

The Dip Summary

By Seth Godin

Winners know when to quit.

The Dip is about the art of "strategic quitting." When it comes to achieving our long-term goals, 'knowing is half the work.' Dips happen, but we can increase our chances of success if we're more aware of these sinkholes.

Once we can acknowledge the sinkholes, we can prepare for them, better manage them, and importantly, know when to exit them. To be "dip savvy," we need to make tough choices, avoid distractions, and set our priorities straight.

If you're a goal-orientated overachiever, then you're likely to have run into some obstacles in pursuit of success. Most of the time, we tackle these obstacles with perseverance. If we get a little discouraged, we might turn to inspirational words, such as Vince Lombardi's popular adage, 'quitters never win, and winners never quit.' However, author Seth Godin, explains why this is bad advice. Winners quit all the time. In his words, 'they quit the wrong stuff, stick with the right stuff, and have the guts to do one or the other.'

We'll briefly explore life's dips, why they help us rise to number one, why being number one matters, and lastly, how to quit *strategically*. So, if you want to figure out if the dips you happen to find yourself in are worthy of your time, effort, and talents, then this is a book that will give tremendous insight.

The Dip

Progress is never a straight line.

Take figure skating. After a few visits to the ice rink, we may learn the basics of ice skating reasonably quickly. But, if we want to turn things up a notch and master jumps, we may encounter "the dip." The dip happens when our initial ease and euphoria is replaced with never-ending workouts, and the frustration of countless failed attempts.

Every new undertaking, be it a hobby, a relationship, or work pursuit, usually starts with an initial honeymoon phase of excitement. However, inevitably the dip will rear its head, and we'll be faced with the sinkhole. This is the "long slog," as Godin puts it, 'the long slog between starting and mastery.' The cycle is that usually things start out well; then, things get difficult, strenuous, and uncomfortable. Added to this, in comparison to the honeymoon start-out period, the dips we hit can take years to push through, until we *finally* feel like we've come out stronger on the other side.

So dips happen. What's more, some are built-in on purpose. "Built-in dips" help to truly test the power of a person's determination and discipline. They serve as a kind of strategic process of elimination, especially for universities and employers wanting to find the right person for the job.

If you're an American student, and want to go to medical school, one of your first year mandatory classes will be the notoriously difficult organic chemistry. Interestingly, organic chemistry isn't the most important class in the medical curriculum, but it creates a dip. A dip causes students to

quit while they're ahead. It's easy to entertain the idea of being a doctor, but it's not easy to get there. Creating a dip early on is a quick way for universities to downsize classes to only the most dedicated students. Employers use the same approach. Many job applications require people to fill out loads of documentation, and to endure several grueling rounds of interviews, to reduce the applicant list to only the "best" candidates.

Perhaps we can take stoic comfort in knowing that dips are supposed to be challenging, but things will get easier if we push through. And we'll be better for it. If it weren't for life's dips, we'd live in a world without excellence.

Dips Bring Out the Best in Us, and Striving to be the Best Matters

Having a vast repertoire of skills and interests can be both a blessing and a curse. As the saying goes, 'you can do anything, but not everything.' We might want to start the next big company, be a successful musician in a jazz band, and, establish a non-profit. All of these might be worthwhile pursuits, but to truly excel, we need to pick one thing at the expense of all else. In his book *12 Rules*, clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson says, 'choose your sacrifice.'

Why should we focus on one particular area of expertise? The bottom line is that specialization matters. Godin explores the surprising value of being "the best" in the world. Our culture celebrates superstars, and we live in a world where we reward the song, product, organization, or employee that's number one.

Did you know that the two most popular ice cream flavors in the United States are vanilla and chocolate? Vanilla lovers might be pleased to know that their flavor comes first in ranking order, and by a mile. Vanilla accounts for almost 30% of all ice cream sales in the U.S., while chocolate only accounts for about 10%. So, there's a big gap between first place and second place, between the best and good. Godin uses this example to illustrate that the rewards for being number one are heavily skewed. Zipf's law of distribution shows that no matter the domain, it's typical for a number one spot to get ten times the benefit of being number ten and a hundred times the advantage of being placed at one hundred. This law isn't just restricted to ice cream, but applies to anything, from college applications, résumés, record labels, and vocations.

To be number one, matters for two reasons. In today's global, competitive marketplace, people want only the best. Consumers and clients don't have time and money to waste, so they go straight to who's the best. Godin gives the example that if we're diagnosed with cancer, we're not going to mess around and go to an array of doctors; we're going to head straight for the "top guy," the person who's ranked best in the world. Being the best in our chosen niche means we're likely to have more customers than our competitors. However, this isn't the only advantage. If people know our services and products are worth it, "that they're the best," they pay more. So we're able to charge more for our premium product or service.

Godin's advice is this: 'Being at the top matters because there's room at the top for only a few. Scarcity makes being at the top worth something.' And dips create scarcity. So, find where your skills and passions intersect, and commit to make this your central focus. Scan for anything that doesn't serve your core pursuit; quit that quickly, and stop feeling

guilty.

How to Quit Strategically

The word "quitter" is a term many of us tend to associate with failure. The proverbial phrase 'never give up' has been indoctrinated into us since our early school days. But quitting might just be the secret to winning.

The currency of dips comes in the form of time, energy, and resources. So we have to make a conscious choice based on what it takes to invest further if we're to emerge "successfully" from the dip. Sometimes to be the best, the cost may be too high, and other opportunities that may be available to us could be more worthy of investment. Knowing where we are in life, helps us to clarify when to quit and when to stick it out. Having the right information and a clear idea of where the path is headed, can also help us determine if the payoff is worth the struggle.

Here's one question worth reflecting on: Are you in a dip, or actually in a cul-de-sac or on a cliff?

"Cul-de-sac" is French for "dead end." It's when we're in a situation that's stagnant with no prospects of improvement. Compared to the dip, it's a flat line. If we look to the future and realize that what we're doing isn't leading anywhere, then we're likely to be in a cul de sac, and it's time to quit. Perhaps we're in a dead-end job with no growth prospects. Or, no matter how hard we try, there are just incompatible beliefs and values, which we may never reconcile and therefore, have to move on from.

"The cliff" is a situation where things seem to be going okay, but will

collapse eventually. Unlike the dip, we don't successfully re-emerge on the other side. Despite our efforts: the hard work, struggle, and challenges we endure, things still crumble. The project fails, the market ignores us, or we get fired from the job.

So it helps to know the difference between a dip, a cul-de-sac, and a cliff. And then decide if you have to quit.

Before Quitting, Ask These Two Questions

The first thing to ask yourself is: 'Am I panicking?'

If you are, this isn't the moment to throw in the towel. Quitting when you're in panic mode is dangerous and expensive. Godin says, 'when the pressure is greatest to compromise, to drop out, or to settle, your desire to quit should be at its lowest.' Be strategic. Decide in advance *when* to quit, and don't quit without a compass or a plan. So wait until you've finished panicking, and then decide. Quitting in the heat of the moment might be the easiest path, but it's the least successful one.

On the other hand, sometimes quitting is the most difficult choice, but unfortunately necessary. Here's where we need to ask the next question: 'What sort of measurable progress am I making?'

All too often, we get stuck in a scenario where quitting feels too painful, so we stay put. Choosing not to quit is easier than quitting. But to stick with something with no hope of progress is a waste. It's a waste because we could be doing something far better, more pleasurable, and more worthy of our time.

In light of this, where do you think you are? Currently, based on where you're at, are you moving forward, standing still, or worse, falling behind? To succeed, we need to make some sort of forward progress, no matter how incremental.

In Conclusion

Winning means *sometimes* quitting. So learn to quit fast, often, and without guilt. Mastery comes from persevering through the *right* dips, in which case, keep in mind that the more significant the barrier is, the bigger the reward may be. Press on.

Before we think about entering a new market, acquiring a new skill, or starting a new business venture, it's essential to consider what *their* unique dips will ask of us. Alternatively, we need to think about what would happen if we continue to focus and push through the dip that we're already in?

Success comes to those who obsess. As Godin explains, 'A woodpecker can tap twenty times on a thousand trees and get nowhere, but stay busy. Or he can tap twenty-thousand times on one tree and get dinner.' The focus that leads us through the dip and out the other side, is rewarded by a marketplace in search of those at the top.

So may Godin's book grant you the serenity to quit the wrong stuff, the courage to stick with the right stuff, and the wisdom to know the difference.