



The Ups and Downs of Running a Small Business: Lessons on Life, Family, and Entrepreneurship

James F. Comley

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Foundational ideas about entrepreneurship, work ethic, and leadership wend into the friendly, experience-based leadership guide *The Ups and Downs of Running a Small Business*.

James F. Comley's enlightening memoir–cum–entrepreneurial guide *The Ups and Downs of Running a Small Business* mines decades of leadership for lessons for other business owners.

Drawing on personal experiences, memories, and business philosophies and shaped by his daughter and by journalist Jason Rich, this collaborative text reads like an extended oral history, with tips for others winding in. It covers Comley's beginnings as an electrician before he became the owner of the Massachusetts-based Embree Elevator Company. Along the way, advice is proffered for those entering the workforce or considering launching their own business ventures. Foundational ideas about entrepreneurship, work ethic, and leadership are included as well.

The book's early chapters focus on personal history and the personal influences that shaped Comley's entrepreneurial outlook, including his family's support, four years of service in the US Navy, and edifying experiences of both success and failure. His references to weathering multiple economic cycles, technological changes, and shifting business cultures build credibility.

More concentrated practical advice arrives in the later chapters through reflections on topics like taking calculated risks, managing employees, and maintaining a balance between one's work and personal life. Such discussions of leadership are amplified by personal examples that demonstrate effective ways of managing one's employees, working with union clients, and sustaining long-term professional partnerships. Twenty-five philosophies for success conclude the text, repeating, in distilled form, the ideas presented earlier in the book.

The prose is conversational and warm, written in the tone of a mentor. And the quotations at the beginning of each chapter have a broadening effect, placing Comley's story in the larger context of general entrepreneurial thinking. "Work less, make more," the book repeats throughout to emphasize its central entrepreneurial philosophy of disciplined planning and strategic decision-making.

Still, most of the book's insights are concise and familiar, as where it notes the importance of building trust with employees and clients, of adopting a calculated relationship to risk taking, and of maintaining strong communication with one's family members, employees, clients, and suppliers. However, the book's lines between narrative reflection and actionable guidance are often blurred. Indeed, in several sections, ideas that could function as concise lessons or principles are instead embedded within longer passages of narrative, making them harder to parse.

A congenial memoir and leadership guide, *The Ups and Downs of Running a Small Business* translates decades of experience into practical encouragement for business owners and young professionals.

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