

BusinessWeek

Small Biz

BOOKSHELF: Nonfiction Reviews: Week of 2/11/2008

The Brand Tour

Accidental Branding:

How Ordinary People Build Extraordinary Brands

By David Vinjamuri

Wiley – \$24.95

STIMULATED!

Habits to Spark Your Creative Genius at Work

By Andrew Pek and Jeannine McGlade

Greenleaf Book Group — \$21.95

Gary Erickson couldn't stomach one more taffy-like performance bar, so he developed something pleasanter to the palate and founded Clif Bar, the nutritional supplement company. Sales consultant John Peterman created J. Peterman Co., a clothing and gear company whose catalog, rich with purple prose, made those of competitors look crassly utilitarian. Waitress and apprentice beekeeper Roxanne Quimby harnessed her boyfriend Burt's bees to make natural body-care products way ahead of the curve.

In *Accidental Branding: How Ordinary People Build Extraordinary Brands*, David Vinjamuri, an instructor of marketing in the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at New York University, tells those stories and those of four other well-known entrepreneurs in an attempt to find wisdom that can help small business owners.

It's a good tale. Vinjamuri has written deft, if slight, histories of the companies. And he has identified six common factors to their success: paying attention to detail, defining the brand as anti-status quo, being their own best consumer, persisting, myth building, and staying loyal to their customers.

Vinjamuri also visited each company founder, writing up his journey along the way. And the book's journaling aspects frequently overwhelm the business information it is intended to convey. Furthermore, the author's fascination with his typically graceful prose can become tedious. In a description of his first visit to the Art of Shaving in a Miami mall, Vinjamuri writes: "The straight razor catches the light for an instant as the blade angles towards me. I have a thousand things on my mind...but they fade away as I contemplate the perfect edge of the blade...." Enough already.

The book is less a how-to guide than it is a collection of interesting narratives on how some extremely determined entrepreneurs made their fortunes happen. Mimicking the traits that they share won't guarantee you similar success. Then again, it can't hurt.

CREATIVE SMARTS

How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand? How do you catch a cloud and pin it down? The nuns who were piqued at Maria in *The Sound of Music* could as easily have been entrepreneurs asking how they could come up with the Next Big Thing. Andrew Pek and Jeannine McGlade seek to institutionalize the perennial search for creativity in *Stimulated! Habits to Spark Your Creative Genius at Work*.

The authors, self-described entrepreneurs in the field of creativity and innovation, believe that the conditions for innovation can be cultivated. Set the stage by deciding what type of sounds stimulate you, as well as your preferences for where to sit and write, the level of light, and the cleanliness of your desk. Then mix in some inspiring quotes, and throw in some visits to different environments such as a park, a café, or a museum. With these fertile conditions established, you can experiment with "maintaining a perpetual state of curiosity in pursuit of creative insight and spark moments." Next in the process comes venturing—the "essential habit of encouraging our hearts as well as our minds to make a leap into sometimes unknown...territory." Finally, there is harvesting: "turning our sparks and ideas into something that is real of value to ourselves and to others."

This intentional cultivation, the authors write, made it possible for Pfizer Consumer Healthcare to come up with Listerine Pocket Paks, the dissolvable mouthwash strips, and for Tabi International, a women's clothing manufacturer in Canada, to design popular new lines. If you can wade through the New Age language and wild font styles of this book, you just might discover your own spark.

— By Marilyn Harris

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