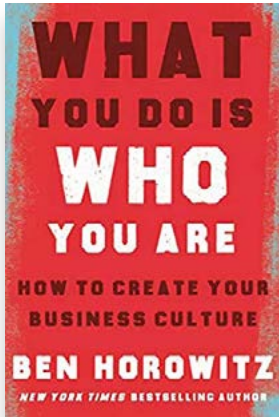


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

convenebooksummary.com



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Horowitz

Ben Horowitz, a New York Times Bestselling author, is general partner at Andreessen Horowitz, a technology venture capital firm.

What You Do Is Who You Are

THE NUTSHELL

Harper Collins 2019

Introduction

When I asked CEOs and industry leaders, “What exactly is culture, and how can I affect mine?” they became extremely vague. I spent the next eighteen years trying to figure this question out. I selected four models in particular. I wasn’t looking for ideal cultural end states—some of the models produced extremely violent or otherwise problematic cultures—but for people who were outstandingly effective in getting the cultures they wanted.

1. Culture and Revolution: The Story of Toussaint Louverture

The stamping out of slavery is one of humanity’s great stories. And the best story within that story is the Haitian Revolution. There has been only one successful slave revolution that led to an independent state. So how did one man, born a slave, reprogram slave culture? How did Toussaint Louverture build an army of slaves in Haiti into a fighting force so fearsome it defeated Spain, Britain, and France—the greatest military forces in Europe?

2. Toussaint Louverture Applied

The techniques Louverture used with rare ingenuity and skill work brilliantly at modern companies. He kept what worked. He created shocking rules. He made decisions that demonstrate priorities. He

What You Do Is Who You Are

walked the talk. He made ethics explicit. Louverture spoke to his slave army as though they were philosophers. He needed them to understand that they would have to think deeply about their choices.

3. The Way of the Warrior

The Samurai, the warrior class of ancient Japan, had a powerful code we call “*bushido*,” or “the way of warrior.” This code enabled the Samurai to rule Japan from 1186 until 1868. *Bushido* looks like a set of principles, but it’s really a set of practices. The Samurai defined culture as a code of action, a system not of values but of virtues. Culturally, what you believe means nearly nothing. What you *do* is who you are.

4. The Warrior of a Different Way: The Story of Shaka Senghor

Shaka Senghor went to prison at an age when most of us went to college. He was maybe the most insightful person I have ever spoken to about how to build a culture and run an organization. He had been the CEO of a 200-member prison gang, a tough organization to manage. He not only built a strong culture, but he displayed all the skills this book hopes to impart: he shaped a culture, recognized its flaws, then transformed it into something better.

5. Shaka Senghor Applied

Culture is an abstract set of principles that lives—or dies—by the concrete decisions the people in your organization make. Two lessons for leaders jump out from Senghor’s experience. Your view or your executive team’s view of your culture is rarely what your employees experience, and don’t just blindly adopt a default culture because you may be adopting an organizing principle you don’t understand, or may not fit your business.

6. Genghis Khan, Master of Inclusion

Genghis Khan was the most effective military leader in history. He conquered more than twice as much land as anyone else, and he did it in a series of astonishing campaigns. He subdued some twelve million square miles—an area roughly the size of Africa, stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Arctic Ocean—with an army of just one hundred thousand men. Genghis Khan subsumed peoples from China, Persia, Europe, practitioners of Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and even cannibalism within one contiguous domain.

7. Inclusion in the Modern World

There were three keys to Genghis Khan’s approach to inclusion. (1) He was deeply involved in the strategy and implementation. (2) He started with the job description he needed to fill—be it cavalry,

What You Do Is Who You Are

doctors, scholars, or engineers—and then went after the talent to fill it. (3) Not only did he make sure that conquered people were treated equally, but through adoption and intermarriage, he made them kin. As a result, they felt truly equal and became more loyal to him and to the Mongols than to their original clans.

8. Be Yourself, Design Your Culture

The first step in getting the culture you want is knowing what you want. With seemingly infinite possibilities to choose from, how do you design a culture that gives your organization the advantages it needs, creates an environment you are proud of and can actually be implemented? Cultures must evolve to meet new challenges. The point is not to be perfect, just better than you were yesterday.

9. Edge Cases and Object Lessons

To truly grasp how culture works, we need to examine the unmapped terrain out on the boundaries where cultural principles often break down or become counterproductive. When does too much of a good thing become a bad thing? When does following one cultural violate another? Is it okay to violate your cultural principles to survive? Do cultural tenets ever run their course and need to be retired?

10. Final Thoughts

Culture begins with deciding what you value most. Then you must help everyone in your organization practice behaviors that reflect those virtues. If the virtues prove ambitious or just plain counterproductive, you have to change them. When your culture turns out to lack crucial elements, you have to add them. Finally, you have to pay close attention to your people's behavior, but even closer attention to your own. How is it affecting your culture? Are you being the person you want to be? That is what it means to create a great culture. That is also what it means to be a leader.