BIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

How to Win at the Sport of Business

by Mark Cuban

Mark Cuban's blog-born playbook: work harder, know your business cold, and guard your time.

BEST POINTS FROM THE BOOK

01 **Don't follow your passion. Follow your effort.**

You get good at whatever you pour time into, and being great at something is what creates passion. Where you lose track of time is where your edge is.

02 **Effort is the one thing in life you can control - and it is measured by goals and results, not hours.**

Sitting at a desk proves nothing. Cuban's whole Chapter 4: you either commit to getting the result or you don't; count outcomes, not time served.

03 **Everyone has the will to win. Only those with the will to prepare actually win.**

The Bobby Knight lesson Cuban builds a chapter on. His edge came from reading the manuals and studying competitors nobody else bothered with - the information was there for anyone.

04 **You only have to be right once.**

Unlike sports, business doesn't average your failures. Get it right one time - one company, one idea - and it can set you for life, so keep learning from misses and keep swinging.

05 **Sales cure all.**

One of his Twelve Rules for Startups: know exactly how your company will make money and how you will sell. A company that can generate sales can survive almost any other problem.

06 **Treat your customers like they own you - because they do.**

Cuban publishes his email and reads complaints himself, and says the best salesperson stands in the customer's shoes and does what's best for them. But never hand customers your roadmap - inventing the future is your job.

07 **Win the battle you're in before chasing the next one. You can drown in opportunity.**

Know honestly what actually adds value in your business, and stay great at your core competencies before expanding into new markets or products.

08 **Sweat equity is the best startup capital.**

A whole chapter and his Rule #1 for success: raising money is the biggest mistake a new business can make - the moment you take investors' money, control starts slipping away. Your own hours keep the company yours.

09 **Don't start a company unless it's an obsession - and if you have an exit strategy, it isn't one.**

Rules 1 and 2 of his Twelve Rules for Startups. Money and connections can't substitute for a founder who can't imagine doing anything else.

10 **Time is the most valuable asset you don't own.**

The first of his Twelve Mantras for Success: how you use or waste your time is the best predictor of where you end up. Skip the meetings and calls that move nothing.

11 **Never hire a PR firm. Pitch the press yourself.**

One of the Twelve Rules, word for word: reporters would rather hear from the founder than a PR flack, and their emails are public. Introduce yourself, become a source, save the fee.

12 **It's okay to live like a student. The cheaper you can live, the greater your options.**

Cuban lived with roommates and slept on friends' floors in his early Dallas years. Low overhead meant no single bad break could force him to quit, so he could keep taking chances.

THE BOOK, IN SHORT

This short book (Diversion Books, 2011; subtitle: If I Can Do It, You Can Do It) collects Mark Cuban's best Blog Maverick posts, edited and expanded. It is part memoir, part rulebook - 21 short chapters that move from his story to his rules, with no filler.

The memoir: fired from a Dallas software sales job in his mid-20s and sleeping on friends' floors, Cuban taught himself computers from manuals alone, then founded MicroSolutions. When his secretary embezzled roughly $85,000 - nearly everything the young company had - he refused to dwell on it and sold his way back. He later sold MicroSolutions to CompuServe, co-founded AudioNet (renamed Broadcast.com), sold it to Yahoo in 1999, and bought the Dallas Mavericks in 2000.

His frame is the title: business is a sport, and the game never stops - in his phrase, it runs 7 x 24 x 365 x forever. Your edge is not money or connections; it is preparation. Cuban reads for hours a day, learned his industries and competitors cold, and treats that knowledge as his real advantage. Everyone has the will to win, he says, borrowing coach Bobby Knight's line; only those with the will to prepare do.

The back of the book turns the posts into lists: his Twelve Rules for Startups (don't start unless it's an obsession; if you have an exit strategy it isn't one; sales cure all; know your core competencies; never hire a PR firm; make the job fun) and his Twelve Mantras for Success, led by 'time is the most valuable asset you don't own.' Between them sit his signature flips: follow your effort, not your passion; treat customers like they own you but never let them write your roadmap; take a 'no' gracefully and move on; and remember you only have to be right once.

Underneath it all is frugality and honesty: live like a student so no bad break can kill you, prefer sweat equity to investors' money, and don't lie to yourself about how hard you're really working. The promise is the subtitle - if I can do it, you can do it - with no shortcut sold along the way.

DO THIS WEEK

This week, run Cuban's effort test: write down the goals you actually hit in the last 7 days, not the hours you sat working. Then find the one activity where time disappears for you - that is your edge - and give it the first hour of every workday. Effort you can measure beats passion you can only talk about.

By Mark Cuban, first published 2011 by Diversion Books, built from his Blog Maverick posts; subtitle: If I Can Do It, You Can Do It. Read it for blunt, no-excuses advice from a self-made billionaire on effort, sales, and starting a business.