

STAY THIRSTY REVIEW
BY TED OLCZAK

In the crowded landscape of business literature, it is rare to find a narrative that balances the cold metrics of scaling a company with the warm, often messy reality of a life lived in pursuit of a dream. Mark Haertzen's memoir, "Stay Thirsty: A Serial Entrepreneur's Tale of Success & Failure," manages this balance with remarkable transparency. It is an insightful plain-spoken account of what it takes to survive sixty years in the "entrepreneurial trenches."

The book's strength lies in its chronological depth. Haertzen's early ventures begin in Louisville, KY—charging tolls to fairgoers and selling cinnamon toothpicks—serve as the perfect "origin story" for a serial entrepreneur. These anecdotes illustrate a fundamental thesis: entrepreneurship is often a temperament before it is a career.

The narrative hits its stride when Haertzen takes the ultimate leap at age thirty-two, leaving the security of the banking industry to launch Rocket Man Inc. Readers are given a front-row seat to the evolution of a company that became a staple at iconic events like the Super Bowl and the Kentucky Derby. Haertzen's description of managing walking vendors at high-stakes venues provides a fascinating look at the logistical "chaos" behind major entertainment spectacles.

What elevates "Stay Thirsty" above a standard corporate history is Haertzen's willingness to turn the lens inward. He explores how a childhood shaped by his father's frugality fueled a complex relationship with wealth and self-esteem.

By sharing his insecurities, Haertzen dismantles the myth of the "bulletproof" CEO. He shows that the drive to succeed is often rooted in personal history, and that overcoming internal obstacles is just as critical as overcoming market fluctuations. This "unfiltered" approach makes the author a relatable mentor rather than a distant figurehead.

Throughout the book, Haertzen distills his experiences into what he calls "Rocket Wisdom." These axioms act as pragmatic anchor points for the reader, focusing on: 1) Perseverance: The necessity of staying in the game when things look bleak; 2) Adaptability: Transitioning from an instinct-led "born" entrepreneur to a data-driven leader; and 3) The Utility of Failure: Reinterpreting losses as tuition for future success.

The book's core argument is clear: Persistence is the primary currency of the entrepreneur. Haertzen provides ample evidence for this through the 31-year lifecycle of Rocket Man Inc., proving that longevity is the result of continuous evolution rather than a single "big break."

“Stay Thirsty” is an inspiring and instructive read that replaces corporate jargon with honest storytelling. Mark Haertzen doesn’t just tell you how to build a business; he tells you how to survive the process of building one. It is a testament to the fact that while success is the goal, the “thirst”—the relentless drive to improve and adapt—is the true reward. Perfect read for aspiring entrepreneurs, business students, or anyone who enjoys an underdog story about the American Dream.

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