



Think Big Partners Principals Herb Sih and Tyler Prochnow

# THINK BIG PARTNERS

*Perfecting the Art of Collective Thought in Business Development*  
by Tiffany Killoren

**T**There is no such thing as a small idea. The world has been changed and lives improved by people who take chances and believe that even the smallest idea can move mountains. With the right resources, the business model that has been resonating in the back of your mind doesn't have to stay there. It can be molded, shaped and grown into a dream realized--an oak in a forest of good ideas never pursued. Life is too short to be lost in the forest; if you're ready to plant the seed for a solid business foundation, you need to think big. More specifically, you need Think Big Partners.

Self-described as an "early-stage business incubator," Think Big Partners applies a Silicon Valley approach to business development by mentoring, advising, and supporting the growth of new businesses. Most importantly, they recognize that no two entrepreneurs are the same and neither are their needs. Built on three crucial steps for business development - build, fund and launch the idea - Think Big Partners is an entrepreneur's guide to climbing those steps wisely and avoiding skinned knees.

If Think Big Partners exemplifies a collaborative school of thought, Herb Sih and Tyler Prochnow are its principals. As partners and co-founders, Sih and Prochnow combine their extensive business acumen and experiences to create, hone and customize the Think Big Partners model and programs.

You could say that Think Big Partners itself is an example of successful collaboration at work. Sih and Prochnow met because their children were friends, and by spending time at the same events, the two entrepreneurs became friends themselves. Like-minded in their approach to business, and

with successful careers in the financial and legal fields, it was only a matter of time before an innovative idea organically took shape. When dinner conversation between these friends turned into brainstorming ideas about how best to support new business ventures in Kansas City, Sih and Prochnow knew they were on to something. After researching other collaborative working spaces throughout the country, they formed a business model, plan and office space to fit the needs of entrepreneurs in the community.

Inspired by the tough lessons learned as a new business owner years ago, Prochnow wanted to offer the opportunity to help others avoid the pitfalls that come with inexperience. "I had no idea what I was doing. I made a thousand mistakes, five-hundred of which I had to make in order to learn and five-hundred of which I didn't have to."

By peeling back the layers involved in starting a business, Think Big Partners makes an otherwise intimidating endeavor manageable by addressing each step in turn. Specifically, the "Think Big Accelerator Program" is an intensive 14-week program that focuses on providing participants



Think Big Partners invites its clients to look at the world a little differently – at an altered vantage point or angle – because even the smallest change in perspective can result in the biggest and best ideas. Perhaps everyone could benefit from a rooftop garden.

Yes, we live in an age of online college lectures, text messages instead of birthday cards and twitter followings instead of college cliques. Kudos to those who try to conquer the world in their pajamas from the couch and save on birthday card stamps – more power to them. Think Big Partners is not about sitting on the couch or learning through osmosis, however; they personify the adage that there is no substitute for hands-on hard work and some fun to get those creative juices flowing. Most importantly, Think Big Partners is based on the simple idea that we're not alone; there are people who are ready, willing and able to help entrepreneurs achieve their dreams and build successful businesses.



competition, has its own working space down the hall from CandyCam Multimedia Robotics, which develops cutting edge robotics for filmmakers and others. Although these Think Big Partners' companies are more established, the creative energy from the floor below isn't lost. You can't walk the halls without being inspired to create or build something, or at the very least, sit and talk to the people who are creating and building because what they're doing is pretty amazing.

With another floor devoted to space for learning lunches, conferences, and demonstrations, Think Big Partners has created a workplace that grows with its entrepreneurs' needs. You can't even hit the ceiling. With rooftop garden access,

To make sure clients don't lose sight of their vision, the words of George Bernard Shaw hang as a reminder for all who enter one of Think Big Partners' conference rooms: "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." How true, George, how true.

the tools necessary to become entrepreneurs, and ultimately, thought leaders in their community. With various model plans, including capital investment options for those without means to finance their business venture in exchange for equity share, Think Big Partners customizes its focus to fit clients' needs. If an entrepreneur comes to the table with extensive prior experience, that's great too. They offer an experienced founder track for those who are determined to not need the 14-week program, as well as a fee-for-service model plan option for those who qualify. Although the goal at Think Big Partners is for their companies to grow up and eventually out after successfully building their framework, it is always with mixed emotions that Sih and Prochnow see them go. What you sense is an investment that goes beyond a business collaboration; to watch entrepreneurs' ideas take form and help them achieve success is the driving force behind the company.



Nestled in a hotspot for all-things-creative (the Crossroads District), Think Big Partners' collaborative office space isn't just a central working area offered to clients. Its fourth floor loft space offers individual desk space for rent in its central working area, complete with fully stocked coffee bar and internal windows with ideas and numbers scribbled across their face in marker (how ironic to think that rather than discipline our kids for doing the same thing, we should be

taking a lesson from them). The copier and office supply room sits across from a wall of old school lockers, many of which are adorned with magnets that don't let you take yourself too seriously. If that was ever a risk, the kegerator in the kitchen -- wheeled out on Fridays -- is a helpful reminder to keep a healthy perspective when the going gets tough.

The floor above houses "graduates" from the fourth floor; i.e., companies that have grown into their own and who now neighbor with businesses at the same development stage. PlanetReuse, a recyclable materials resource company that is a finalist in the Wall Street Journal's Startup of the Year

Think Big Partners' focus on innovation and creative thought isn't limited to its business model approach. To hang its mailbox in a nondescript office building would be like playing Kansas City jazz over a loud speaker in a mall, the substance lost and the message filtered. Apropos to its foundation, Think Big Partners has made its home in loft space in a charming old brick building on the corner of 18th and Baltimore Avenue that was once used as a warehouse for Walt Disney films. The cement floors, white-washed brick walls, original art work and framed movie poster of Rudy hanging on one wall do nothing, if not inspire. One can't help but think that Walt himself would be proud.



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