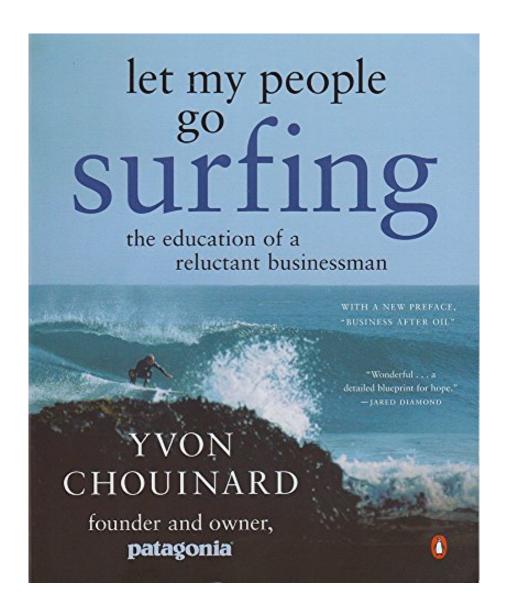


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Yvon Chouinard-legendary climber, businessman, environmentalist, and founder of Patagonia, Inc.-shares the persistence and courage that have gone into being head of one of the most respected and environmentally responsible companies on earth.

From his youth as the son of a French Canadian blacksmith to the thrilling, ambitious climbing expeditions that inspired his innovative designs for the sport's equipment, Let My People Go Surfing is the story of a man who brought doing good and having grand adventures into the heart of his business life-a book that will deeply affect entrepreneurs and outdoor enthusiasts alike.

A newly revised edition of Let My People Go Surfing is available now.

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Great Memoir - great company.

By Adam

Insomuch as this is a memoir and not a business management book, it's fantastic! The first part is pretty much all about the Yvon's early life (which makes me feel like less of a man lol), the history of Chouinard Equipment (future Black Diamond) and Patagonia, and the history of a few of it's offshoot sister companies. The 2nd part of the book describes various philosophies that Patagonia tries to employ in it's practices and dealings.

I found this history particularly interesting, especially given that Yvon had absolutely no business background, and throughout the book is very upfront on this fact. Describing the (sometimes comical) struggles he encountered, restructures needed and addressed, and culture developed, was very enjoyable.

Insomuch as the philosophies section is concerned, if you're familiar at all with Patagonia and it's dealings this will be pretty straightforward to you. I did enjoy the HR/benefits section, and was intrigued about Chouinard's take on innovation (borrowing, stealing, repurposing ideas ='s fast and effective) vs. invention (can be great, but takes time, is unpredictable, and doesn't guarantee value added vs. just cool). I think it was telling though that by far the longest section of this book in this section is the Environmental Philosophies section. Everyone who knows Patagonia knows this is important to them, and I thought it was telling of them to give it so much space in his book. Some of the figures - if somewhat outdated - are interesting (and scary).

If you're looking for a 'how to do business [like Patagonia]' rule by rule book, this probably wouldn't be the best starting point. For that, maybe try Yvon's other book, The Responsible Company. However, if you accept that this is a memoir about a man and the development of a company that cares deeply about it's value and understands the struggles therein, this book is great!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Filled with Soul

By Sean Sheikh

Let my people go surfing is the part biography and part company memoir by Patagonia founder, Yvon Chouinard. Born to French-Canadian parents, he moved to California at an early age. Always one connected to the outdoors, he would usually work so he would have enough to pay for his travels and climbing. He eventually founded a small firm that made climbing equipment, and that evolved into Patagonia.

Global warming is one of the biggest threats to mankind today. Despite the magnitude of the issue, governments and businesses are doing very little to combat the problem. Patagonia does everything it can to do its part. From scrutinizing parts in their clothing to subsidizing electric cards their employees purchase, they go above and beyond the norm held by most companies. Not only are these things good for the environment, but they're great for profits. Patagonia usually ends up making their money back in energy upgrades within a few years, sometimes sooner. If only more businesses could make the conscious effort to investigate energy savings, they would find an arena littered with profit.

Chounaird is fiercely independent. He openly criticizes the government, big business, and energy firms. He rightly points out that if everyone took take the long view, we would have a better society for workers, customers, and the environment. He lays out the various Patagonia philosophies in the second half of the book. The overlying theme, whether its' the financial or human resource philosophy seems to be: do the right thing, and profits will follow. Treat employees right. Give back to the environment. Use the best materials.

You really get an idea of how Yvon thinks, feels, and acts. He comes across as centered, humble, and responsible. As Patagonias sole owner, he can retain the company culture and vision he set without being grilled on profits, and cutting costs. Support Patagonia. It's good for the earth.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Inspiring... can it change what YOU think and do?

By R S Cobblestone

When Jim S. loaned me a copy of this book, Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman, by Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard, I really expected it to be another contribution to the genre of business books regarding the topic "how I made my millions, and now you can, too."

If success can come from a formulaic process, there should be more millionaires running around, right?

But that's not what this book is about. Chouinard never claims that by following his plan, success is guaranteed. Instead, he discusses how his philosophy is entwined into all aspects of Patagonia, from how he treats his employees to what he expects from his suppliers to what he will not compromise on. So I bought my own copy.

It was inspiring to me, so much so that I tried to get my employer to develop, with the employees, a statement of Our Values that we could them apply to... everything. I even gave a copy of my boss.

No dice. We were to develop a "committee" to draft up a new mission statement. There's a process for obscuring values!

So, for me, it is a process of one, following the mantra of Margaret Mead's "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." I'm adding myself to that small group.

What does Chouinard claim?

First, he outlines a series of Values that Patagonia's board of directors adopted to drive the company's policies (p. 72-73). It begins with the statement, "We begin with the premise that all life on Earth is facing a critical time, during which survivability will be the issue that increasingly dominates public concern... The root causes of this situation include basic values embodied in our economic system, including the values of the corporate world. Primary among the problematic corporate values are the primacy of expansion and short-term profit over such other considerations as quality, sustainability, environmental and human health, and successful communities."

This statement then drives particular company operating decisions, including these statements (among others):

- "All decisions of the company are made in the context of the environmental crisis."
- "Maximum attention is given to product quality, as defined by durability, minimum use of natural resources... multifunctionalism, non-obsolescence, and the kind of beauty that emerges from absolute suitability to task."
- "Without giving its achievement primacy, we seek to profit on our activities. However growth and expansion are values NOT basic to this corporation."
- "To help mitigate any negative environmental consequences of our business activity, we impose on ourselves an annual tax of one percent of our gross sales, or ten percent of profits, whichever is greater. All proceeds of this tax are granted to local community and environmental activism."

What else does Chouinard claim?

"My first principle of mail order argues that 'selling' ourselves and our philosophy is equally important to selling product" (p. 129).

"Patagonia's image arises directly from the values, outdoor pursuits, and passions of its founders and employees... Our image is a direct reflection of who we are and what we believe" (p. 147).

"At Patagonia, making a profit is not THE goal because the Zen master would say profits happen 'when you

do everything else right" (p. 160).

"Today, most Americans are aware we are facing an environmental crisis. In surveys, 75 percent identify themselves as environmentalists. But you are what you do, not what you say you are...The thought is, I'm not the problem; therefore, I'm not the solution" (p. 226). "The difficulty of convincing people to act is evident from a walk-through of Patagonia's own parking lots and offices. SUVs are studded all over the lot, and people are wearing jeans and shirts made from nonsustainable fibers grown with toxic chemicals. Even here, where everyone knows how bad all this stuff is, environmental values are a hard sell" (p. 228).

"No matter how diligent we are at Patagonia in trying to cause less harm to the environment with our business, everything we make causes some waste and pollution. So the next step in our responsibility is to pay for our sins until such a time that we hope we can stop sinning" (p. 228).

"I'd like to be able to get companies to give just 1 percent to the environment and to feel the same commitment and satisfactions that Mormons feel when they give 10 percent of their incomes to their church every year. Their tithing assures the church will take care of them if they should lose the farm. For me, the solution to the world's problems is easy: We have to take action, and if we can't do it ourselves, we've got to dig into our pockets. The scariest moment is writing that first check, but you know what, the next day things go on: The phone still rings, there's food on the table, and the world is a little bit better. As Mahatma Gandhi said, 'You must be the change you wish to see in the world" (p. 252).

Overall, an inspiring book. Be the change. Act. Sustain. And support people and businesses who do.

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