



Book Review: "Mean Business: How I Save Bad Companies and Make Good Companies Great" by Al Dunlap

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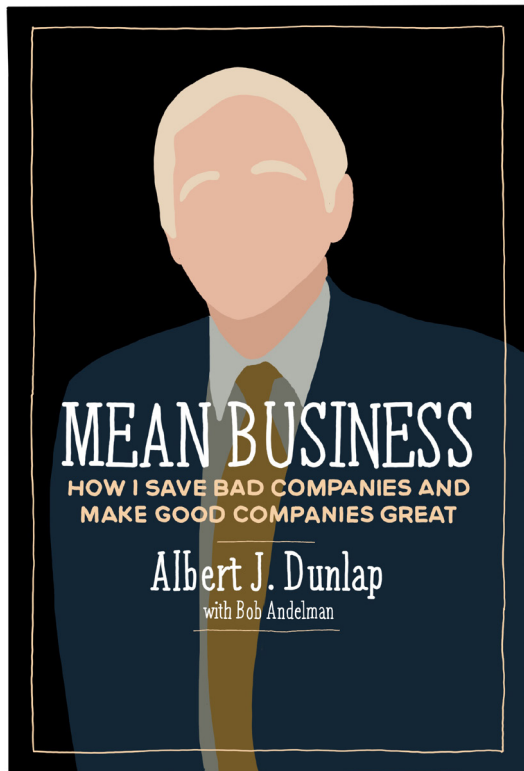
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Mean Business: How I Save Bad Companies and Make Good Companies Great

By Albert J. Dunlap and Bob Andelman

Book Review By Jennifer Goldsberry

Business is simpler than it is made out to be. Al Dunlap argues in his book, *Mean Business: How I Save Bad Companies and Make Good Companies Great*, that the principles he teaches, if understood, would make schools of business everywhere obsolete. The way Dunlap writes, basic business principles are broken down very simply (“Remember that business is simple: don’t overintellectualize it,” he writes), which makes the book an easy read for anybody. Part II is the most important part of the book, as it helps his readers get into the mindset of business professionals and learn very generally how to run a business. Dunlap has four simple rules: *Get the Right*

Management Team, Pinch Pennies, Know What Business You’re In, and Get a Real Strategy.

Get the Right Management Team. Dunlap describes not only his dream team, but the reason behind their role. For example, he hates “yes men” and loves to butt heads with his team. “Look for people who challenge you and have ideas,” he suggests. “They will stimulate you and the company.”

Pinch Pennies. Dunlap shares his tactics for “trimming the fat.” In these sections, it is clear to see that Dunlap uses the same common sense the rest of us do; he is even relatable to those unfamiliar with business. While many businesses have corporate jets and cars and other assets, for Dunlap, these are the first to be trimmed. Hence, he is nicknamed “Rambo in pinstripes”: he represents the common folk and annihilates antagonists to successful businesses. He even talks like Rambo: he uses direct, straightforward language with some expletives sprinkled throughout.

Know What Business You’re In. “Focus like a laser,” Dunlap advises. When he was working for Scott Paper, the company had to make decisions to sharpen their focus. “Are we a coated paper company or a tissue company?” These two products are very similar, yet it is important to Dunlap that focus remain on fewer items of business. With a strict focus, there is a lesser likelihood that a company will fail by taking on too many projects. It is easier to balance just a few items.

Get a Real Strategy. This final rule is almost a combination of all the rules before it. Once the standards are set regarding a management team, a budget, and the company’s vision, one must stick to them. All of these become a strategy that is never to be strayed from again. In the end, “[b]usiness is simple. It’s about doing the right things on a consistent basis.”