

Crossing the Swamp: My Path to Innovating as a Parallel Entrepreneur

John Shen

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Distilling decades' worth of business experiences into professional-growth advice for fellow entrepreneurs, Crossing the Swamp is inspiring.

John Shen's uplifting memoir-cum-business book *Crossing the Swamp* concerns running several different companies at the same time.

Shen, a Chinese immigrant to the US who had to contend with the collapse of an early business venture and was wiped out by the 2008 financial crisis, overcame serious depression and went on to found and run multiple startups. Here, he makes suggestions for others who also hope to launch multiple, synergetic enterprises too. Indeed, his book suggests that parallel entrepreneurship will become more of a trend in the future.

The book's memoir elements are dramatic, with examples as of going from being a millionaire to being unwilling to spend a few dollars on a meal. They recount personal and professional setbacks with candor, covering the emotional toll that such challenges take. They also become a means by which to distill decades' worth of business experience—spanning endeavors including microlending, startup accelerators, and pitch competitions—into eight generally applicable guidelines for fellow entrepreneurs who are hoping to reach their full potential.

The book seeks to outline the importance of attributes including drive, risk-taking, financial savvy, and strategic vision, which it says are all needed to lead a successful enterprise. These talents that entrepreneurs are encouraged to hone become the book's framework; its advice focuses most on professional growth and development. In the end, though, this is somewhat limiting, and some illustrative stories are repeated in the course of the book.

More so than the book's outward advice, Shen's personal story remains inspiring. He outlines the challenges of juggling several businesses, comparing such work to chess instead of checkers. He discusses leveraging existing customer bases, capital, and resources in new ventures, saying that doing so can be a stimulating challenge. He also models diversifying one's income, hedging against risks, and attaining efficiency. He is analytical in covering both his motivations and methods, and he backs his claims with illuminating statistics that reflect ongoing growth in US entrepreneurship. Still, while some of its graphics and images are complementary, others are merely distracting, as with a picture of a basketball player dunking over their defenders that's to illustrate drive, and a coil to reflect resilience. And the book's pull quotes are both verbose and space consuming.

Filled with insights from a successful entrepreneur, the business book *Crossing the Swamp* is encouraging in introducing the challenges and advantages of parallel entrepreneurship.

JOSEPH S. PETE (June 29, 2023)

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