

BOOK REVIEW

DISCIPLINED ENTREPRENEURSHIP: 24 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL START-UP

**B. Aulet: Disciplined Entrepreneurship: 24 Steps to a Successful Start-up Wiley;
1 edition, 2013. 288 pages. ISBN-10: 1118692284**

Bill Aulet wrote *Disciplined Entrepreneurship* to fill what he perceived as a gap amongst “*the valuable books*” that are “*focused in depth on a few key points without providing the more fulsome roadmap*”. He wanted to provide “[...] *guidance in a messy and sometimes confusing process where [...], the entrepreneur, [is] attempting to do something that has never been done before*”. When asked about the choice of title, Aulet explained: “*...it captures the dichotomy that makes for a successful entrepreneur: the fearless spirit of a pirate with the execution skills of a Navy SEAL Team Six.*” Whilst it is true that an entrepreneur needs to be brave and walk where others have feared to tread, having a roadmap to show the way most certainly makes for a better chance of success. *Disciplined Entrepreneurship* aims to be that roadmap and goes a long way towards being a very good one.

The book is designed as an *integrated toolbox* taking the reader through 24 steps to success. These steps are arranged into five themes: Who is your customer? What can you do for your customer? How does your customer acquire your product? How do you make money off your product? How do you design and build your product? How do you scale your business? There is a heavy emphasis on the customer for as Aulet rightly says: “*The single necessary and sufficient condition for a business is a paying customer.*” This is certainly where a lot of entrepreneurs slip up – focusing on the product they are in love with rather than seeking to discover if anyone else feels the same way – and whether they’re willing to pay good money for it. Each of the 24 steps has useful examples of businesses started by students at MIT in order to show how that step works in practice and why it’s important. Although the 24 steps aim to be linear, Aulet cautions that entrepreneurship is in fact an iterative

process – one of ‘*spiralling*’ towards the optimal answer. If you teach new venture creation with an emphasis on innovation, this book will provide structure for your course and for the assignments that you will undoubtedly give to your students. If you work with start-ups, *Disciplined Entrepreneurship* will give you a fresh take on the essential elements of finding that paying customer, being sure that the business will make money and that it’s scaleable. For the entrepreneur, although the book is focused on the Innovation-Driven Enterprise (IDE) rather than the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), there are many elements that are highly relevant for people starting more routine types of businesses. If you’re intending to bring an innovative product to market you will have in your possession a very useful roadmap. You will rapidly grasp that the customer is of vital importance and understand how to identify them and learn as much as possible about them thus enhancing your chances of business success.

I do have some criticisms of the book: the cartoons become rather irritating after a while; visually the text is very dense – textbook like; there is a heavy MIT focus which at times can make it feel like a textbook for an entrepreneurship course at MIT. The absence of any consideration of the external environment also concerned me. Sadly blue oceans can become purple – often fairly rapidly – and potential threats need to be identified, duly evaluated and mitigating actions taken. Ultimately I wasn’t totally convinced that Aulet had filled a gap in the market. However what he has done is rightfully place considerable emphasis on the need to know your target customer and he provides a structured process to discover as much as possible about those customers. So whilst I would recommend *Disciplined Entrepreneurship*, I would suggest reading it in conjunction with *Business*

Model Generator by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur (Wiley, 2010).

Bill Aulet is the managing director of the Martin Trust Center for MIT Entrepreneurship as well as a senior lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management. Prior to joining MIT, he had a 25-year track record of success in business: from a career at IBM to his experience as a serial entrepreneur.

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