Clarion Review

Business & Economics

Lessons From Desperado Poet
Baxter Black
Two Dot Books
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When a nonfiction book defies description (and that's not a criticism), it helps to consider the extra-long subtitle publishers currently slather across book covers. In the case of Baxter Black's book, *Lessons From a Desperado Poet: How to find your way when you don't have a map, How to win the game when you don't know the rules, and When someone says it can't be done, What they really mean is they can't do it.* Phew.

In this book Black seems more determined than desperate, less a maverick than a methodical, though free-spirited, worker bee. He is widely recognized as this country's most successful cowboy poet, with many books to his credit (both traditionally and self-published), CDs, DVDs, and a wide following. Black appeared six times on *The Tonight Show* during Johnny Carson's tenure, was regularly featured on NPR in the late 1980s and 90s, and continues to be a sought-after cowboy poetry performer, entertaining large crowds in the American West and Canada.

With liberal rations of humor, Black takes readers on a romp over his thirty years in the business of performing, publishing, and other business ventures built around his "modest celebrity." One hundred eighteen lessons are sprinkled through a text which traces successes and failures, and range from standard advice: "Keep your shoulder to the wheel but don't take your eye off the road" to the more outlier variety: "You will be amazed at how capable people think you are if they don't know you well. Don't waste that advantage" to sage truisms applicable to every reader: "The Internet can be a distracting, addictive habit and a voracious thief of time."

This book is a fast read and a fun one, too, enlivened with comical photos and illustrations, lists, and occasionally poems. Yet while Black's tales and lessons stem from having capitalized on his poet status, he knows few readers are planning to make poetry their path to prosperity so he's careful to show how his experiences translate to other pursuits, quipping "Since you can count on one hand (a slight exaggeration) the number of people who

make enough money as a poet to buy a used car, I chose to define success differently."

Lisa Romeo