



Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman

By Yvon Chouinard

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Whether you care about adventure sports, the fate of the natural world, or pure brand maintenance and business success, Patagonia, Inc. is one of the earth's most interesting and inspiring companies. For almost forty years, its reputation for unsurpassed high quality, maverick innovation, and long-term environmental responsibility has put it in a class by itself. And everything flows from Patagonia's founder, Yvon Chouinard.

Chouinard's creation myth is now an American business legend. As a child, he moved with his father, a French Canadian blacksmith, and the rest of his family to Southern California in the 1950s with little English and less money. He escaped into mountain climbing as a teenager and by his early twenties was among the best climbers in America, making famous first ascents of a number of notorious faces. When he decided he could make better climbing tools himself for less money and when his fellow climbers agreed and clamored for more, a way of life became a business. Some forty years later, Yvon Chouinard still summits peaks around the world (though he now spends more time surfing). Patagonia still makes exceptionally high-quality things, only it now earns more than \$250 million a year from worldwide sales, and Chouinard is able to leverage his concern for the natural settings he's spent a lifetime enjoying. His resolve to minimize Patagonia's impact on the environment has led the company to make its famous fleeces out of recycled soda bottles and to donate at least 1 percent of its revenue each year to environmental causes, among many other things.

In *Let My People Go Surfing*, Yvon Chouinard relates his and his company's story and the core philosophies that have sustained Patagonia, Inc. year in and year out. This is not another story of a successful businessman who manages on the side to do great good and have grand adventures; it's the story of a man who brought doing good and having grand adventures into the heart of his business model--and who enjoyed even more business success as a result. *Let My People Go Surfing* gives ample evidence as to why there have been few more influential companies in American business in the last forty years than Patagonia, Inc.

The long-awaited memoir/manifesto from legendary climber, businessman, and

environmentalist Yvon Chouinard, founder and owner of one of the world's most inspiring companies, Patagonia, Inc.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Like the carefully engineered dies which created his company's first products--steel pitons and carabiners which climbing enthusiasts would recognize as primitive forerunners of today's sleeker gear--Yvon Chouinard is if nothing else an original. How many other shy French-Canadian boys become surf-and-climbing bums, then blacksmiths forging their own play tools, and eventually founders of world-renowned sports equipment and apparel companies like Patagonia? How many other heads of multi-million dollar enterprises open their memoirs by stating bluntly, "The Lee Iacoccas, Donald Trumps, and Jack Welches of the business world are heroes to no one except other businessmen with similar values. I wanted to be a fur trapper when I grew up." The proverbial mold from which Chouinard was cast got broken.

In *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman*, readers get a fascinating look inside the history and philosophy of both Patagonia and its irascible, opinionated founder. From its beginning, the book shares a sense of Chouinard's strong-willed personality and his love of the outdoors. He recounts a mostly happy childhood spent in a still-unspoiled southern California, climbing, diving, fishing, and surfing. The narrative soon moves into Chouinard's early entrepreneurial efforts, which were less focused on market-share domination than on earning a basic living to finance his own sporting habits. As his company's first catalog noted, delivery could be slow in the summer months, when Chouinard typically left the "office"--a dilapidated shack converted into an ironworks--for climbing adventures across the American West.

Eventually, though, the story settles into a pattern familiar to business audiences: Patagonia grows rapidly, takes on more employees and product lines to sustain hungry demand from customers, but overreaches with over-ambitious expansion plans and suffers a hiccup in its adolescence. This make-or-break juncture of a business's development often contains the most interesting material, and here Chouinard and his beloved company are no exception. He describes a series of wrenching decisions through which he and Patagonia management team navigated in 1991, as sales growth stalled while capital and operational expenses sprinted ahead. From this crisis emerged Patagonia's first-ever layoffs, affecting a hefty 20% of the workforce, and a serious re-examination of the business's core principles and methods.

The historical part of Chouinard's book largely ends at this point, and gives way to an exposition of philosophies which emerged at Patagonia during its dark moments in the early 1990s. The rest of the book serves as a kind of primer to business, the Patagonia way: one chapter each on product design philosophy, production philosophy, distribution philosophy, image philosophy, financial philosophy, human resource philosophy, and so on. Fans of Patagonia can revel in the company's working details, as can those who support or want to build businesses with self-consciously cultivated soulfulness. Readers who enjoyed Gary Erickson's story about Clif Bar, for example, should definitely find this a welcome addition to their bookshelves. --Peter Han

From Publishers Weekly

Chouinard, founder and owner of Patagonia Inc., presents his philosophy for a "new style of responsible business" along with a chronicle of his personal and company history in this sincere if self-congratulatory creed. A Californian of French-Canadian descent, Chouinard started forging climbing hardware and selling it out of his car in 1957 and published his first catalogue, a one-page mimeographed sheet, in 1964. Today, his sporting goods company has annual revenues of \$230 million, but he nonetheless identifies himself as more

of "a climber, a surfer, a kayaker, a skier and a blacksmith" than a CEO. In this vein, he lays out his alternative vision of business, detailing eco- and people-conscious philosophies on aspects of the supply chain from product design and production to human resources and management. Chouinard has backed up his rhetoric with action: Patagonia pursues sustainability, gives 1% of annual net sales to environmental groups and has set benchmarks with its employee-friendly policies. Patagonians and socially conscious businesspeople may appreciate this account despite its wooden writing, especially as an antidote to headlines of corporate fraud. (Oct.)

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Review

[Chouinard's] unique and compelling hybrid book, *Let My People Go Surfing*, is the love child of adventure and industry. -- *SFGate.com*, December 5, 2005

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Catherine Gabel:

Why don't make it to be your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important action, like looking for your favorite book and reading a reserve. Beside you can solve your long lasting problem; you can add your knowledge by the guide entitled *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman*. Try to make the book *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman* as your friend. It means that it can for being your friend when you experience alone and beside those of course make you smarter than in the past. Yeah, it is very fortunated in your case. The book makes you much more confidence because you can know almost everything by the book. So , let me make new experience in addition to knowledge with this book.

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Philip Nguyen:

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