

At the Corner of Destiny and Ingenuity: Lessons from an Entrepreneur's Improbable Life

Paul Owhadi

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The mishaps and successes of an immigrant entrepreneur are mined for lessons in the edifying memoir At the Corner of Destiny and Ingenuity.

Iranian entrepreneur Paul Owhadi's picaresque memoir *At the Corner of Destiny and Ingenuity* is about the challenges of managing cities and multimillion-dollar businesses as an immigrant.

Told in episodic chapters that reflect natural storytelling abilities, Owhadi's life story is divided up to reflect the international locales he's lived in. These include Shiraz and a strict French boarding school in childhood; a US general's apartment in Iran; London; and Boca Raton. He had to adapt to new sets of rules, as when he arrived in New York City penniless in the winter, and when he became the youngest city manager in Indiana just out of college. In time, Owhadi's career brought him to the West Coast too.

This is a globe-trotting memoir, and the peculiarities of each place and culture that Owhadi encountered are captured in a sometimes insightful manner. For example, the book makes note of traditional Persian obligations to welcome and host family members, no matter how distant or inconvenient, and such intercultural observations lend themselves to general leadership lessons well. But at other times, the book handles its geographical differences in a more superficial, comical manner, going for entertainment over edification, as when it makes note of the abundance of plaid clothing in 1960s London.

In each location, Owhadi was ambitious, as is reflected in his stories about being a leader in the making and about learning to be independent and self-sufficient. He started over in new places and took blue-collar jobs, such as waiting tables. He treated each job as an opportunity to expand his skill set, solve problems, and create new opportunities. He attributes this determination to his growth from an employee toward being a boss and an entrepreneur.

In addition to the book's stories from Owhadi's career, there are also adventure-focused anecdotes devoted to driving escapades and an incident during which he stole a Persian rug from a confidence artist. Such stories are often told with lessons in mind as well, accompanied by clear morals and a sense of the attributes and characteristics that are necessary to thrive in the business world. In this way, the book proffers clear philosophical and psychological insights based on Owhadi's practical experiences throughout. Less effective than its personal illustrations are its chapter-concluding reflection questions, which issue broad prompts on topics like fear that are unlikely to elicit nuanced responses.

About immigrating and becoming a successful entrepreneur, *At the Corner of Destiny and Ingenuity* is an inspiring memoir.

WILLEM MARX (June 3, 2024)

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