

EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Jason Fried is the co-founder and President of 37signals, a privately-held Chicago-based company committed to building the best web-based tools possible with the least number of features necessary.

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David Heinemeier Hansson is the cofounder of Basecamp and NYT bestselling coauthor of REWORK and REMOTE. He's also the creator of the software toolkit Ruby on Rails, which has been used to launch and power Twitter, Shopify, GitHub, Airbnb, Square, and over a million other web applications.

Rework THE NUTSHELL

Vermilion 2010

FIRST

Today anyone can be in business. Tools that used to be out of reach are now easily accessible. Technology that cost thousands is now just a few bucks or even free. You don't need an office. Starting a business on the side while keeping your day job can provide all the cash flow you need.

TAKEDOWNS

Unless you're a fortune-teller, long-term business planning is a fantasy. There are too many factors that are out of your hands: market conditions, competitors, customers, the economy, etc. Writing a plan makes you feel in control of things you can't actually control. You have to be able to improvise. You just need an idea, a touch of confidence, and a push to get started.

GO

The easiest, most straightforward way to create a great product or service is to make something you want to use. That lets you design what you know and you'll figure out immediately whether or not what you're making is any good. When you solve your own problem you know what the right answer is. To do great work, you need to feel that you're making a difference; that you're doing something important; that you're making a dent in the universe. You want your customers to say, "This makes my life better."

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PROGRESS

When you start anything new, there are forces pulling you in a variety of directions. There's the stuff you *could* do, the stuff you *want* to do, and the stuff you have to do. Find your epicenter by asking, "If I take this away, would what I'm selling still exist?" Focus all your energy on doing the best you can. When is your product or service finished? When should you put it on the market? Launch now. A list of things to do doesn't mean it's not done. Once your product does what it needs to do, get it out there.

PRODUCTIVITY

Here are some questions to ask to ensure you're doing work that matters. Why are you doing this? What problem are you solving? Is this actually useful? Are you adding value? Will this change behavior? Is there an easier way? What could you be doing instead? Is it really worth it? Problems can usually be solved with simple, mundane solutions. Good enough is fine. You just get the job done and then move on.

COMPETITORS

Conventional wisdom says that to beat your competitors, you need to one-up them. This cold-war mentality is a dead end. Defensive companies can't think ahead—they don't lead, they follow. So do less to beat them. Solve the simple problems and leave the difficult, nasty problems to the competition. In the end, it's not worth paying much attention to the competition, because worrying about the competition quickly turns into an obsession. It's pointless. Your competitor tomorrow may be completely different from your competitor today. Focus on yourself instead. Make your own rules.

EVOLUTION

How should you keep track of what customers want? Don't. Listen, and then forget. The only requests that really matter are the ones you'll hear over and over. After a while, you won't be able to forget them. What you keep forgetting isn't very important. The really important stuff doesn't go away.

PROMOTION

All companies have customers. Lucky companies have fans but the most fortunate companies have *audiences*. Instead of going out to reach people, you want people to come to you. An audience returns often—on its own—to see what you have to say.

HIRING

Never hire anyone to do a job until you've tried to do it yourself first. That way, you'll understand the nature of the work. You'll know what a job well done looks like. You want to be intimately involved in all aspects of your business, so your fate isn't solely in the hands of others.

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DAMAGE CONTROL

When something goes wrong, someone is going to tell the story. You'll be better off if it's you. Otherwise, you create an opportunity for rumors, hearsay, and false information to spread. Own your bad news. If something bad happens, tell your customers (even if they never noticed in the first place). There's never really a great way to say you're sorry, but there are plenty of terrible ways.

CULTURE

Instant cultures are artificial cultures. They're big bangs made of mission statements, declarations, and rules. They are obvious, ugly, and plastic. Artificial culture is paint. Real culture is patina. You don't create a culture. New companies don't have culture. Culture is the by-product of consistent behavior.

CONCLUSION

We all have ideas. Ideas are immortal. They last forever. What doesn't last forever is inspiration. Inspiration is like fresh fruit or milk in that it has an expiration date. If you want to do something, you've got to do it now. Inspiration won't wait. If it grabs you, grab it back and put it to work.