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Business & Economics

The Rainforest: The Secret to Building the Next Silicon Valley
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Every once in a while, a business book with a big idea that defines a way of thinking comes along. Such books as *Crossing the Chasm* by Geoffrey Moore and Jim Collins's *Good to Great* come to mind.

The Rainforest feels like one of those books. The authors, Silicon Valley venture capitalists, present an intriguing metaphor: that Silicon Valley is a kind of rainforest with its own unique "innovation ecosystem" in which "talent, ideas, and capital are the nutrients." Hwang and Horowitt go on to explain in considerable detail exactly how that magical place known as Silicon Valley maps to a rainforest, replete with its intricate interdependencies.

In true business-bestseller style, Hwang and Horowitt present the reader with both theory and practical application. They offer the reader fourteen specific "Rainforest Axioms" to help explain how the Silicon Valley rainforest operates; for example: Axiom #5: "The vibrancy of a Rainforest correlates to the number of people in a network and their ability to connect with one another." These axioms are supplemented by the seven Rules of the Rainforest, which the authors liken to the Ten Commandments, including Rule #1: "Thou shalt break rules and dream," and Rule #7: "Thou shalt pay it forward."

The Rainforest is overflowing with numerous examples; in addition, the authors make exceptionally good use of graphs, charts, and illustrations to further explain and expand on the text. Some charts, such as The Rainforest Canvas, are particularly helpful in graphically representing what is required to develop and sustain the rainforest type of business environment.

Hwang and Horowitt make the point that the rainforest concept should be transferable to locations other than Silicon Valley; however, they admit that duplicating that area's success will be challenging. In the end, they write, "Rainforests thrive because of normative culture that accelerates the evolution of human organizations into ever-increasing patterns of efficiency and

productivity." Surely, replicating the culture of Silicon Valley is no easy task, but hidden in the pages of *The Rainforest* is a roadmap leading to the exciting potential for other places to create similar innovation ecosystems.

This is an important book that not only provides rare insight into what makes Silicon Valley so special; in addition, *The Rainforest* effectively presents a model for innovation that, if successfully applied, could have a major impact on the way innovative businesses develop and prosper.

Barry Silverstein