Like the carefully engineered dies which created his company's first products--steel pitons and carabiners which climbing enthusiasts would recognize as primitive forerunners of today's sleeker gear--Yvon Chouinard is if nothing else an original. How many other shy French-Canadian boys become surf-and-climbing bums, then blacksmiths forging their own play tools, and eventually founders of world-renowned sports equipment and apparel companies like Patagonia? How many other heads of multi-million dollar enterprises open their memoirs by stating bluntly, The Lee Iacoccas, Donald Trumps, and Jack Welches of the business world are heroes to no one except other businessmen with similar values. I wanted to be a fur trapper when I grew up. The proverbial mold from which Chouinard was cast got broken. In Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman, readers get a fascinating look inside the history and philosophy of both Patagonia and its irascible, opinionated founder. From its beginning, the book shares a sense of Chouinard's strong-willed personality and his love of the outdoors. He recounts a mostly happy childhood spent in a still-unspoiled southern California, climbing, diving, fishing, and surfing. The narrative soon moves into Chouinard's early entrepreneurial efforts, which were less focused on market-share domination than on earning a basic living to finance his own sporting habits. As his company's first catalog noted, delivery could be slow in the summer months, when Chouinard typically left the office--a dilapidated shack converted into an ironworks--for climbing adventures across the American West. Eventually, though, the story settles into a pattern familiar to business audiences: Patagonia grows rapidly, takes on more employees and product lines to sustain hungry demand from customers, but overreaches with over-ambitious expansion plans and suffers a hiccup in its adolescence. This make-or-break juncture of a business's development often contains the most interesting material, and here Chouinard and his beloved company are no exception. He describes a series of wrenching
decisions through which he and Patagonia management team navigated in 1991, as sales growth stalled while capital and operational expenses sprinted ahead. From this crisis emerged Patagonias first-ever layoffs, affecting a hefty 20% of the workforce, and a serious re-examination of the businesss core principles and methods. The historical part of Chouinards book largely ends at this point, and gives way to an exposition of philosophies which emerged at Patagonia during its dark moments in the early 1990s. The rest of the book serves as a kind of primer to business, the Patagonia way: one chapter each on product design philosophy, production philosophy, distribution philosophy, image philosophy, financial philosophy, human resource philosophy, and so on. Fans of Patagonia can revel in the companys working details, as can those who support or want to build businesses with self-consciously cultivated soulfulness. Readers who enjoyed Gary Ericksons story about Clif Bar, for example, should definitely find this a welcome addition to their bookshelves. --Peter Han

This is one of those drop everything books that you want to buy and give to all your friends and relations who will read and gain from it.

I dont even know how the book came to my attention to buy i the first place, it sat in my TBR pile for several weeks until i had the time to read the first chapter and skim the rest, my usual routine with new books as they come into the house. However it is so good, from the first sentence that i just set aside my other reading and finished it.

It is about doing good and having an adventure while doing so. Partly biographical, partly a history of the companys beginning, mostly a philosophic discussion of how to interact with an increasingly polluted and destroyed planet in a responsible corporate way. Its a story about a man, from all indications one of those rare individuals who consciously walks through life (perhaps climbing is a better word for his travels) aware of what is around him and how he is responsible for his wake through the world.

From the decision to end pinions and switch to clean climbing chocks to the 1% of sales to progressive environmental activist groups, his philosophy not only interacts with his outdoor activities but with the wider world. This book ought to be required reading for every MBA, every business student in the world. And recommended reading for everyone else.

Im not a very hopeful person, perhaps being in contact with people like the author would turn me around. He is realistic, a little pessimistic but puts his money, his deeds where his words are, in action. An excellent book, just drop everything and get a copy and read it tonight.

thanks for reading this short review.
if you can offer suggestion like this book, please email rwilliam2@yahoo.com subject amazon review.

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