

INTRODUCTION

A QUICK ADMISSION

THE CLEAR WIN

I admit it. I lack the academic credentials to write authoritatively on strategy. I have never studied Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, which I am often told is a 'must read' for strategists. I tried to read it. But I failed. I also never finished Peters & Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*, even though it was my only companion at a spa – for an entire week. As for Michael Porter's *Competitive Strategy*, I can say very little, because I read very little of it. About Henry Mintzberg, I know even less (although I admire his tongue in cheek *Strategy Bites Back*). Perhaps these are all paving stones for the strategic road that we need to travel on – whether designing a strategy to gain the affection of another, or to return a global giant to profitability. To be quite honest, I don't know. And judging by what I've read, neither does anyone else. There is nothing definitive on strategy.

In the field of new business pitching, once again my credentials are a little shaky. I have never been part of a sterling effort on behalf of a country to host a major event (or even a minor one), and have never succeeded in winning one of those big fat airline or cellphone accounts with retainers that contribute to a second home at the coast. My pitches have been far more frequent, and often for the sake of a 'must win' to grow the business (and eat) than "Gosh that would be a nice account to have in our portfolio". Very much like what goes on 99% of the time with 99% of the people. Like you. Today.

This book leans towards reductionism, in the same way that a tough cowboy walks into a rowdy brawling bar with an authoritative “What’s the problem?” followed by a thunderous hush that descends over the fisticuffs. As with all strategies, we need to begin with a clearly defined problem. Only once we have been informed that “Jeb here pushed Ned there about Meg yonder”, can we move towards an action plan, which in this case could be as simple as “Take it outside.”

Make no mistake, I have won my fair share of pitches (often as the underdog) and I am a voracious reader of non fiction. So perhaps part of my authoritative claim comes from my collection of stories gained in an active pitching career, as well as a book collection that far exceeds the value of furniture in our home. You could safely say I am well read – or poorly furnished. Fortunately my wife’s taste in décor is minimalist.