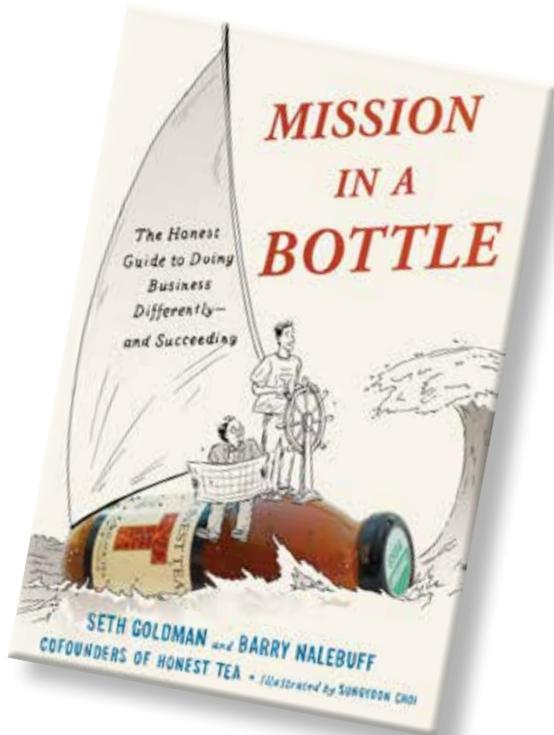


# CRITICAL



**Author, CEO, and green advocate Seth Goldman on organizational mission, individual and institutional success, and what makes a garage cool.**

**S**eth Goldman is founder and TeaEO of Honest Tea and co-author of *Mission in a Bottle: The Honest Guide to Doing Business Differently—and Succeeding*. The bestselling graphic book tells the story of Goldman’s 15-year-old organic tea company and its growth from kitchen experiment to national brand sold in more than 100,000 stores. He is also co-founder of Bethesda Green, a sustainability initiative that has helped restaurants covert grease into biodiesel and diverted more than 200,000 lbs. of electronics from landfills. It is also Maryland’s first green incubator, hosting a dozen start-up companies.



Honest Tea, acquired by Coca-Cola in 2011, was founded on a mission to serve customers living a healthier, greener lifestyle. Consumers took to it, and the company’s 2010 revenue was \$71.7 million. The book offers a guide for operating a mission-driven business—something Goldman says is critical to success. He recently talked with *The Parking Professional* about mission, business, and parking and transportation in a more sustainable world.



**THE PARKING PROFESSIONAL:** The book offers a set of rules for the road, the first of which is to build something you believe in—have a mission and be driven by it. Why is that so important in business?

**SETH GOLDMAN:** For us, it's partly motivation. It helps everybody feel like they have a higher cause than just moving around cases of liquid. It's also what helps us make meaningful differences to our customers. They have thousands of choices of what they can drink every day, and our mission helps us stand apart. It helps reinforce, from our perspective, that we know health and taste are two big drivers of what they buy. When we can reinforce not only ingredients and recipes but also healthy communities, we're supporting that.

**TPP:** What's the best way for an existing organization to develop a mission if they haven't already?

**SG:** You're really re-thinking the business. It's easy for someone to say that our job is moving around packages of liquid, but that's not what we get up every day thinking. Instead, we're thinking about how we can help consumers move closer to the lives they want to be living, including their impact on the environment and their relationships with nature and the way they take care of themselves.

We help our customers do all of that in how we do business every day. The way we do that is by selling packages of liquid. From our perspective, though, it's a higher calling than selling glass bottles of tea. You want to look at the big picture: what purpose do you have, what materials do you use, what ingredients, what names will you use, how are you sourcing what you need, and how do you think about the partners who could be important to develop relationships with—how will you connect with other businesses?

**TPP:** How do you trickle-down that mission to employees on the front line?

**SG:** That's a great question. We talk a lot about having a mission in a bottle. We'd love to have more profits to give away to charity, but our real impact is with every product we sell and where we sell it. How is the daily experience people have with us? How do we build relationships that are meaningful?

One of the big things is how people interact with the people in your organization. Parking attendants are some of those people. Parking can be a source of frustration and tension, or it can be kind of a Starbucks experience, where people go in there and talk. There's a community there. So how do you make parking a community experience instead of transactional and tense? Not many people speak favorably about their

commuting experience. But what if those points of interaction are really pleasant?

My wife uses a parking garage every day at work. We have this very colorful car (pictured on cover)—it's painted in sort of a multicolored way and very distinct. She has a parking pass and uses the same garage every day for months at a time. So one day, she'd had to switch to another car and when she got our car back, she forgot her parking pass. She went to the garage, and the attendant had seen her for years in that same, very distinctive car—she knew my wife was a regular parker. She said, "I can't let you in without a pass—you have to pay the \$20 fee." She was embarrassed and it was a clear case of an employee not being empowered. She said, "If my boss comes in here and sees your car without a pass, I'll get in trouble."

That seemed harsh to us. So instead, let your employees make decisions based on their relationships with their customers. Think about what your employees get out of their work. Nobody wants to feel like they're just checking a box every day. They want to be encouraged and empowered to build those relationships.

**TPP:** You write that companies shouldn't aim for 10 percent improvement. Instead, you say, they should "make it radically different and better." Why is that a better business practice?

**SG:** That's mostly talking to someone launching a new product or company. As a challenger brand, you have to bring out something really new. Things are so competitive that you have to be dramatically better and different. If you're a new entrant and your competition charges \$20 per day, you can't just charge \$18 per day. That's not enough. Ideally, you don't compete on price. You find another way to make the experience positive. Offer a car location finder or some other element that makes the experience better.

I fly out of Baltimore a lot and when I go to the airport, I always use express parking. They bring you to the terminal from your car and when you return, they take you right back to your car—you give them your space number and that's exactly where they go. I can't understand why more people don't use that service. It's kind of hard to have a negative experience when you're picked up from and delivered directly back to your car and the price is right. Waiting is an issue, I think, but it's interesting—people still go to the daily garage [attached to the terminal]. I guess when you're coming back from a long trip, the last thing you want to have to remember is where you parked [in a remote lot].

**TPP:** You say that people should understand the other party's perspective to be successful and that "when you put yourself in their position, it isn't what you would do wearing their shoes but



what they would do wearing your shoes.” Why the shift in thinking there?

**SG:** It’s all about understanding your consumer when it comes to businesses and brands and experiences. It’s not driven by the management. It’s driven by what customers want, and sometimes they don’t even know what they want. You have to figure out what their needs are and how you’re going to respond.

Let’s be honest: sometimes parking garages can feel like unpleasant places to go. I’m an outdoors guy and garages are underground and it’s very easy to have them feel subterranean. It’s a challenging environment. So how do you make that a positive experience?

Well, it can be the little things. There’s a garage in Boston, near Logan Airport, where the different levels of the garage are named for different things in their community. It’s geography and sports teams and things like that. It makes that garage a little more community-friendly. There’s local pride there. Someone is putting some thought and effort into this. That’s where you get rid of that conveyor belt feeling. That makes a difference.

**TPP:** You write that leaders need to take care of their family, personal, and spiritual health to be successful. Why is that important? How do you encourage it throughout an organization?

**SG:** It’s all about energy and what you bring to things not just as a leader, but in terms of how you infuse energy to other people. If people have a sense you want to be there and you’re excited about what you’re doing, they’ll pick up on those cues themselves. If your people feel like you’re exhausted, they’ll pick up on that too. Create the right energy for yourself and your people and work on having a balance. You need to invest in that. Sometimes it means getting up a little earlier—I can either sleep in until 6:30 or I can get up at 5 and exercise. That hour and a half I might lose in sleep pays off in having energy throughout the day from my workout. I can sleep more, but then I won’t have the right energy. I can exercise and then when I sleep, I sleep well because I’m tired. I can fall asleep within five minutes of going to bed!

We have a wellness program in place and we encourage our employees to take their own actions—take care of their health, set goals—and we celebrate accomplishments and milestones. We make a big deal of meeting goals that are set at the beginning of the year. It’s not like if you don’t hit your goal, you’re punished at all. But we do celebrate the people who make theirs.

**TPP:** You write about delegating, and say not to delegate in the beginning of a business and not to

delegate the important stuff. How do you know what you can delegate, and attract the right people so it works?

**SG:** You have to empower people as you grow. You can delegate when you have great people. That means that you can’t really delegate hiring. If there are great people reporting to you, you can develop the comfort level you need. I have a great CFO, so I don’t have to see the books every day.

Our company attracts people of a certain mindset. It’s pretty easy in our organization to understand what we do and why, and people get it. Within a few weeks, they’re either energized and they fit in or they’re not. As a company, we pay attention to that.

**TPP:** You’re known as a biking and a bike-to-work advocate. Space for bikes and facilities for bikers are a trend in the parking industry. How can our business make biking and alternate transportation easier for customers, and from your perspective, why does that make good business sense?

**SG:** I can’t tell you how important that is. When I started working, there was a garage in the building and the company subsidized parking for people who drove. I remember thinking that people who biked were doing better things for the environment at a much lower cost, so why wasn’t that subsidized?

Having a few bike racks in the garage, and even better if there’s a shower or facility for bikers, is huge. It’s a service you offer to the people in that building and it makes biking to work much easier.

Of the commuters who come into a building, I think the ones who bike or walk are happier about their commute. It’s not a chore, but an indulgence. It’s exercise, so they’re getting energized on their way to work, and it’s better for the organization to feel like their workplace supports them. Having a place to park bikes is a huge workplace enhancement and can spark great loyalty.

If I’m working somewhere and I have to leave work, I want to be able to get my bike from a rack. I’d like it protected from the outdoors, and I’d love to be able to stow my stuff and take my bike home without any problems. If I come in and I’m sweaty, I want a place to change and maybe a place to hang a wet towel and my clothes so they don’t get all mildewy. Forward-thinking people are looking for it. **P**



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