The Night before David met Goliath

Your attitude defines your success

Executive Summary:

We take a whimsical look at the epic battle between David and Goliath to see whether it might offer some insights into the way large and small companies act in a changing market place. Jay Heuer shows how the common beliefs cherished inside those companies are actually not that far off from those of the two warriors. How one of them was able to defeat the other was not so much a matter of situation but of attitude. And such attitudes can be changed.

Pondering Fate

Picture this situation: here is **David**, lying in his bed at the eve of his encounter with Goliath. For the last 39 days, this mighty warrior had stepped between their two armies and challenged a champion to single combat. The war's outcome hinges on this event. All along, the mighty warriors of the Jews had been busy gazing at their navels, or the texture of their toe nails, humbled in shame. And here David was, thinking about stepping up and answering the challenge. Against the Big Guy.

Now take this picture across a few hills. Here lies **Goliath**, mightiest of the Philistines warriors, unchallenged for 39 days, confident in his superiority. He is bigger than anybody the Jews can muster, stronger, and more fearsome: the clean winner.

Human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.
William James

What were the thoughts of those two while they were waiting for sleep (or the sun, in David's case, I guess)?

Let's assume those two are actually schooled in disciplined thought, and use the **SWOT Analysis to predict their reality tomorrow**. Here is one skew already: while David is fully aware of Goliath, and develops plans to defeat him, Goliath is unaware of his impending doom.

We will see that both had their chance to win. By **choosing** a specific path of action, Goliath doomed himself to failure, while David was betting his life on his idea.

This is the typical struggle between the established corporation and the startup (or small company). Let's see what is going on.

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Goliath's SWOT Analysis on the night before the fight	
— Strengths —	**— Weaknesses —**
• Mightiest Warrior around • Wide reach • Intimidation • Experience	• Have not had a good fight lately • These weaklings might never show up • Nobody roots for Goliath
— Opportunities —	**— Threats —**
• Fame, by winning this war single-handedly • Become stronger yet to challenge anybody in the known world	• Might be betrayed or cheated (poison or arrows) • Might make the king jealous • Boredom

Goliath's Dreams

Goliath slept very well before the fight. Nobody had showed up yet, so why tomorrow? In his dreams, he was thinking about his status as the mightiest warrior around. He could trust his experience that nobody could beat him.

Then there was his reach: with a height of 6ft 6in he could attack an opponent even before he could be harmed himself. With his towering size and his fame Goliath could also intimidate most opponents.

Lastly, he had fought many wars and was experienced in war fare (at this point that meant that he knew how to kill his opponent quickly by doing the same thing he had done so many times before).

He was worrying that he would not have a good fight ever again. Maybe these weaklings would never show up, and he would have to go home without the thrill of a kill.

He could almost feel the fame he would achieve by winning this war single-handedly. At the rate he was going, he would be able to challenge anybody in the world pretty soon.

Nobody roots for Goliath.
Wilt Chamberlain

A little bit of nightmare did slip into his dreams, nevertheless. He was tossing and turning when thinking about betrayal in the form of poisoning (a cowards way, yet deadly) or cheating (an arrow could still kill him from afar, his own eye sight was not too good). He briefly worried about making the king jealous, but dismissed this fear quickly since he won the king's wars and did not have any ambitions himself.

And most of all he was worried that he would never have a good fight again and would die of boredom.

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David's SWOT Analysis on the night before the fight	
— Strengths —	**— Weaknesses —**
• I know I can do it, I slew a bear and lion • Surprise, I am the "Dark Horse" • Nimbleness and Speed	• Weaker than opponent • Smaller reach • Much less experience in fighting • I am scared
— Opportunities —	**— Threats —**
• Nothing to lose (except my life, don't think about that!) • Choice of weapon • Surprise	• Die before I can do anything • Elders forbid me to fight

David's Thoughts

David had a slightly different night than Goliath. He did slay a bear and a lion before, and that gave him a bit of confidence. He knew that Goliath would not expect him, so an element of surprise was on his side. He was also much faster and nimbler than the large Goliath.

Yet, the tall figure still loomed large in his head. The warrior was huge, and David was clearly the weaker of the two. His reach was not a wide, and he had much less experience in fighting. Plus, he had to admit as he lay there staring against the roof of his tent, he was scared.

There were major opportunities, though. He had nothing to lose but his life, and he could choose his weapon. That should compensate for the reach and strength of Goliath. He could also surprise him with a new tactic that the experienced hero had never tackled before.

That sounded very good in theory, but he still worried. There were threats, too. He could die quickly, rendered helpless if Goliath understood his plan quickly and brought his own advantages of strength and reach to bear. And, he realized with a shudder, the king could simply forbid him to fight.

Everybody wants to see David beat Goliath.

Chuck Esposito

The Issue of Attitude

Why is this story so interesting? Because it mirrors what a big company and a small company go through when they engage in the market place.

Just like Goliath, a big company will rely on its size (budget and people), reach (geographies, markets and politics) and experience (decades

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spent in the business) to dominate opponents. Just like David, a small company will benefit from the surprise factor and its nimbleness. This comparison is actually surprisingly comprehensive.

We believe that **Goliath was too confident** and set in his ways to be able to deal with David. Goliath did not lose because David was better. David won because he had the more appropriate attitude for the fight.

If Goliath would have realized that **this form of combat had different rules** than the large-scale engagements he won so far, he could have made preparations (a small guy with a bow and arrow in the back, maybe) to ensure victory.

Here are a few more successful attitudes for Goliath:

- If my opponent is big, I will see him coming from afar, with fair warning. With the small guys, I need to be able to quickly generate counter-strategies that can kill them effectively. They are not that robust, a quick decisive strike will do it. **Maybe I need a partner to take care of them, somebody that is faster than I.**
- Fighting might not involve swords and shields, weapons that clearly favor my strengths. I need to make sure that **my defense system can take on a variety of attacks in different styles**.
- My size does not only protect me, it also makes me a **big target**. I should think about the possibility of losing more often, and how it could happen.
- **I should avoid situations in which my death is the only survival option for my competitor.**

Only the paranoid survive.
Andy Grove

About Jay Heuer

Dr. Heuer is co-founder and CEO of SarJay GmbH, the Germany-based consulting outfit focused on **Innovation Management**, **Finance Management**, and **Talent Development**.

Jay has spoken on numerous occasions at conference and in company events about Innovation Management and Talent Development.

Dr. Heuer has been quoted in several newspaper articles about product development and Innovation Management, last in the Boston Globe.

His career spans the creation of a German software development company and a successful, US-based decade in IT and Research & Development for one of the largest companies in the world.

He can be reached through the contact form at http://www.sarjay.com (because he really, really, really hates spam).

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