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Boss Life: Surviving My Own Small Business

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BOSS LIFE

SURVIVING MY OWN SMALL BUSINESS



AUTHOR FOR THE YOU'RE THE BOSS BLOG OF NYTIMES.COM

PAUL DOWNS

NARRATED BY JONATHAN HOGAN



Synopsis

When columnist Paul Downs was approached by the New York Times to write for their You're the Boss blog, he had been running his custom furniture business for 24 years strong - or mostly strong. Now he embarks on a book-length essay that intends to show a portrait of a real business, with a real boss, a real set of employees, and the real challenges they face, in hopes of promoting a better understanding of the behaviors of small-business owners. In 1986, fresh out of college, Paul Downs opened his first and last business: a small company that built custom furniture. With no idea how to run a business or how to build custom furniture, Downs spent a year teaching himself the business, and in 1987 he hired his first employee. That was when things got complicated. As his business began to grow, he had to learn about management, cash flow, taxes, and so much more. Furthermore, globalization and the arrival of the Internet made a big impact on the economy, causing him to have to reevaluate, restructure, and reinvent. Most important, Downs is keenly aware that every small business, no matter the product it makes or the service it provides, starts with people. He writes with tremendous insight about hiring employees, providing motivation to get the best jobs out of them and incentive to maintain their loyalty and respect, and the difficult decisions he's made to let some of them go. With honesty and conviction, Downs tells the true story behind building and sustaining a successful company in an ever-evolving economy, often airing his own failures and shortcomings to unveil the difficulties that arise from being a boss and a businessperson. We've heard countless stories from employees about their managers; Boss Life seeks to tell the other side of that story.

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Customer Reviews

It is a very good book. It allows a business owner to see that they are not alone in their struggles. I had a real problem with the fact that it is like reading someones diary. I do not know how Paul could have done a better job of conveying the stress of being a boss. However, I read technical reports and dissertations on a regular basis and had a hard time reading about the thoughts of someone who uses the information they have. While reading the book I felt that we were friends and just wanted to scream "No!" at times. I am grateful that he had the courage to write about what all business owners have gone through at one time or another. I recommend anyone in business, or anyone that wants to go into business, read this book. I give it 4 stars instead of five because I felt so uneasy reading it.

This book has had a profound impact on how I view myself as a small business owner, the struggles, successes and failures that often feel like they happen to no one else but me. Paul shares a very, very transparent journey that many of us face each day: keeping our businesses open during hard times, managing family life and keeping employees happy. I highly recommend this book to any long term business owner.

As a fellow entrepreneur / small business owner, I thoroughly enjoyed Boss Life. Unlike most of the business books out there, the author does not sugarcoat the complexities of running a small business. He tells it like it is, warts and all. He not only admits his own shortcomings, but also describes the challenges of balancing his personal life with work. In addition, he mentions the role that luck plays in one's business success, which I found refreshing (The only other business memoir that I've read in which the author admitted how much luck played in business / his success was An Wang of Wang Computers - an old book from the eighties). I was both humbled and inspired by the author. It is small business owners like him, who hustle everyday (even traveling to the Middle East) and sacrifice his own income in order to pay his employees first that make this country strong. Finally, the author's writing was crisp and to the point, a real joy to read. Even if you are not a business owner, you will be entertained. The only thing I wish the author would have included was a final chapter on suggestions for other small business owners on growing and managing their businesses (e.g management systems / methods that he's had the biggest success with, his biggest

failures, what he would do now if he was starting his business over again today). I highly recommend this book - especially to fellow small business owners!

I truly enjoyed reading Paul's book. As a small business owner myself it was a constant comfort to understand that my problems were not unique to me, and while I operate a business much smaller and far from woodworking, there were a number of areas in which I found common ground in what he talked about with his business. This book will not give you answers to your problems but could provide much needed motivation. If you love what you do and want to stay your own boss this book will be a welcomed read. It always helps to know someone else is out there working through the grind of owning their own business..Also, I emailed Paul after completion just to say thank you and provide words of encouragement to stay at it and he promptly responded wishing me well with my business. Seems to be an honestly great person. Thanks Paul.

I am not an entrepreneur. Or so I thought. About a year ago I discovered that I had some innate talent to hand craft furniture. I don't want to come across as arrogant, but I'm going to sell myself here solely for the purpose of solidifying my position as a valid reviewer of this book. It reads like a novel. Paul takes a subject (business) for which I normally view on par with watching paint dry, and makes it riveting. I could not put it down. If you are operating a small business, this book is for you. If you're struggling, it will make you see that you're normal. If you are just starting out like me, you get his 25 plus years of struggle condensed into one book. Is it a roadmap? No. Nor does it sell itself like that. But it provides a vector and a human face to the road we embark upon. I cannot recommend this book enough. And if that isn't enough, I emailed Paul after I finished it. And he emailed me back with real answers to my questions.

This is an absolute must-read for anyone considering making a hobby into their career. (Doesn't have to be woodworking) I read this after being in business for 15 years and I wish I'd been able to read it when I started... would've saved me so much struggle and heartache. If any of the text seems dry or repetitive... you gotta keep going, because the reality is... that's what being in business for yourself is about... it's not the romantic ideal of pulling wispy shavings off your plane while a shaft of sunlight illuminates your workbench. It's the daily, redundant, and sometime boring minutiae that pays the rent. And, Paul does a great job of presenting the challenges and solutions a small business faces. This book shouldn't be a discouragement... it'll just get you into the proper mindset of how to think about your "business".

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