Book Review Editor: Theodore J. Weidner, Ph.D., P.E., AIA, CEFP, DBIA
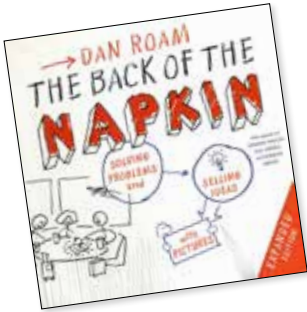
THE BACK OF THE NAPKIN: SOLVING PROBLEMS AND SELLING IDEAS WITH PICTURES (EXPANDED EDITION)

Dan Roam, Portfolio/Penguin, 2008, softcover.

To say a "picture is worth a thousand words" is to repeat an axiom, state a truth—and put up a barrier. That's because while many people understand and interpret pictures easily, most don't believe they can draw, and are thus limited by their inability to communicate effectively in a graphic format. In order to break through this barrier, Dan Roam has written two books entitled *The Back of the Napkin* and *Draw to Win*. The second book focuses on application of the first book, but they are both useful together.

Most people think a meaningful picture must always be carefully crafted, finely detailed, and photorealistic. To overcome that perception, Roam has included many simple, somewhat crude drawings to illustrate his points, and to demonstrate that a meaningful picture doesn't have to be a Rembrandt. Indeed, while some of the illustrations are complex (there are lots of images provided), they all have a hand-drawn, "back-of-the-napkin" appearance.

In the many meetings I've attended over the years, the elegant simplicity of a picture that is used to impart a message quickly and powerfully has always started with a crude illustration that summarized the essence of the discussion. A picture can describe a process or thing. It can explain why or how. It can describe when or how much. Combining these concepts with what Roam calls "SQVID" is a "Visual Thinking Codex" that helps one develop the visual image needed in a "napkin-shorthand" way of thinking. The codex appears in a 6×6 grid that helps organize one's thoughts and convey the intended message.

It's not important to know the details of each of the images in the matrix; Roam addresses the who/what/where/how/when/why through his SQVID (simple, quality, vision, individual, and change) approach. There are examples and stories behind the applications to the matrix as well as more figures and sketches. As a result, even someone who can only draw a simple stick figure can get a message or concept across with pictures and do it effectively.

DRAW TO WIN: A CRASH COURSE ON HOW TO LEAD, SELL, AND INNOVATE WITH YOUR VISUAL MIND

Dan Roam, Portfolio/Penguin, 2017, hardcover, softcover.

In *Draw to Win*, Roam continues with examples of how simple drawings, despite an overall lack of detailed knowledge on a subject, have brought his company lucrative consulting assignments. The goal of these drawings was not necessarily to make money; it seems to have been more about describing a situation and/or communicating information usefully. But that's why a picture is worth so many words.

In hindsight, this approach is what has made some of my work so successful, and why I sometimes find writing about a topic so difficult; I prefer seeing the subject in pictures and not words or formulas. Consider what it takes to describe a complex process. Is it described in words or in pictures (a process flow diagram)? While convincing the CFO with numbers is important, illustrating the benefits of an energy reduction project with figures (graphs) can explain how the numbers work together with the physical realities of the proposed project. But conveying the graphic information still requires a clear process. In *Draw to Win*, Roam provides several techniques to get your graphic thought processes flowing and to turn ideas into images that will be effective in delivering your message.
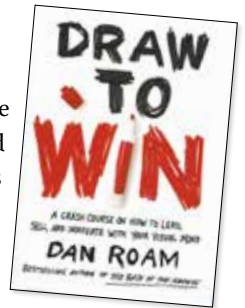
I'll be the first to say that graphic messages are not the sole means to communicate an idea to someone—drawings are a tool that can convey a complex idea in tandem with verbal or formulaic information. But ignoring the power of graphics makes expressing complex ideas much more difficult, and thus validates the use of images and the challenges of learning how to draw simple figures. If you aren't good at drawing, consider both books for your reference library; but if you're comfortable with your graphic skills, then *Draw to Win* is a winner. 🗲

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