

Going Nuts?

Excerpt from *Milk & Cookies for Success*, Daniel St-Jean, ©2004

NUTS!—Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success

By Kevin & Jackie Freiberg ISBN 0-7679-0184-3 (362 pages / softcover)

Ladies and gentlemen, here is my 5-word evaluation of this book:

This is a fantasterrific book!

Who else thinks this book is so?

Let's start with Scott DeGarmo, the editor-in-chief and Publisher of Success magazine (at the time he wrote this):

"Required reading for every entrepreneur and aspiring entrepreneur! It's the colorful, brash, exciting, often amazing story of how one of the country's best managed businesses continues to be outrageously successful year after year while everyone from the top down has a blast."

Then let's hear from another head honcho, Phil Condit, President and CEO, The Boeing Company (at the time he wrote this):

"Operating a commercial airline is serious business, but that doesn't mean it can't be fun. Herb Kelleher and his colleagues at Southwest Airlines have proven that it can be fun and profitable. In some very turbulent times for airlines around the world, Southwest has blazed its own trail to success. This people-friendly airline is worthy of study by any enterprise."

I totally agree with Mr. Condit's last statement. Really. It doesn't matter if you are in the flower industry with a staff of 6, or an accountant in a business of one, you WILL get something out of reading this book. Heck, even a baseball player did!

Here's Nolan Ryan:

"I'd like to make a power pitch for NUTS! It does a great job of telling the inside story of the best bigger-than-Texas success story I know. All of us can learn from Southwest's fiercely competitive spirit and the way it treats employees and customers. Kevin and Jackie Freiberg have hit a homerun."

(NOTE, June-2020: the following paragraphs in italics were written in 2005 so some of the numbers might not be accurate today...but regardless, the story of Southwest Airlines is amazing and the book is fascinating)

Are you familiar with the story behind Southwest Airlines? No? Well, thirty-five years ago, Herb Kelleher reinvented air travel when he founded Southwest Airlines, where the planes are painted like killer whales, a typical company maxim is "Hire people with a sense of humor," and in-flight meals are never served—just sixty million bags of peanuts a year.

By sidestepping “reengineering,” “total quality management,” and other management philosophies and employing its own brand of business success, Kelleher’s airline has turned a profit for thirty-four consecutive years and seen its stock soar 300 percent since 1990.

Today, Southwest is the safest airline in the world and ranks number one in the industry for service, on-time performance, and lowest employee turnover rate; and Fortune magazine has twice ranked Southwest one of the ten best companies to work for in America. How do they do it?

That’s what you’ll find out in NUTS! With unlimited access to the people and inside documents of Southwest Airlines, the authors share the secrets behind the greatest success story in commercial aviation. Read it and discover how to transfer Southwest inspiration to your own business and personal life.

Here are a few of my favorite quotations.

Chapter 19: Customers come second

While Southwest Airlines CEO Herb Kelleher gives customers a terrific deal on an airline seat, he makes it clear that his employees come first—even if it means dismissing customers. But aren’t customers always right? “No, they are not,” Kelleher snaps. “And I think that’s one of the biggest betrayals of employees a boss can possibly commit. The customer is sometimes wrong. We don’t carry those sorts of customers. We write to them and say, ‘Fly somebody else. Don’t abuse our people.’”

To a customer who had sent the customer relations office numerous letters to complain about everything from the color of the planes to the lack of a first class section, Herb sent a letter that simply said, “Dear Mrs. Crabapple, we will miss you. Love, Herb.”

Chapter 20: Employees come first

“We are not an airline with great customer service. We are a great customer service organization that happens to be in the airline business.”

Chapter 22: Go nuts!

Southwest airlines is a legendary business today because its people dared to be different. It made room for the untried, the unpredictable, and the unexpected. When people who hit you differently hit you with a fresh idea that makes sense, go for it! If it bombs, learn from it. If it works, celebrate like crazy. But in either case, remember to keep looking for the new, the unconventional, the unfamiliar way of doing things. Not only is this a key to success in a world of change, it’s a lot less stressful and more exciting way to live. Daring to be unconventional certainly has its risks, but, as Southwest has learned, the financial and spiritual payoffs can be immense.
