



## TEL EPISODE #010:

### *The Art of War for Small Business* with Becky Sheetz-Runkle

Show Notes: <http://www.theelpodcast.com/tel-010-art-war-small-business-becky-sheetz-runkle/>

Welcome to *The Entrepreneurs Library*, the only book-centric podcast that reviews all the top-selling business books and shares author's perspective, firsthand. This is your resource to finding the next great book that will enable you to grow personally and professionally. Welcome your host, Wade Danielson.

**WADE:** Thank you for joining us today on The EL. Today we have Becky Sheetz-Runkle, author of *The Art of War for Small Business*. Welcome, Becky, and thank you for joining us on The Entrepreneurs Library.

**BECKY:** Great, thanks for having me. It's a privilege to be with you today.

**WADE:** Thank you. Will you take just a moment to introduce yourself and tell us just a little bit about you personally?

**BECKY:** Well, sure. I am a speaker and author and a martial artist, which all those things really dovetail nicely. I'm also a marketing consultant. That's about as brief as I can be. (laughs)

**WADE:** Thank you for sharing that. Now let's jump right into the book, *The Art of War for Small Business*, which was just made available for purchase on June 11th, 2014. Becky, we're going to move quickly, but here are some of the top questions our listeners would love to get answered.

What was the inspiration behind writing *The Art of War for Small Business*?

**BECKY:** Sure, the premise is this: imagine that Sun Tzu was with us today. Imagine that he was in our boardrooms, he was a CEO of a small business or on the executive team of a small business. The question at the heart of this book, of *The Art of War for Small Business*, is how would he adapt the principles from *The Art of War* to wage war – and to wage peace – for his small business and build it into an empire? That's really the inspiration behind the book, is that question.

And leading up to that, my previous book is called *Sun Tzu for Women*, and that was, as you might expect, a book that took Sun Tzu's Art of War philosophy and battlefield strategy and applied it to women in business. As I was writing that book – because my career, I have worked largely with a lot of small businesses, and as I was writing *Sun Tzu for Women*, I said, "Oh my gosh," I was struck with the principles of how small forces, small business, if they took Sun Tzu's strategies and if they applied it, they would be able to build themselves into mighty organizations and they would avoid a lot of the common and devastating mistakes that I saw made over and over and over again.

And the final thing I would say as far as the inspiration goes is really the sense of urgency. I think those of us who are running small organizations, we've got to be smarter, we've got to be faster, we've got to be better across the board, in all ways in which we have competitive attributes, than the better-established adversaries. We really cannot afford to just hold ground, to just weather storms. We've got to be proactive and we've got to be winning battles, waging battles, and achieving success each and every day, with comparatively leaner budgets and fewer resources.

**WADE:** Okay, great. What are some key differentiators between your book and others regarding the same topic?

**BECKY:** Sure, there are a lot of books – and I know you're familiar with this, Wade – there's a lot of books on the Art of War and that apply the Art of War to business in general and to other topics as well. The differentiator here, what's important for your listeners to understand, is that this is the only book, at least the only mainstream book, that applies Sun Tzu's Art of War to small forces, to small businesses.

It's interesting, and it's very fitting, because that's how Sun Tzu wrote *The Art of War*. He wrote it as the smallest state in the period leading up to the Warring States period, and he enabled that small state to become the dominant power in China. So he was very much in tune to the idea of how can small force take its attributes, take its strategies, take its resources, and overtake the bigger players?

So that's the answer, is it's taking Sun Tzu and applying him from his intention in terms of the smaller to overtake the larger and applying it to a business setting.

**WADE:** Becky, now that we know a little bit of the behind the book, the inspiration, will you take us now through your book – and again, it doesn't have to be chapter by chapter or section by section, but will you take us through and really take a deep dive your creation?

**BECKY:** Sure, I would love to do that. First thing that I would say – and this is the kind of feedback I've had as well from readers of the book, early stage reviewers as well, is that the book is really practical. It's easy to read the original copy of *The Art of War* and just get lost in it and get lost in what's Sun Tzu really trying to say, #1, in terms of reading an English language translation – or any other language, for that matter – what is he trying to say? That's the first hurdle, and the second hurdle, and it's just as significant, is how am I going to apply that to my business, to my life, to my whatever my issue is?

The book is not theoretical. It is really practical. I've really gone to great pains to do that. I've profiled a number of companies repeatedly throughout the book, companies like 5-Hour Energy, Five Guys, the better burger restaurant, Chobani, the yogurt maker – really cool story there on how they have, not necessarily intentionally, but have utilized, a lot of these businesses have utilized Sun Tzu's strategy to be successful. Samuel Adams, the beer company. The grocery store chain Wegmans. Netflix. The bourbon industry at large. So I've got a lot of illustrations throughout the book that will make Sun Tzu's words really practical and will allow small business – or big business for that matter, any readers – to say "Oh, okay, that's how you can do that. That's how they did that. That's how I can do this."

One other thing I would stress that I didn't say in answering your previous question about how this book is different: most business books on the Art of War tell you how a big business stayed a big business, how an industry monolith maintained its ground, or how it fell from power by not taking Sun Tzu's advice. All good things. The problem for a small business, though, is "Okay, how do I

become Pepsi? How do I become Kraft? How do I become that industry monolith?”

And that’s what this book does, is it takes you from that stage, from those smaller organizations. The ones I just mentioned, I’ve taken you from those early stages, early days, and shown you how they have unseated and/or been competitive with much larger adversaries.

As far as the flow of the book, there’s four parts, there’s 12 chapters, and those 12 chapters are expressly for small business leaders and entrepreneurs. I have not done, just like with my previous book, I’ve not done what a lot of other Sun Tzu authors have done, and that’s take you from Chapter 1 through Chapter 13 and said “This is what he’s talking about here” and given you an interpretation. Rather, I’ve focused thematically. I’ve said, “Okay, here’s 12 chapters, here’s 12 concepts, here’s 12 ideas that I really need to impart upon readers,” and gone through and really broken those down and shown you all the applicable passages and then the applicable illustrations as well.

The four parts, if I can go through these and give you some illustrations just to kind of break up the flow here, the first part is Seizing the Advantage. That’s really context. I work in marketing, and we say content is king; I think context is king. The context is what was *The Art of War* all about? What were Sun Tzu’s objectives? And then really more importantly, how can I apply those to my small business? So initially, the context.

The second part of the book, the second of four parts, is Essential Sun Tzu, understanding the essential pieces of Sun Tzu. If you read no more than this section, if you just read Part 2, you will have graduated out of Sun Tzu 101. You will have understood the fundamentals of what this book can do for you. The basic keys are understanding yourself, understanding your enemy, understanding the market. Sun Tzu said if you know yourself and you know your adversary, you will be victorious. You must also understand the market.

Another piece, which you’re not going to read about in Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, is understanding customers and business alliances. Absolutely critical. And I think

this book does a really good job, and a better job than I've seen done previously, in addressing the idea of customers and business alliance. Because think about that: how apropos is a customer base for a general in ancient China? Not really very applicable. But in context, it makes perfect sense, and Sun Tzu's military strategy and how you treat and care for and reward your customers and your alliances makes eminently good sense.

Part 3 is a little more elevated. These are the Principles for the Battlefield. The four principles to the battlefield that I focus on are embodying the general – how do you, as a CEO, as an executive team leader, how do you carry yourself? How do you care for the people who work under you? How do you run your business? – perseverance, focus, and unity. Those are the four fundamental concepts that are under the third part.

The fourth part is the really, really fun stuff. And this is where we might – the folks who are first putting a toe into the water in business strategy and in a book like Sun Tzu, this is where the really heavy lifting comes down, and this is things like maneuvering, adaptation, the spirit, the energy that you need to be successful, deception – which is an interesting take on deception; it's actually ethical deception, if you can believe in such a thing – and then finally Sun Tzu and the future of your business.

The point there is, the bottom line – and the whole book is focused on this, but the bottom line thing you need to take away from *The Art of War*, what are the 30 to 50 key points, key passages from Sun Tzu's *Art of War* that you need to take and apply to your business immediately?

That's a pretty high level overview; I'd be happy to go into any of that in greater detail or answer any more questions you might have on that.

**WADE:** That was a phenomenal review. Thank you for that. We're going to continue on, because we're going to go back and cover some of it. Matter of fact, this is one of my favorite questions as well, and that's you just covered all of this content – or you're talking about context for your book – if the reader could only

take away one, just one principle, one concept, or one action item out of the entire book, what would you want that to be?

**BECKY:** That's a really good question, and as you can imagine, very, very, very difficult to answer. I think I have one that I'll share with you. On its face, it may sound like "Okay, that's just a principle," but I'd like to break it down a little bit and talk about what that means and give you an example.

Here's the passage. It's the passage directly from Sun Tzu. "In war, the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who's destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory." Here's the point: victory occurs before the battle is fought. What does that mean?

Well, on one hand it's about being well-trained, it's about being well-positioned, it's about being prepared for everything that we take on. But it's greater than that. It's not just planning and preparation, but it's that spirit, that fervent belief that you're going to be successful, you're going to win, you're going to get what you have set out to accomplish – whether it's the new client, whether it's the sales pitch, whether it's the raise that you want from your employer.

Before you walk into that boardroom, that conference room, that engagement, you know in your spirit, fundamentally, "I have what it takes to do this, and I'm going to get this." That's a fundamental idea from *The Art of War*, is you never fight a battle unless you know you're going to be victorious, unless you know you can win. Otherwise you're destined to lose. That's worst case scenario, but you're certainly not set up well for optimal victory.

I'll give you one example from here. I'm a lifetime martial artist, and that's really fueled a lot of the writing and the philosophy that I take and have put into this book. I train in martial arts very, very seriously. For me, anyway, martial arts is about self-defense. That's really what my focus is. I want to be able to defend myself in any survivable outcome. An example of that is you carry yourself in such a way, you've planned, you've prepared, but your mindset when you walk out the door is "I can handle myself. I can take whatever comes my way."

You think of the business application there, a juxtaposition is – I trained with a woman years ago, and I remember her saying – and she was very senior martial artist. She'd been training for years, maybe as long as I had, maybe even longer. And she said, "You know, there's some techniques that I like and some techniques that I don't like, but I don't think I could ever hit a man and really hurt him." And that always stuck with me, because if I believed that, I would never leave the house.

You've got to win the battle before you engage. You've got to know in your spirit that whatever you set out to do, no matter how lofty, you've got what it takes. You've got the strategy, the planning, the timing, and the execution. None of this is easy, but if all these things are aligned, you know you're ready to win before the battle is fought. You're positioned for victory.

**WADE:** Excellent, thank you. Do you have a favorite quote from your book? What I ask by this is not so much maybe one that you put in there from someone else, but from you. I try and give the author a chance to brag on themselves. If there's something that you've written that you just really felt that was powerful, was there something like that?

**BECKY:** Wow, that's a tough question. I like them all, I guess, but the idea – when I talk about context – and I mentioned in this interview here that small business leaders, we've got to be able to separate ourselves from what we think and what we believe and what we feel, but we've got to be able to be pragmatic and understand the industry research, understand the market factors, understand the real and true conditions.

I'm going to paraphrase from memory, but one of the things that I've said is everything we do is autobiographical. Everything that we say and everything we do carries the baggage of our experience, of our limited knowledge, of our preconceived ideas, so we've got to work that much harder to overcome those and to deal with the reality at hand.

That's a paraphrase; that's not really a quote. I have a great Sun Tzu quote for you, though.

**WADE:** Yeah, share it, please.

**BECKY:** This is another one – this is a thing that I’ve seen done over and over and over again, mistakes I’ve seen small businesses make. Here it is: “Now to win battles and capture lands and cities but to fail to consolidate these achievements is ominous and may be described as a waste of resources and time.” What does that mean? To win battles and capture lands and cities but not consolidate those achievements.

Think about that. I see this happen all the time with small businesses that I’ve worked with and been engaged with. We start out going down this path, then we go down this path, then we chase this over here, and it’s that lack of unification and it’s that lack of the ability to consolidate achievements. Rather than having minor victories here and there, but to consolidate those captured lands, those captured cities, as a metaphor for our victories and our successes.

So that idea there of really leveraging all of the successes and building everything together to me is fundamental for all small businesses. And that’s just one nugget of wisdom from *The Art of War*.

**WADE:** Okay, excellent. Becky, do you have a book, outside of the ones that you’ve written, do you have a book that you would suggest for our readers/listeners to be able to read in the future that will create a paradigm shift?

**BECKY:** Oh, wow. A paradigm shift, that would definitely be in the business category. I’ll tell you, this may be perhaps a little fundamental, but *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* is something everybody needs to read. And it’s not necessarily going to help you to run your business better, but it’s going to infuse entrepreneurs and small business leaders with a sense of all the things that we’re doing wrong, and it really is a paradigm shift.

And that’s something – it’s graduation season. It’s almost like maybe a strange title; I never really realized it wasn’t just for dads. It’s certainly not for dads. It’s



for everybody. It's something that you should be giving to the young people in your life around graduation, *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, for sure.

**WADE:** I completely agree. I love that book, and I get what you're saying as far as it might not be what some people are looking for or something profound, but that book is – it keeps it very simple, the story between his real dad and his rich dad and how it breaks it down. I think especially what you said, to a new graduate deciding what they want to go out and do, to know the truth – because school probably didn't teach them – at least mine didn't – the things from that book, and it's very, very important information.

**BECKY:** Exactly. School did not teach them to be successful at life. It may have taught them to be successful at something, at a domain, but when it comes to running a business and investing wisely and really creating wealth, schools aren't designed for that.

**WADE:** Yeah, absolutely. Becky, we appreciate your time. Before we depart, though, can you recommend the best way for our listeners to get more information on you and *The Art of War for Small Business*?

**BECKY:** Sure. My website is SunTzuStrategies.com. You can find my bio there, you can find some excerpts of me speaking. You can find out about booking me to speak if you'd like. Got a blog there. As far as purchasing the book, Barnes and Noble, Amazon. My publisher is the American Management Association Press, AMACOM, so their website. No shortage of places to purchase the book.

It should be in bookstores, really. It's such a new book. But as you know, shelf lives for books are pretty narrow, pretty slim. But if you want to support your good old-fashioned bookstore, you should be able to find it there as well.

**WADE:** Okay, great, thank you for that.

**BECKY:** Sure. Thank you.



**WADE:** Thanks again for listening in today. If you would like to get your hands on *The Art of War for Small Business* or any of the other resources mentioned by Becky, just look at the show notes at [TheELPodcast.com](http://TheELPodcast.com).

*Looking for your next book idea? Head over to [TheELPodcast.com](http://TheELPodcast.com), where Wade shares his amazing resource, "The Top 10 Business Books Recommended by Over 500 Entrepreneurs," with you for free. That's [TheELPodcast.com](http://TheELPodcast.com). Till the next time, keep it on the EL.*

### **LINKS AND RESOURCES MENTIONED IN THIS EPISODE:**

Buy [Rich Dad Poor Dad](#) by Robert Kiyosaki on Amazon

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