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ESPN The Company: The Story And Lessons Behind The Most Fanatical Brand In Sports



Synopsis

A fascinating look at ESPN and its success as a brand ESPN The Company reveals the inside scoop on the biggest business story in sports, detailing the creative and innovative spirit and practices that drove the programming, products, and services of the most powerful and prominent name in sports media. The authors provide a behind-the-scenes perspective on how ESPN dealt with their many partners and how they handled mistakes and missteps along the way-from the humble beginnings of ESPN as an underrated startup to the pinnacle of their success as a major industry player. ESPN and other great organizations invest in their people. They train them. They believe that if you spend the time and resources turning talented performers into leaders, you're going to get better organizational performance and engender higher levels of commitment and sweat. ESPN The Company Explores the dedication to excellence that makes ESPN the "Worldwide Leader in Sports" Reveals how the steps ESPN has taken to excel can be applied to whatever type of business you're in Shares the lessons learned at ESPN about launching and growing a wildly successful enterprise Engaging and informative, this entertaining guide reveals how any company can benefit by embracing the best practices of ESPN.

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Customer Reviews

Thirty years ago, TV sports coverage was produced as a sidebar unworthy of serious news time. Game highlights, such as they were, usually consisted of scores and brief recaps crammed into a few minutes between news and weather on your local television channel. That all changed when Bill

Rasmussen, an unemployed sports announcer in 1979, and a group of committed sports junkies in Bristol, Connecticut, decided to lease unwanted satellite time to broadcast some local college sports and minor league hockey games. They called their organization the Entertainment & Sports Programming Network which we know today as ESPN, the most powerful and prominent name in sports media, with twenty-seven satellite dishes feeding more than 97 million subscribers. How did Connecticut become the center of the sports universe? ESPN The Company tells the fascinating story of how ESPN managed to sustain its growth, innovation, and brand in a highly competitive and rapidly evolving marketplace. Based on over twenty years of consulting inside ESPN, Smith provides the reader with firsthand observations, experiences, and research, which reveals for the first time an inside look and feel for the type of organizational psychology and culture that exists at all levels of ESPN. The authors detail four distinct stages in the company's development that the company has gone through illuminating how ESPN's business decisions and accomplishments can be understood in the context of the company's evolution. We ultimately learn that at the heart of ESPN's success is one astoundingly simple principle: serve fans. After each chapter, the authors share the lessons learned at ESPN about launching and growing a wildly successful enterprise—all the while enhancing economic and human value. The lessons are rich and applicable anywhere, and if you're a fan of business, competition, or sports, you'll enjoy reading and learning from this book.

Praise For ESPN The Company "Any sports fanatic can appreciate what ESPN has done for sports viewing. ESPN: The Company provides keen insights into the business plan, leadership, and passion that dramatically changed the scope of sports television." —T. Boone Pickens, legendary entrepreneur and 2008 National Football Foundation Distinguished American Award winner "The enormous success of ESPN did not happen by chance. The story and lessons of the powerful vision, decision-making, leadership, and corporate culture are all captured in Dr. Smith's very compelling book. Truly a must-read!" —Mike Krzyzewski, "Coach K," head basketball coach, Duke University and Gold Medal Winning United States Olympic Team, 2008, author of several bestselling books, including *The Gold Standard: Building a World-Class Team* "ESPN The Company is a winner! It's a wildly entertaining book that teaches the fundamentals of the game better than any business book on the market. If you want to know how to build a successful franchise and how to keep loyal fans coming back day after day, you have to read this book." —Jim Kouzes, award-winning coauthor of the bestselling book, *The Leadership Challenge*, The Dean's Executive Professor of Leadership, Santa Clara University "This book is for anyone who

ever wondered how ESPN created, nurtured, battled, and branded what has become the worldwide leader in sports. Dr. Smith, a leading expert himself, shares the secrets of ESPN's success and presents the game plan for how, as he says, 'to think like an incumbent, act like a challenger.' "

• Lesley Visser, award-winning sportscaster and the first and only woman enshrined into the Pro Football Hall of Fame "When Michael Eisner presciently called ESPN 'the crown jewel of ABC,' he may just as well have been referring to Dr. Anthony F. Smith. Amidst the multitudes of management consultants out there, Tony is one of the precious few able to cut through the clutter and platitudes to deliver smart, strategic, and practical advice about leadership and organizational performance." • James M. Citrin, Senior Director, Spencer Stuart, author of several bestselling books, including *The Dynamic Path*

Pick up "ESPN: The Company" and just begin reading it. If you are at all like me, you will find that you can't put it down. This book has all the ingredients of a truly great business book: A hugely successful company, a world-famous brand, a hyper-competitive landscape, a wild ride through the four stages of ESPN's development described by the author, and fascinating and amazingly diverse leaders. And, of course, the "insider/outsider" perspective that author Tony Smith brings to the story. As the primary management consultant to ESPN for 20 years, Tony is in the unique position of being able to reflect in a very compelling way not only the history of the organization, but also the culture -- the stories, the values, the very sense of the place. At the same time, the author does a good job of keeping his obvious admiration for the story's key players in check. We learn, for example, not only about CEO George Bodenheimer's "calm, reassuring, purposeful" leadership style, but also his conflict averse nature; about former CEO Steve Bornstein's extraordinary intelligence and strategic acumen, but also his tendency to "strip people down in a New York minute." As with his first book, "The Taboos of Leadership," Tony seeks at all times to "keep it real." If you are a business-person wondering what to read on that next long flight, you will find that this book resonates, educates, and even entertains.

Tony Smith has, I believe, contributed in a way that many books do not. He has contributed on a level of understanding of a company that has a true story to tell. As many of us who are sports fans know, ESPN is a unique story of a group that went from being seen with skepticism to truly a worldwide leader. But, Tony has also contributed on the level that allows us to understand organizational effectiveness and leadership in a deeper and more meaningful context. We all know that there are lots of books out there that talk about leadership. Tony's knowledge of a client with a

powerful message and his own powerful message about leadership makes this an enduring contribution to both fields.

As an avid reader of how businesses were built, this one really hits home as every one of us has experienced the ESPN brand and many of us have watched it's ascent from a single channel showing 3rd tier sports to the media and entertainment juggernaut that it has become. Filled with interesting and humorous stories from the early days right on through to the present, ESPN The Company is a quick read and well worth your time.

This book was a nice read on the history of ESPN along with a series of business lessons. As a sports fan and an ESPN admirer I appreciated the info in this book. However, I felt that most of the lessons were basic and the story could have been a little more detailed. The author fell a little short on going into details of the history of ESPN. Nevertheless, I would recommend this book to sports fans, especially if they have time to go through it quickly.

Tony's work and perspective here is not only interesting, but incredibly useful. The thing about his approach that's clear is that he's far from a standard, run of the mill consultant who's lucky enough to land a cool gig at a client. Uniquely, he's able to deliver, and in this book reflect in his writing, insights about how things change in a brand's evolution. ESPN is fortunate to have retained him, as is the reader for buying this book.

Tony has written a wonderful book, detailing the successes of ESPN, and the roadmap of how they got to where they are today. His insider perspective, and tremendous longevity as a consultant for ESPN, have equipped him to lend insights that other authors just cannot provide. If you love sports, television, the study of organizational development or leadership, you will love this book!

I enjoyed Taboos and while this book deals with a totally different subject, Tony Smith has brought his usual unique style to the story of ESPN. While ESPN helped reinvent the way sports is reported, the background and strategy behind the story makes for great reading.

Tony Smith has written a fresh and engaging book, with lots of "insider" glimpses of this iconic company. It was filled with thought-provoking ideas and actionable principles. Highly recommended for sports fans as well as leaders-

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