



A conversation with a Renegade

What is your book about?

“It’s about how to de-mystify success. We all want more power, more prosperity, and more peace. My book shows you how to get it, regardless of your education, background, past careers. Topics I address include failing forward (one of the best ways to increase innovation — Google uses these techniques), building power and leadership without losing oneself in workaholism, and the most effective ways to network. It’s like an accelerated, real-world MBA in hardback, with no B.S., and lots of behind-the-scenes peeks into the halls of power.

Where else can both a budding or seasoned executive glean business and life lessons from the Clinton White House, the early days of Microsoft, the boardrooms of corporations large and small, Bill Gates’ home and the more far-out locations of a geisha training room, ashram, L.A. County morgue?”

Who is the book for?

“I’ve written it for entrepreneurs with their own companies and those within someone else’s. But it’s definitely applicable for people who *want* to be entrepreneurs too, as well as moms or anyone returning to the workforce, kids fresh from college, and people who generally want to be more entrepreneurial in their lives and businesses.”

Why did you write this book?

“I was happily retired when two things happened. Phone calls and emails kept flooding in from people saying I needed to tell my story — the world was under-going a massive influx of entrepreneurial thinking and I could make a significant contribution. And my father died and I started thinking about my mortality. I thought, ‘If I die tomorrow, what would be left undone?’ That’s when I KNEW I had to write this book, tell these stories, and help people develop a new perspective on power, prosperity, and inner peace.”

How did you go from dropping out of high school to building companies?

“At age 15 I went to EST (Erhard Seminars Training). I learned there one of the most important things ever: that we are 100% responsible for our lives. So at age 16 I took responsibility for my unhappiness, dropped out of high school and ran away to New York City. Anyway, I had to get away from my parent’s troubled marriage. Trouble was, I had no skills and needed money. Once in NY I got a lead into a modeling agency but they said I was too short and ugly. I thought to myself, I can get around that! And landed a coveted gig as a neck-to-knees lingerie model. After one photo shoot I quit. It was too demeaning. Returning home, Mom and I left my father and drove across the country, and I talked my way into college at UC San Diego. Two years later I left and experimented with entrepreneurship. I didn’t take it seriously until eight years later.”

— *continued*

What role did your father play in your success?

“For my life overall, the biggest influence was my dad. We had a pretty contentious relationship. Early on he said I should’ve been a boy, and as a girl I wasn’t very smart or pretty. This set me running from myself, trying to become someone else. The cool part is that a few years ago, as he was dying, we had lots of deep conversations. In these I realized that I had misunderstood his messages all along. He was trying to toughen me up, and never intended to damage my self-esteem. It was bittersweet: we became super close and forgave one another, and then he died.”

You’ve had a fascinating life. Let’s begin with your early lifestyle choices. What was your driving force to become a monk?

“I had teenage angst. I thought that there was too much pain in this world, and I wanted to find a way to reduce it. Ultimately, I decided I could make a bigger difference if I were not cloistered away, so I threw myself out in the world. That terrified me. But, I realized I’m a more in-the-trenches kind of girl and need to see results.”

Moving from monk to geisha girl to entrepreneur to venture capitalist, gives you quite a different perspective.

“Reinventions are great, and business reinventions are not that different from personal ones – find a pain point and fix it. It’s fun to have the vantage point of both sides of the table. Entrepreneurs are creating new products, new markets, new ways to entice customers. Venture capitalists are looking at costs, risks, how compelling the team is. It’s fascinating to watch the dynamics when they are in the room together.”

What is the most important lesson you want readers to take away from this book?

“Anyone can have the degree of professional and personal success I’ve had. You don’t need a specific educational pedigree, specific connections, or advantages of some sort. You can create all this, as I have. I was a high school dropout, a Buddhist monk for seven years, and I didn’t even take business seriously until my late 20’s. And 10 years later I’d made over \$10million dollars from a variety of businesses.

You’ve had a very colorful career. What do you know now that you wish you knew then?

“Self-confidence is a decision. You *decide* to be self-confident, *decide* to be a winner, and *decide* to achieve great things often before you have the evidence that you can. The deciding puts you in the right place to see amazing opportunities. It raises your awareness. Without this lesson, which is one of the things I’ve learned from Bill Gates, I wouldn’t have been as successful as I have.”

You have a fascinating message of business success and personal success. How do you reconcile both?

“All the business success in the world won’t matter if you don’t have a fulfilling personal life. My book shows how I chased the Almighty Dollar to my detriment, then learned how to make even more money by having a balanced life. You CAN have it all—you just need to decide what it is you really want, and how to allocate your time and build a terrific support team.”

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You've worked or interacted with some fascinating people: Bill Gates, Larry Ellison, Barbara Walters, Hillary Clinton to name a few. What have you learned from them?

“Bill has supreme self-confidence. Consider these words: think, hope, believe, know. He *knows* something will happen, and there's no doubt whatsoever. Windows was the laughing stock of the industry from 1985 to 1990. Yet, Bill Gates said it would be the world standard and it did. Later, he said that Microsoft would lead the browser wars. He said, and I'm paraphrasing, “We're great at partnering. Yes, we are behind, but we will catch up and we'll win.” That energy of *knowing* is what moves mountains. Stick with it tenaciously.

Barbara is so personable, very sincere. She is one of the few famous people who really looks you in the eyes, really connects with you, and wants to know what you think. She has a spectacular handshake. She connects on the spot.

Hillary has a memory you would not believe. At a party with 200 other people, I had a conversation with her about contemporary poetry. Eight months later I saw her again, and she remembered our poetry conversation. And, she remembered me: “Aren't you the one who got into Microsoft with no high school or college degrees?” She does her homework, and she remembers.”

What do you consider your greatest accomplishments?

“Getting into college without a high school diploma, getting a job at Microsoft with no degrees, starting my first company regardless of massive resistance and making it a success. Continually starting companies, creating jobs, helping people grow and stretch. I get letters and emails from both past staff and strangers very often—it's so insanely great to hear from people that you have touched and maybe made their lives a little better. That makes me so high!”

Is being a woman an advantage or disadvantage in your work?

“It's a mix. I just returned from giving a speech to 1300 people where the audience went nuts because this particular venue had never had a female speaker. I was gobsmacked. Hello! It's 2007! It's America! How can I be the first female speaker at this high profile conference? Sheesh. So there it was an advantage. On the disadvantage side, I've been in countless sticky situations: a man putting his hands on my thigh while trying to do a business deal (ick), men trying to sabotage me because they're intimidated by my success (oh well). What can you do? This is where perseverance and a sense of humor come in handy!”

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