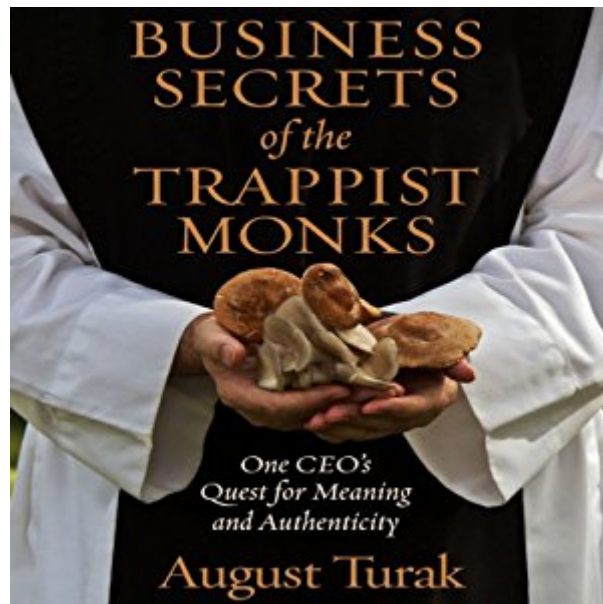


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Business Secrets Of The Trappist Monks: One CEO's Quest For Meaning And Authenticity



Synopsis

In addition to his work as an entrepreneur, corporate executive, and consultant, for the last 16 years August Turak worked alongside the Trappist monks of Mepkin Abbey, watching firsthand as they undertook new enterprises and sustained an incredibly successful business practice. Service and selflessness are at the heart of this 1,500-year-old monastic tradition's remarkable business success, an ancient though immensely relevant economic model that preserves what is positive and productive about capitalism while transcending its ethical limitations and internal contradictions. Combining the lessons he's learned from 30 years of business experience with intimate portraits of the monks at work, Turak shows how Trappist principles have been successfully applied in a variety of business settings. He demonstrates how the monks and such agnostics as Warren Buffett are wildly successful not despite their fanatical commitment to the highest principles but because of them. Turak also points to other transformational organizations that share critical components of the abbey's philosophy conducive to success.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's hard to describe this book because I've never read another like it. It's deeply personal and completely universal; it's nuts-and-bolts business insight and it's profound spiritual insight; it's ancient philosophy told through the lens of "Star Wars" and "The Devil Wears Prada." The best review I can give, I think, is a direct quote. Watch how he starts with a fairly commonplace psychological insight about money, moves to a concrete business application that most businesses could benefit from tremendously, twists it into an unusual look at the entertainment industry, and

then (as he would say) "transcends" all that as he brings it back to his overarching theme of selflessness.-----One of the most useful things I learned as a sales and marketing executive is the concept of "dollar votes"...if we really want to understand what motivates people, we should look at how people actually spend their money...I may argue quite persuasively that helping others is my top priority, but if I donate far more money to my favorite casino than to my favorite charity, I shouldn't be surprised if you remain unconvinced. In my own company, after some disappointing forays with surveys, we dispensed with this type of market research altogether. Instead, whenever we had a new product idea, we would presell the product into our customer base with a discount for prerelease software. Only if our customers were willing to pony up cold, hard cash would we in turn invest in full-blown product development. If the requisite number of sales was not forthcoming, we gave refunds to the disappointed few and headed back to the drawing board.

For almost twenty years I've been drawn to the notion that true leadership in business is about the transformation of consciousness. In writing a Ph.D. around this subject, I found a great deal of literature exploring this topic and related subjects such as developmental psychology, transpersonal psychology, leadership studies and transformative learning. The complexity of all of this could seem overwhelming, yet somehow I knew there must be a simplicity on the other side of it. On a long flight I took recently I read through Turak's *Business Secrets of the Trappist Monks*. In it I found readable stories linked to principles that touched me to the core. More than that, they inspired me to tell colleagues that this is how I wanted us to run our new business. It is all well and good to talk about being purpose driven, yet it demands putting those aspirations into practice. This book is a treasure trove of how this can be done. Out of all that I found useful in the book, three things stood out for me as representing essential distillations of the most important things I had learned from my own experience and doing my Ph.D. The first is that the core business of the Trappist monks of Mepkin Abbey is service and selflessness. While much is written about servant leadership, the more profound meaning of this orientation only becomes apparent when you hear the stories of how the monks gave of themselves in ways that inspire the best of being human. The second thing that stood out for me was detachment. It is set as the antidote for identification, which is easy to get caught up in. How often do we identify with our accomplishments, role, position or even sense of power? All of these limit our ability to lead and to inspire performance in others.

This is a title that will stop you momentarily as you scan through a shelf of books. What do Trappist monks have to do with business? Is this some form of ecclesiastical wordplay? Yet the world of work

is key to the rule of St. Benedict and its motto "ora et labora" (pray and work). Here the author takes an insider's view of monastic life, acquired through a 17-year association as a frequent guest of the monks of Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina, USA and weaves this in with business experiences and case studies to bring forth an interesting and fresh viewpoint. The relatively-enclosed nature of a monastery reinforces the necessity of cooperation and community cohesion and this can in turn be an essential "corporate lubricant" that is often missing in many businesses. Some business gurus seek to flatten a corporate hierarchy yet even monastic life has a necessary hierarchy of sorts. Determination towards a common series of goals can have a rather cohesive, beneficial effect. Egg production was the commercial powerhouse of the Abbey with over 40,000 hens literally sitting on a veritable production line, until they switched gears and moved to mushroom production after alleged controversial practices were highlighted by an animal welfare group in the late 2000s. Business is not so uncommon within religious orders either. Some brew beer, some sell preserves and other products yet a philosophy seems to be that they sell to live and not live to sell (meaning that profit is not their sole objective). This is certainly not your typical business book. It is not dry and full of jargon, it is not full of positivity and rah-rah-you-can-do-it praise.

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