

This information is based on the book “How Will You Measure Your Life?” by Clayton Christensen (professor at Harvard Business School and author of Innovator’s Dilemma). The book is relatively easy to read. It has very strong religious influence and overtones, but has good information. The book is very strategy and priorities oriented. It is written from business, career, and relationship points of view. It was a bit of a challenge to summarize.

Chapter One: Just because you have feathers...

The author makes the point about businesses and individuals following advice and opinions – there are no quick fixes. Don’t look for (or give) direct answers, look for ways to think about the problem or goal.

Chapter Two: What makes us tick

Don’t focus on the trappings of success... look for meaning, development, and opportunity.

Chapter Three: Balance of calculation and serendipity

Strategies can be deliberate (planned) or emergent (exploratory). They both can work, but the right one for an individual or business depends on the circumstances. In other words: stop, step back, think, and then choose. Often, businesses and individuals need to start with emergent strategies and then when (through trial and error) things are working, you transition to deliberate strategy.

Chapter Four: Your strategy is not what you say it is

Your personal or business strategy is not what you say it is, it is really based on how you allocate your time and resources. If you say your strategy is family (or software) but the bulk of your time and money is focused on work (or hardware), your strategy is not family (or software). Look at what you do, not what you say.

Chapter Five: The ticking clock

Before you have a viable business strategy, it is important to be patient for growth, but impatient for profit. The reason is that you’ll go through changes as you tune the strategy and you need the profits to fund the exploration. When you’ve gotten to a viable strategy, then you need to push for growth and be patient for profit. Scaling out the model takes time and money.

This is broadly about investing properly for the future. Obviously, this applies at a personal level as well. The author refers to a study of how parent talk to their children during the first few years of life. The bottom line is that, independent of socio-economic level, the more words the parent says and the more conversational (talking to them like an adult) the parent does has a huge impact on how the child develops later in life.

Chapter 6: What job did you hire that milkshake for?

The author is making a point in this chapter about the mistake of the perspective of companies trying to sell their products to the customer. How can I make product X better? The point is to understand what problems the customer is trying to solve.

This also applies to relationships. Often times we do something for a family member or friend because we think that’s what they need (we give what want to give). The better thing is to figure out what job the other person needs us to help with. (The example is a spouse doing chores, which obviously needed to be done for a very tired parent, the spouse checked and found what they needed, was to have some adult time/conversation.

The author makes the point that successful relationships are the ones where the each of the couple not only understand each other, but where they are driven to help each other succeed. The author used the word ‘sacrifice’. And in many cases, it is needing to do the hardest things for each other that make the tightest bonds.

Chapter 7: Sailing your kids on Theseus's ship

This chapter is about the dangers of outsourcing – for both businesses and families. The author uses the Dell/Asus example to describe what happens when you take a short-term view and do more and more outsourcing. The author uses a model for capabilities of a combination of resources, processes, and priorities. The key point he makes is to ‘never outsource your future’ ... think about the long term implications of the outsourcing.

At a family level, the author makes the point that parents often outsource the development of children's capabilities to others (teachers, coaches, electronic devices, etc.). The author also makes the point that the things we thought were the big lessons are not the same as the ones our children think are the big lessons. He also comments that children will get the lessons on their schedule, not yours.

Chapter 8: The schools of experience

The main point of this chapter is around development – that people are not born with innate skills (‘the right stuff’). The key is that people who are seen as having the right stuff really had experiences and learning that prepared them for the challenges they face later.

He makes a case for giving children learning opportunities – letting them fail, but small and early. (I refer to this a decision-making live virus exposure. Letting children get into some trouble and having to deal with consequences when they are young lets them know how to deal with situations when they are older and the stakes are higher.)

Chapter 9: The invisible hand inside your family

This chapter is about culture (both family and business). The definition he has is:

Culture is a way of working together toward common goals that have been followed so frequently and so successfully that people don't even think about trying to do things another way. If a culture has formed, people will autonomously do what they need to do to be successful.

Culture can evolve or be built. But a culture will develop consciously or not. Of course, the key for success is for the people (business and family) to walk the talk that is the culture.

Chapter 10: Just this once...

There are a couple of concepts in this chapter (that I think warrant 2 chapters). A business concept that the author talks about is of ‘marginal thinking’. Established businesses will look at new opportunities or emerging competitors in the context of their existing business. This analysis usually approaches the future as being substantively like the present. The example used was Blockbuster and Netflix. (The concept is that ‘you have to be ready and plan to kill your businesses with new ones, because, if you don't, your competitors will’.)

The other concept is around ethics and integrity. The obvious point is that you shouldn't let extenuating circumstances allow you to slip up and do something that you know is wrong or is a moral or value compromise. The phrase the author uses is ‘100% of the time is easier than 98% of the time’.

Epilogue

The author closes with how to approach developing a deliberate purpose. For a company or individual this includes:

- Likeness (broadly what the company or person wants to become)
- Commitment (to the likeness)
- Metrics (by which employees or the person can measure progress to the likeness)