

Title: “Simply Success: How to Start, Build, and Grow a Multimillion-Dollar Business the Old Fashioned Way”

Author: Jack Miller (2008)

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Length: 228 Pages

Price: \$24.95

Reading time: 3 hours

Reading rating: 7 (1 = Very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 2 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

One of the fascinating and very positive aspects surrounding entrepreneurship is the phenomenon where one entrepreneur offers advice and help to other entrepreneurs. Practicing entrepreneurs enjoy hearing how other entrepreneurs became successful or how they overcame a problem. Jack Miller has had a successful career as an entrepreneur. He started Quill, Incorporated and built it into the nation’s largest mail order office supply company. He sold the company to Staples for \$700 million. While he continues his entrepreneurial lifestyle, he has written *Simply Success* in order to offer his help to those trying to begin their own ventures.

The author has compiled dozens of excellent nuggets of wisdom to help those desiring to start a new venture be more successful. The subject matter covers a wide range of topics from what makes a good entrepreneur to creating a vision. Miller offers his advice regarding the handling of cash, budgeting, and the importance of establishing a strong partnership with a banker. He presents his ideas of how to develop competitive advantage and what the entrepreneur must do to become a successful leader.

One of the author’s major nuggets of wisdom deals with customer service. He says today’s economic environment presents an excellent opportunity to start a company that has a focus on customer service. According to the author, today’s American businesses are failing to offer top flight customer service and he believes those willing to be fanatical about customer service can make a successful place for their business.

Miller discusses the importance of customer service in several ways in the book. Make sure you include excellent customer service in your company’s mission statement. Having your employees and customers know customer service is a core value and the cornerstone on which you will build your company’s culture will go a long way to obtaining sustainable success. The author admonishes every entrepreneur to practice “fanatical customer service” as a way of reinforcing its importance to your company’s employees.

With regard to budgeting and forecasting, the author tells us to be very skeptical of the veracity of any forecasted budget, especially one you construct yourself. He warns us to be careful of “straight line budgeting” – the simple process of taking what happened in

the past and assuming it will happen again. Miller says to use the past as one of several guides for predicting the future. Once you have a budget, use it to help you understand where your company is versus where you thought it would be. According to Miller “(F)inancial statements show more than just profits and losses.” At Quill the top management team and more than 25 other members of management spent hours going over every line item each month, asking whether a specific item could be eliminated or increased.

Finally, the author provides some outstanding insights into leadership. He argues that the entrepreneur can shape a winning organization by hiring (and firing) the right people. While the people aspect of a business can be demanding, learning how to be a leader is critical to the success of your venture. One important skill of an excellent leader is that of delegating authority. Performing this task successfully will relieve the leader of many tasks that can be done by others, allowing you the chance to “work on your company, not work in your company.” Miller admonishes us to practice lifelong learning as a way of keeping yourself relevant.

Jack Miller presents the aspiring and the practicing entrepreneur many nuggets of wisdom. The book flows in a logical sequence and as you read it you can almost hear the author talking with you about your business. As I read each chapter, I thought about my experiences as an entrepreneur and quite often nodded in agreement with one of the author’s comments.

Frank Lockwood is the Director of Western Carolina University’s Master of Entrepreneurship program. Prior to earning his doctorate in strategic management from the University of South Carolina Lockwood participated in more than 20 new ventures, qualifying him as a serial entrepreneur. He is active in the region’s business community and is willing to help entrepreneurs in their quest for to establish successful sustainable new ventures. Lockwood can be contacted at 828-227-3390 or email at [lockwood@wcu.edu](mailto:lockwood@wcu.edu). For previously reviewed books, visit our Web site at [www.wcu.edu/cob](http://www.wcu.edu/cob).