



The Magic of Mojo

What happens when a software company owner, a roller coaster designer, and a condom maker walk into a monastery?

By Paul Spiegelman

It sounds like the start of a dirty joke, but it actually happened—at the Small Giants International Summit in Konstanz, Germany from June 9 – 11, 2011—and the founders emerged smarter, and with a renewed passion for their businesses. As CEO of the Small Giants Community, I hosted 55 entrepreneurs from 13 countries and 6 continents at the first-ever such summit.

The idea of a “Small Giant” originated in Bo Burlingham’s 2006 book, *Small Giants: Companies that Choose to Be Great Instead of Big*. As CEO of Beryl, a company that manages patient interactions for hospitals, I became acquainted with Bo when I wrote a book about culture and asked him to write a foreword for it. Then, in June 2009, Bo and I partnered to form the Small Giants Community, a group of business leaders who measure success more than just through financial bottom lines, but also contributions to communities, dedication to great customer service, and the creation and preservation of strong workplace cultures.

As *Small Giants* was published in non-English languages, we realized there was a passion for these philosophies among the international community, which led us to host the 2011 summit in a converted monastery in a university town in the southwest corner of Germany.

Participants represented diverse industries including manufacturing, social investment, consulting, patient experience, jewelry, catering, sales, publishing, and software design, and the companies they lead ranged from solo shops to those with more than 350 employees, or annual revenues of \$250,000 to \$33 million. The series of workshops, discussions, and mentoring sessions not only resulted in takeaways to improve our respective businesses, but was even a life-changing experience. One participant told me: “It restored my faith in commerce and people.”

In his book, Bo talks about “business mojo,” the organizational equivalent of charisma that defines a Small Giant. During the summit, our existing Small Giants and aspiring Small Giants realized that because of our shared “mojo,” we were more alike than different, despite the thousands of miles that separated us, the business climates of our particular countries, or even the type of work we do. One attendee said: “I never thought I could have shared a value set with a weapons and roller coaster machinery fabricator.”

A central theme at the Small Giant’s Summit was the focus on and reinforcement of business mojo. Here’s what we talked about:

- **The biggest challenges for a values-driven business involve people.** Get the right people in the business, keep communications clear, open and regular, and make tough decisions to remove people who do not fit. One Small Giant mentioned a leader who had a great resume but was not a culture fit so was therefore unable to gain the trust of employees and move the business forward. Despite excellent experience and ideas, the organization had to let the person go in order to stay true to its values.
- **We face the same challenges, but see business through different lenses.** A Small Giant isn’t looking at just the short-term financial impact of decisions, but rather how those decisions impact long-term vision. Several companies cited a need to “fire” clients who did not fit their core values because it would be better for the company in the long run. One participant walked away from outside capital because of the threat to culture.
- **Reframe the definition of success within your organization and the business community overall.** A Small Giant doesn’t only focus on creating wealth through rapid growth, but looks to create viable and vital business operations that offer opportunities for those who contribute to them. Attendees expressed the importance of ensuring that all key players are aligned in purpose and vision to move people forward together. In addition to taking their message to internal audiences, Small Giants often become ambassadors for these different business ideas in their local communities around the world. A common topic was the need to create new measurable indicators for business success, focused on the responsible growth principles embraced by Small Giants.
- **Maintaining your mojo requires daily focus.** Attend webinars, keep up with your reading, go to conferences, and absorb everything you can. Engage and ask questions, create personal connections, and communicate between events. Keep this up and mojo becomes a part of your company’s DNA.

After engaging in two days of dialogue with our international peers, I was excited to find that, although I believe business leaders who adhere to our values-driven methodology are still in the minority, the tide appears to be causing a ripple effect for businesses around the world. Let’s keep it going.