

Startup Different: The Myth-Busting Blueprint for Your Multi-Million-Dollar Business

David Sinkinson

Chris Sinkinson

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A guide to starting businesses in a way that is atypical and empathetic, Startup Different is a persuasive book for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Software entrepreneurs and brothers Chris and David Sinkinson's *Startup Different* is a jovial, down-to-earth guide to building a business.

David, one of the creators of AppArmor and *The Startup Different Podcast*, writes that entrepreneurs are made, not born. He recounts the time he and his brother announced they sold their company and became millionaires in their own way despite having been told by consultants, executives, and engineers that their new startup had to be set up a different way. Positioning the brothers as the “antithesis of the stereotypical startup and all its baggage,” the book is set up as a guide to following their unconventional example.

With sections that cover busted myths appearing throughout, the book advises against operating according to what a startup “should be” (for example, seeking funding and growth as validation). Instead, it suggests prioritizing values like being critical, principled, empathetic, and resilient for the sake of one's customers and own business. Its work is didactic and makes use of repetition and chapter-ending takeaway notes; further, each chapter includes anecdotes regarding potential setbacks to model navigating challenges. There are stories about using knowledge to avoid mistakes, such as drawing upon previous experience with a telecommunications firm to retain customers. The tone is jovial, and the book's neologisms are appealing (for example, “excitified” to represent being both excited and terrified).

The most prominent myth that the book dissects is the “Alpha Myth,” or the outdated idea that “for a businessperson to be successful, they need to be a certain kind of aggressive or ruthless individual.” There are clear warnings against such attitudes and against other components of toxic work environments. The book also seeks to resuscitate “alpha” notions with empathy in mind: “Alpha chimps ... focus on a few important tasks for the troop: peacemaker and consoler-in-chief... . If the alpha is a bully, they are likely to be actively resisted or even ousted by the troop.” Positive examples of one-on-one meetings with employees to gain insight into their personal lives and independent career goals model such paradigm shifts, helping to distinguish this text among other industry manuals. But while much of the book's advice is accessible and persuasive, such as that to lead with empathy to boost resilience and mental fortitude during busier seasons, some of it is more complicated to put into place, such as encouragements to potential startup founders to work deleterious night shifts to reach their goals.

Startup Different is a congenial, myth-busting business guide with advice for creating a legitimate startup.

STEPHANIE MARRIE (July 9, 2024)

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