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Book Review

100 Great Businesses and the Minds Behind Them

By Emily Ross and Angus Holland

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Reviewed by

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So you already know that Michael Dell and Bill Gates dropped out of their universities, and perhaps you know that Phil Knight sold tennis shoes out of the trunk of a Plymouth Valiant at athletic meets. But did you also know that Warren Buffet had five paper routes before school when he was thirteen and that he bought his first share of stock at age eleven? And did you know that Oprah Winfrey was raised on a pig farm in Mississippi and that her parents wanted to name her Orpah after a character from the Bible but misspelled her name? Or how about that IKEA was started in a shed that had been used to store milk churns? And Clarence Birdseye got the idea for frozen vegetables while working as a naturalist in the Arctic Circle.

Such is the stuff from a wonderful book, *100 Great Businesses and the Minds Behind Them* by Emily Ross and Angus Holland. I'm not sure the book was intended as a trivia book; it more likely was supposed to be a business history book. It is great as both. The authors break the book into 22 chapters although I am not sure what their logic was. Never mind, because the chapters are then broken into the 100 vignettes about the beginnings and development of businesses we all know. We find, for example, that in-line skates were invented back in the 1700s, long before Scott Olson perfected the idea and called them Rollerblades. Liquid Paper was once called Mistake Out. Play-Doh had been sold for years as Magic Wall-paper Cleaner before Joe

McVicker put it in cans for use as modeling clay. Now sold by Hasbro, more than two billion cans have made it into the hands of eager children.

100 Great Businesses is a great book for a number of reasons. It is an excellent example of what I call an airplane book. That is, if you are flying from Chicago to Los Angeles, you can pretty well finish the book in one flight. Its short vignettes, each two to four pages in length, are also perfect for easy reading after finishing a day of teaching or heavy research. Another excellent use of the book is for a one-hour honors course in entrepreneurship. Ask students to read a do-zen or so selected vignettes and then look for commonalities. Are there any similarities between Tupperware, Home Depot, eBay, and MTV? The final great use of *100 Great Businesses* is as a source of business facts and trivia. You are bound to be the hit of the coffee shop discussions as you become an expert on little known facts about a lot of businesses. The book makes a great gift, as it was for me. As a paperback, it sells for \$16.95, so it would be a nice token gift for a guest speaker, a graduation gift for a favorite student, or a holiday gift exchange.

All in all, *100 Great Businesses and the Minds Behind Them* is a delightful book, well written, interesting, and a great source of information. I recommend it.