*

*“With so many platforms for selling and bartering one’s services, it has never been easier to start a simple business that solves a single problem.”*

## See Things Differently

Train yourself to see, and you’ll find ideas for new opportunities and ventures everywhere. Shift your mind-set from that of a “farmer” to that of a “hunter.” Farming comes naturally because human beings have farmed successfully for thousands of years. You start out looking for opportunities, you work hard tilling the ground to establish yourself and, once you do, you stop looking. You solidify your position and reap the gains as long as you can. You have seen that a football team that stops pressing late in the game and just tries to protect its lead often loses.

## Avoid the “Traps”

Reawaken the opportunity hunter in you by first recognizing the traps you fall into as a farmer:

- **“Complacency”** – Resting on your laurels deadens your curiosity, thereby inviting disaster. Consider BlackBerry, which once held a commanding lead in the business mobile phone market. Smug in its position as the most secure, reliable provider, BlackBerry failed to see its competitors catching up. Its leaders didn’t understand that corporate users might respond to innovative design. Remember singer, rapper and dancer M.C. Hammer? In 1991, he was the music industry’s darling, but he spent his money as if the party would last forever. It didn’t; he declared bankruptcy in 1996.
- **“Repetition”** – Successful organizations and people have a hard time veering away from what made them rich. Blockbuster couldn’t shift its obviously outdated model of renting hard-copy videos until it was too late. Workers stay in jobs and careers too long. Routine blinds people and prevents them from trying new things.
- **“Protectiveness”** – In the 1970s, Kodak invented the digital camera. Instead of pressing its advantage and leading the world into a new age of photography, Kodak suppressed the technology to protect its dominance of the film market. When Kodak realized its mistake many years later, it was too late. In the 1980s, the Encyclopedia Britannica rejected

*“Push yourself to challenge ‘certainties.’ Relentlessly seek out and talk to customers, and don’t be afraid to prove yourself wrong. You need to fight your own arrogance and test impossibilities.”*

*“To innovate, you need to break free from past success.”*

*“To counteract complacency, you must exhibit insatiability. Eat or be eaten – that’s the primal force that drives the hunter.”*

*“While hunters may enjoy the occasional feast, far more often they must scan the horizon for their next meal. It helps if hunters exist in a culture that is obsessed with pleasing the customer.”*

Microsoft’s offer to digitize its content. At the time, Britannica sold more encyclopedias than any company in the world. Microsoft went ahead with another partner; Encarta emerged, and Wikipedia came not long after.

## Uncover New Opportunities

Counter your natural tendencies to become complacent, fall into routines and protect your gains by developing these “hunter instincts”:

1. **“Insatiability”** – Overcome complacency by focusing on your customers. Never assume you know what they want. Meet with them, ask questions and experiment to find better ways to serve them. Consider Capital One, which tests new ideas relentlessly, including issuing cut-rate credit cards and embracing new banking technology.
2. **“Curiosity”** – Break your routine by staying curious. Diane Halfin loved fashion, but she earned an economics degree. Determined to follow her passion for fine clothing, she took apprenticeships with designers throughout Europe. She met and married a prince, but despite her newfound wealth, focused on her dream. Today, Diane von Furstenberg stays curious by working in New York’s meatpacking district, a fashion hub where customers, employees and the buzz surrounding her keep her senses alive and her eyes open.
3. **“Willingness to destroy”** – Keep pushing. Resist overprotecting by committing yourself to destroying the things that made you successful, even if that’s painful. For example, chefs spend years perfecting their craft, but only a select few earn a Michelin star. Eric Ripert has three. He stays at the top because he refuses to keep cooking the same thing, especially his best, most beloved dishes. He experiments and creates continuously. Ripert has everything to lose, but puts his reputation and his three stars on the line constantly.

Now that you know how to change your mind-set from farmer to hunter, look for an opportunity. The secret lies in detecting patterns or trends. Avoid megatrends; for example, knowing that “environmentalism” changes everything only points to an opportunity everyone else already realizes. Look within the megatrend for patterns that reveal what might come next because of it.

## The “Six Patterns of Opportunity”

Spotting the rise of social media, even as far back as 2006, wouldn’t have helped you much if you tried to compete head-on with Facebook. But if you looked for patterns within the trend, you might have seen that Facebook focused on sharing among friends. That left open the opportunity to share with everyone. That observation – an example of recognizing a “divergent” pattern – might have helped you create Twitter. Seek patterns of opportunity in your environment. Look at the way markets, products and trends relate. Don’t chase obvious trends; look within them for hidden, “niche” opportunities by using these strategies:

### 1. “Divergence”

Divergent thinking means going against the grain, taking a counterculture stance, “customizing” and, often, focusing on a narrow niche. In the late 18th century, Edward Jenner deliberately exposed healthy people to infectious diseases. The divergent, and gross, idea of ingesting pus from a diseased person contradicted everyone’s idea of health, but it led to the first vaccines.

Robert Hintz wanted to find a girlfriend, but his exploration of big, online dating sites led him to question their screening tools. Hintz wondered whether “attractive women” felt

*“A pattern-obsessed mind-set can help you spot opportunities in retro, nostalgia, economics, seasonality and generational shifts.”*

*“If you’re exploring a concept that differs from the mainstream... examine your weaknesses to consider whether you can position them as points of differentiation.”*

*“Companies love to roll out policies, procedures, hierarchy and guidelines to scale a business, but inevitably the rigid structure limits flexibility.”*

*“To find a remarkable new idea, you need a fresh way of thinking. For many innovators, this can be accomplished by looking outside their industry for inspiration.”*

frustrated by having to wade through hundreds of unattractive men who responded to their profiles. He probably couldn’t have succeeded by building another ordinary dating site, so he built BeautifulPeople.com, a dating site that rejects millions of would-be members as being too ugly. Controversial, polarizing and deliciously divergent, the site attracted enormous free publicity and succeeded wildly.

## 2. “Convergence”

Convergent thinkers see opportunities in bringing together “unrelated” ideas and trends to create new prospects. For instance, convergence emerges from combining knowledge of one field with experience in another. During Kyla Gutsche’s treatment for cancer, she lost her eyebrows and couldn’t find a satisfactory cosmetic substitute. This started her multiyear journey into tattooing, which led to alliances with a mix of specialists, such as plastic surgeons, Japanese ink masters, Yakuza gangsters and prison inmates. By combining disparate fields and expertise, she advanced tattooing, particularly for those whose skin suffered the effects of radiation therapy.

Gutsche’s major breakthrough came from reaching into the distant past. Previously a University of Oxford art professor, she remembered the breakthroughs the Renaissance artist Titian accomplished in simulating skin tone. The combination of his techniques with the advances she’d made in tattooing provided the solution she was seeking. She launched a new company and achieved widespread recognition as an expert in skin pigmentation.

## 3. “Cyclical”

What goes around, comes around. Old fads and trends often enjoy new life years or decades later. It took Matthew Weiner, the creator of *Mad Men*, almost a decade to convince film studios that the 1960s were trending. When his show finally aired, it led the trend and “redefined” what the ’60s meant. Today, many of Hollywood’s biggest hits feature old comic book heroes brought to life on the big screen. Nike Air running shoes have made a comeback, as well. Look for “story lines” from the past and tap into people’s “memories and nostalgia.” Without fail, economies go through cycles. Entrepreneurs launched many of the world’s signature companies during recessions, often a ripe time for start-ups.

## 4. “Redirection”

Take what might otherwise be a disadvantage and turn it into a strength. Analyze a trend and “rechannel” it in your favor. For example, when Dutch authorities wanted to reduce the thousands of gallons of urine street festival partygoers sent flowing into canals each year on the queen’s birthday, they installed new “video-game”-style urinals that drew people into the restrooms.

Frederick the Great of Prussia wanted his people to eat potatoes, a food they saw as disgusting. He declared spuds to be a royal food and thus “off limits” to commoners. He had his potato gardens fenced, but lightly guarded. This encouraged people to steal the crop. Before long, potatoes became a staple of the Prussian diet.

DeBeers created demand for a common jewel – the diamond – by making it seem rare and associating it with love and permanence. Advertising Age named DeBeers’s “A Diamond Is Forever” the “best slogan of the 20th century.” Redirection means going with the trend, not fighting it, like the Dutch, or using psychology, like Frederick and DeBeers. “Redirection involves refocusing, shifting, swapping, repurposing, repositioning, righting a wrong and gamifying an experience. It’s the art of the spin.”

*“People are seduced by story, and if you can emphasize the right tales, you can cultivate a powerful connection to your brand.”*

*“The path of divergence is often blocked by hesitation, fear and conservatism.”*

*“Keep the following three principles in mind, and you’ll find your way back every time. Be curious. Be willing to destroy. Be insatiable.”*

## 5. “Reduction”

In a world of abundance, people want to satisfy their specific, differentiating desires. Reduction means simplifying and narrowing your idea. Rather than trying to cater to everyone, deliberately focus on a narrow niche. By offering only “blow-drys” and not haircuts, the boutique Blo has grown to 25 stores and almost \$20 million in revenue. By aiming her Skinnygirl cocktails at women who worry about their weight, Bethany Frankel built a company that sold for \$64 million.

The Dollar Shave Club lures a small cohort of men – guys who hate shopping for razors – away from giants like Gillette. It has built a fast-growing subscriber base of 200,000 people and \$10 million in annual revenue. Look at what works on a massive scale and think about who within that mass wishes for something different. Consider where giant companies face a disadvantage from bloat and overhead, and carve off a piece of their business. Hyperniches often earn increased customer and brand loyalty.

## 6. “Acceleration”

When you spot something trending, sometimes going all in and taking “an extreme position” makes sense. Toyota led the charge to electric cars by taking a conservative “hybrid” approach with the Prius. Tesla, on the other hand, went all in, betting the future on an “all-electric car.” Now, it leads the industry.

Nicole DeBoom wanted to buy feminine running clothes. Finding nothing that appealed to her in the stores, she designed “running skirts.” Her designs took off, giving birth to “Skirt Sports.” DeBoom doubled down on her idea by sponsoring races. People dubbed her races the “Skirt Chaser 5K.” Rather than backing down from controversy, she accelerated the idea, adding post-race singles mixers and running ads featuring running skirts with the message “Your Pace or Mine?” DeBoom’s business is flourishing, and six cities now host her races.

## Join the Hunt

Now that you understand patterns of opportunity, start hunting. Identify underexploited slices of the action. Seek something viable, but small enough to escape everyone else’s attention. Put your ideas together to spot patterns and “clusters,” throw out your first thoughts, and do it again. Keep narrowing your focus until you find your opportunity.

For example, the fashion industry always operates at the cutting edge. Consider how Zara and H&M flipped their industry upside down through rapid design and fast inventory turnover. Study the food business and learn from exploitation of trends, including healthy eating and home delivery. Consider opportunities in industries that are ripe for disruption, like health care and education, with their outrageous fees and antiquated structures.

Capitalize on constant change, seek patterns, resist your instinct to farm, stay curious and move on from the things that made you successful. Search relentlessly for the next opportunity.

# About the Author

**Jeremy Gutsche** became an entrepreneur at age seven. His fascination with ideas led to the launch of Trendhunter.com, a site where millions of followers seek unique opportunities.