

At A Glance:

Title: “Copy This! How I turned Dyslexia, ADHD and 100 square feet into a company called Kinko’s®”

Authors: Paul Orfalea and Ann Marsh

Publishers: Workman

Copyright: 2007

Length: 226 pages

Price: \$13.95 (paperback)

Reading time: six hours

Reading rating: 10 (1 = very hard, 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1 = average, 4 = outstanding)

With my KEVLAR vest fully secured, I strongly recommend this book be made mandatory reading in every junior high, high school, college and university, not only for students but also teachers, administrators and professors. It should also be read by every child and adult diagnosed with ADD, ADHD, dyslexia and other learning challenges, as well as the parents of such children.

Aspiring entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs, business owners and the full spectrum of organizational leadership should read this book as well. Note: all profits go to charity.

Paul Orfalea (OR-fah-la), a “dyslexic misfit”, founded Kinko’s in 1970. With a \$5,000.00 bank loan co-signed by his father he grew an 8 foot by 12 foot storefront copy stand near the University of California at Santa Barbara into a \$1.5 billion yearly revenues chain of 1200 copy shops which was sold to Fed Ex in 2004 for \$2.4 billion.

Exactly how this business genius did just that is a fascinating study about an underdog’s unyielding optimism, perseverance, and fearlessness.

Somehow, through much adversity and failure, Orfalea summoned many of his biological gifts – humor, wit, 130 IQ, wisdom, compassion for humanity and passion for profitability – to take a simple idea and create a complex network of 127 Subchapter S corporations with 200 different owner-partners, all joint ventured with Orfalea who retained majority control.

Orfalea is a wonderful storyteller. He’s a “character” in the true sense of the word. The guy is a bit crazy (aren’t we all?) but absolutely brilliant. He is an environmentalist, a humanitarian, an original thinker, a fierce defender of democracy, a shrewd negotiator and an innovative entrepreneur. He’s sort of an organic Republican.

There are many humorous vignettes throughout this book. Especially entertaining are the practical joke stories, silliness at the annual picnic and those legendary tales about eccentric customers. Like the guy in North Carolina who loves to jump on the copier and photocopy nude parts of his body after regular business hours. When he requested

Kinko's owner to look at the copy and critique it, she asked him, "Do you want this enlarged or reduced?"

Orfalea suffered horribly throughout his childhood from both ADHD and dyslexia. He flunked second grade. He was enrolled in eight different elementary schools and was expelled from four. He had to cheat his way through school (and college) because he could hardly read or write. He was once placed in a school for children with Down's Syndrome, and other conditions of severe mental and physical impairment.

At age 12, he almost drowned in a pool imitating a Houdini trick which he chalks up to creative thinking. He was sexually molested by a neighbor at age 14. His mother also suffered a nervous breakdown when he was young. He eventually graduated high school with a focus on wood shop, ranking 1192 out of 1200.

The story of how he started Kinko's (his nickname based on his curly red-haired afro) is absolutely priceless. He asked a simple very obvious question that spawned an entrepreneurial idea.

Orfalea is best when he expounds on his principles of running a business especially throughout periods of extreme growth and change in the external environment. His concept of multiple streams of income is especially ingenious as he forms various internal profit centers for Kinko's as well as external investing opportunities (stocks, real estate) for himself. He has perfected the art of making money while you sleep.

The final chapters detail the fascinating buyout strategy. Although it was lucrative for all partners it wasn't necessarily pretty. As usual, the company's unique culture was destroyed, many lost their jobs and even Orfalea was shoved aside as soon as the partial buyout was sealed.

We also learn that in retirement Orfalea's soul has been catching up to his body. He's teaching at UCSB, he's on the speaking tour and he's into seven new ventures, all with competent partners whom, much like with Kinko's, he entrusts to handle all the details. He's living the dream—a dyslexic's dream.

Bruce Berger is an Assistant Professor of Business Law in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. For previously reviewed books visit our Web site at www.wcu.edu/cob.