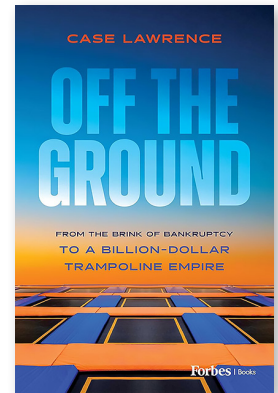


# Executive Book Summaries®

## Off the Ground

From the Brink of Bankruptcy to a Billion-Dollar Trampoline Empire

by **Case Lawrence**



### Contents

Wiped Out

Page 2

From the Ground Up

Page 3

Stumbling Into Growth

Page 4

Elevating the Experience

Page 4

The Power of Partnership

Page 5

Beyond Borders

Page 6

Crisis Mode

Page 6

Full Circle and  
Into the Future

Page 6

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

*Off the Ground: From the Brink of Bankruptcy to a Billion-Dollar Trampoline Empire* outlines how to scale a concept that lacks precedent by using the creation of Sky Zone as a case study in applied leadership and management. The book's core premise is that effective leadership is developed through navigating uncertainty rather than following established playbooks. The Sky Zone journey provides a structured look at how leaders identify opportunities, test ideas in real-world conditions, and make iterative decisions when data is limited or inconclusive.

The content is organized around key phases of business building, including opportunity recognition, early-stage execution, scaling, and crisis management. Each stage introduces practical frameworks such as validating demand before expansion, standardizing operations for replication, and maintaining financial discipline under pressure. The narrative highlights how leaders must continuously adjust strategy while balancing growth ambitions with operational realities.

Case Lawrence, an entrepreneur with a background in law and real estate, draws on his experience building SkyWalk—his original trampoline park concept—and scaling it into what is currently the world's largest trampoline park franchise, Sky Zone. His account connects individual decisions to broader management principles, offering readers a practical understanding of how leadership, adaptability, and disciplined execution can be applied across industries, not just in start-up environments.

### IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

- Evaluate and act on opportunities in uncertain or emerging markets
- Scale operations effectively without relying on a fixed blueprint
- Manage risk, setbacks, and external shocks with discipline
- Build resilience and adaptability for long-term business value

## Introduction

Every major company out there was once a start-up. Every Fortune 500 company started with a single idea. You'll find no exceptions.

My greatest goal is that you walk away with ideas. Ideas that can turn into opportunities. Opportunities that turn into companies. Companies that create jobs and make the world a better place. Because I believe that's what Sky Zone does in its own way. By offering people an escape, an opportunity to bond, and a chance to release anxieties, it makes the world a better place.

You might think that my greatest business accomplishment was scaling a crazy start-up idea to a company valued at over \$1 billion. But it's not. My greatest business accomplishment will always be avoiding bankruptcy during the Great Recession. Because, as tough as it was, I owe the real estate collapse of 2008–2009 for where I ended up. The trials I faced from 2008 to 2010 taught me the most powerful business lesson: With every down, you can find an up.

With each chapter of Sky Zone's story, there is a lesson to be learned and applied to your story. And with every down, there is an up. Bringing the two together is what will create a successful experience. But to do so, you'll have to take the leap. You'll have to ask yourself, "What if?"

---

### CHAPTER 1

## Wiped Out

Most of us want to ignore the failures in our lives. We want to emphasize the wins. The problem with doing that is how intricately connected failure and success are. Sometimes, the line between the two is very thin. One decision can lead a company to thrive or die. One shot at the buzzer can determine a win or a loss.

Failure is part of the story of success. For anyone who is considering the entrepreneurial life, you have to get on the roller coaster. You have to see failure as a blessing. A blessing in disguise, yes, but a blessing nonetheless.

No one wants to live life on a coin flip. But that's what my career looked like for two years straight. All of life is risk, though. You win some. You lose some. You go up. You go down. But how do you set yourself up for more ups than downs? How do you bounce back faster from the downs? What I've seen time and again is that you'd better start with a strong foundation.

## Foundations

As with architecture, a firm foundation is the best start for building anything. Every aspiring entrepreneur should take the time to analyze their own personal foundations.

You need to look at the assets your background brings you and the potential handicaps. How does your background influence your decision-making? How has it shaped your view of money? How has it taught you to face challenges?

Your family and community are your first network, long before you even realize the importance of having a network. So, it's well worth the time to create a catalog of how your foundations can contribute to your success. Many start-ups have found their first round of funding from family and friends, not from the big venture capital (VC) firms.

Part of your foundation is also looking at how your life has provided experiences to you that can be leveraged in business. Think of this as your "life résumé": skills and experience you have acquired by virtue of living life in your unique upbringing.

## The Backup Plan

Most people don't choose law as their backup plan. But with the demise of my real estate business CargoBay, that was the prospect I was facing. We needed to replace the meager income I had taken from CargoBay, and the most obvious option was for me to return to law.

This idea to start up a trampoline park was also meant to be a backup plan: a temporary side hustle. My wife Kerri and I created an Excel spreadsheet to estimate what we could charge for tickets and how many people would visit. Ultimately, we came to a conservative conclusion that we could make \$5,000 a month after expenses, and this would get us through until I could find a job at a firm.

So many of my experiences were about to fuse together—my foundations, my pivot to business, Silicon Valley, and even the failure of CargoBay. Looking back, CargoBay's failure would be particularly important for laying the groundwork for what would become Sky Zone.

The greatest blessing of failure is that it can teach you how to be successful. As long as you don't turn "failure" into a label, and as long as you see it as one chapter in your story and not as the entire book. Failure can be your greatest teacher, but only if you are a great student, ready to apply the lessons. Because you never know when that backup plan may end up being the plan that changes your life forever.

Failure can be your greatest teacher, but only if you are a great student, ready to apply the lessons. ”

## CHAPTER 2

### From the Ground Up

Looking around, many would-be entrepreneurs are disheartened by the notion that all the great ideas have already been taken. But it's not impossible to break into an established industry and excel.

The question then is, “What truly divides successful entrepreneurs from those who give up?”

It rarely has to do with the idea itself, but rather the approach. Are you willing to take action outside of the box? Are you able to see what's not obvious?

Building a business doesn't happen because you have all your ducks in a row and a foolproof plan. In fact, your plan will probably look foolish to most people. Building a business happens because you have a vision, guts, and creativity to leverage. So, how do you build from the ground up? Especially when you don't actually have any ground to build on? In many ways, starting SkyWalk, our first trampoline park, was truly like building on air.

#### Just a Side Hustle

I'm a fan of encouraging a side gig for budding entrepreneurs. You'll often hear the message preached of being all in, and there's nothing wrong with that message. But I believe that mentality dissuades many would-be entrepreneurs from pursuing an idea that could change their lives.

Another common roadblock for would-be entrepreneurs is the belief that you can only create something original—that you can't take someone else's idea and run with it or improve upon it. That's the beauty of competition in a free market. Otherwise, we'd only have one shoe company, one car company, one brand of jeans, and so on.

So never discount a business idea solely on the grounds of originality. Often, being the fast follower in an industry is a more ideal position to start from than being the first mover.

Also, original ideas often prove more difficult to sell. Many business ideas are about solving pain points, and it's more difficult to sell a solution if you first have to show people a pain point they didn't realize they had.

#### It Never Hurts to Ask

Every day, I'm grateful for the opportunities and blessings in my life. But I also had few other choices at the time. Today's entrepreneurs have many more choices for where to find start-up capital. Nor do you have to go the arduous route of VC, which wasn't an option for me either. You can seek out grants, including local government grants that are designed to help the local economy through entrepreneurs. And let's not forget the incredible power of crowdfunding.

Looking back, putting together that \$430,000 to build SkyWalk was a big nut to crack. For many, it would have seemed an insurmountable obstacle. But by making big asks, coupled with the willingness to assume more risks, we were able to move forward.

#### It Worked

While it's certainly important to learn from the past and what entrepreneurs have done before, it's just as important to pay attention to what's happening around you now and then leverage the moment. We did this almost by accident. Several major shifts were happening in the world that ended up being very good for our long-term success, especially as a bootstrapped start-up that most people had never seen.

One of those was the meteoric rise of social media. Waiting to market your business when the doors open is too late. Marketing should always start before. For instance, during the construction of SkyWalk, I posted progress pictures a few times a week to capture people's curiosity. And it worked. By the time SkyWalk opened, we had more than five thousand followers of our Facebook page.

Beyond our own use of video for marketing, video was also a driver for customers. YouTube had successfully democratized video, and social media platforms realized video was their next evolution. People wanted to capture an experience and share it with others. With Instagram taking off, the selfie revolution was in full force.

People wanted to capture photos and videos of themselves having fun with their friends. Parents wanted to post videos of their little ones doing flips. Teenagers were posting videos of playing trampoline dodgeball; my two boys usually right in the thick of it all. All of this generated tons of positive fear

of missing out for anyone who saw those photos and videos, driving more business our way.

---

### CHAPTER 3

## Stumbling Into Growth

Not every business grows on purpose. But you cannot grow a business *without* purpose. That is, a purpose and a plan are not the same thing. Purpose is what motivates you and drives you. But a plan is how you strategically wield that purpose for growth.

### See the Pattern

Our lives are filled with patterns. Maybe you've watched someone crochet, following a pattern over and over until something beautiful takes shape. Or if you've ever learned how to play an instrument, music is a pattern. The digital world has filled our lives with patterns called algorithms.

Though there is no one single formula for success in the world, so much of success is finding your patterns. Finding what works so you can repeat it—and finding what doesn't work so you don't repeat it. In the case of Sky Zone's story, scaling the business was a daisy chain. When you do something great, great people want to become part of the pattern.

I was being carried along by great partners following a great pattern. And the partners were the only reason I had been willing to go along with the idea of new parks. Three parks in, I still considered it a side hustle. Though I hadn't purposefully scaled the business at this point, deep down, the desire to do so was there, just waiting to burst out.

Not every business will follow the same pattern. Sometimes you find the pattern. Sometimes the pattern finds you. What matters most is that you look for and *see* the pattern.

### Scaling with Purpose

Within eighteen months, I was looking at five parks, all performing well thanks to great partners. While I didn't scale SkyWalk on purpose *per se*, the company did scale *with* purpose. Anchored by our values, we were primed for purposeful growth. Looking back, the keys to our early growth were partnership and open-mindedness.

You could say I was a reluctant scaler. But because of our values, the company kept attracting the right partners. And by being open-minded, new opportunities opened up that I wasn't even searching for.

Focus on those two secret ingredients—the power of partnership and keeping an open mind. Anyone can learn how to read a profit and loss statement. Anyone can learn how to run ads. Anyone can learn how to pitch a product. But not everyone masters partnership or open-mindedness.

---

### CHAPTER 4

## Elevating the Experience

No matter what you do, no business is ever 100% in your control, even if you own 100% of the company. From an intellectual point of view, we entrepreneurs understand this and preach it to anyone who will listen. But many of us become hypocrites in the execution process. In the experience of running a business, we forget what we know in exchange for the belief that we can become 100% in control of the business.

You can't control the external factors, which means you have to double down on the internal factors that you *do* control. When you look at the companies that have failed over internal problems, you'll find a common enemy to point the finger at: complacency.

### Exploiting Trends

Avoiding complacency starts with paying attention to what is happening, and more importantly, what needs to happen next. Many businesses fail to grow because all of their focus is on getting people through the door. Once customers have handed over the cash, some companies stop paying attention.

The culture is never stagnant. So, if you're always looking to meet and exploit current trends, then you will avoid complacency by elevating the experience.

When it comes to innovating and elevating the experience for customers, you might surprise yourself, which is why you need to put every idea to the test. Never assume what elevates the experience for consumers; find out from them directly. As an entrepreneur, you should never be your own focus group.

The business lesson here? Always leave room to surprise yourself. But there's another lesson sprouting from it: You might not know your ideal consumer as well as you think you do.

### Understand Your Customer

Contrary to popular opinion, people do change. What grabs their interest changes over time. If you don't develop ways to

Often, being the fast follower in an industry is a more ideal position to start from than being the first mover. ”

get inside their heads and know what they're saying and thinking, how can you ever meaningfully elevate the experience?

The biggest lesson from all the innovation was the need for novelty. Even when a new attraction was less popular than others, there was still a payoff for introducing something new. At the very least, it gave us something to post on social media, and it gave people a reason to come back.

When you couple imagination with an understanding of your customer, you can continue to keep your product or service new. When you keep up with current cultural trends and understand your customer, you'll not only leave room to surprise yourself; you'll also continue elevating the experience.

---

## CHAPTER 5

### The Power of Partnership

One plus one can equal three. Business history is filled with examples of partners who came together and resulted in synergy—and success. Finding success isn't so much about the idea as it is about finding the right partners.

#### First Moves

To scale a business strategically, we couldn't just skim off the profits from the existing locations and add on new parks one by one. Thus far, our growth had been serendipitous, with the right partners coming at the right time, apart from anything I had done. But it would have been impossible to strategically scale that way. We needed to be able to open multiple parks in quick succession, which required real investment power.

And we found that in Jason Peery, who managed a family office, Peery Partners. We started with a trial run in which Peery Partners would fund three new parks and see how they did. If they were successful, then Jason made it clear there would be capital for more parks, which would incentivize me to put my best foot forward.

Peery Partners followed through on their promise to do more if we performed and ended up putting in more than \$30 million in capital for us to get parks up and running across the country. I couldn't have dreamed of a more perfect partner-

ship. Something I emphasize with my business students and new entrepreneurs all the time is to take the right money from the right partners at the right time.

#### Family

If you're married or in a committed relationship, never forget that your partner is the silent founder, even if they are not playing an active role in the business. "Silent" because they are taking on the same risks and gambles as you, but without the full scope of knowledge that comes with proximity to the business. As a result, they are required to have more trust and faith while carrying the same stress.

To combat that stress, you need to lean into radical transparency with them—the real risks and the rewards. Though I hadn't been perfect in this, I worked hard to involve the whole family. For many years, our family vacations consisted of visiting all the parks we had finished in the previous year so they could test them out.

What many entrepreneurs forget is to never stop building that primary community: your family. Yes, scaling a business can easily take over your life. But you can also use a little creativity to weave together family and business without it becoming a family business per se.

From your family to your professional partnerships, stop seeing business as just the thing you do to make money. Business can be a tool to build people, family culture, and community. When you do, you expand your impact as an entrepreneur.

#### Pack vs. Pride

No conversation on partnership would be complete without answering a common question I receive from students: When launching a business, should you always find a partner or cofounder, or is it better to go alone? I see two main types of ventures: packs and prides.

- **People who glorify the lone wolf idea overlook that wolves are pack animals.** Businesses with cofounders operate like wolf packs: decisions are made by the pack, projects are completed by the pack, and rewards are shared by the pack. Everyone prioritizes the pack, regardless of hierarchy.

- **Businesses that operate like lion prides are typically led by a single founder.** These ventures are often driven by a charismatic visionary, but even the leader depends on others (lionesses and younger members) who contribute to the success of the whole.

Both models require an appreciation for the power of partnership. Like in so much of life, there's no right answer. With the right pack members, you can be successful. With the right pride members, you can be successful. And both pack and pride can turn ugly if you have the wrong members.

---

## CHAPTER 6

### Beyond Borders

As a group, humans are explorers. We thrive on cultural exchange. At one point, though, explorers had to have strong financial backing or even royal support. But with technological advances in travel, shipping, and communication, international trade has been democratized. Nearly anyone can conduct an international business if they want to.

Building from the power of partnership, the question every entrepreneur should be asking themselves is, "Do I have the right people and resources to expand my horizons?" Because going international isn't just a whole new ballgame. Sometimes, it can feel like a whole new sport. And if you don't do your due diligence to understand the international market and its requirements, you could lose.

#### Adjust and Adapt

By the end of 2014, we had a bunch of parks in the works, and it became clear that the low-hanging-fruit markets had largely been snapped up. The best markets had been grabbed. The industry as a whole started to pivot, as it became clear that the next frontier was international.

By 2016, we had parks in four countries, which further cemented our business proof. And more importantly, we caught the attention of Palladium Equity Partners. As 2017 approached, they offered to make a long-term investment in the expansion of our business, which was the first institutional private equity deal in the trampoline park industry.

We could never have gone beyond borders if we had not found the right partners at the right time. When you have an international partner, you learn how to adapt and integrate into a new culture and new ways of creating opportunities you would have otherwise missed. With great people in your corner, the horizon no longer has to be the limit.

---

## CHAPTER 7

### Crisis Mode

Whether you're a start-up entrepreneur or an executive at a Fortune 500 company, there's no escaping Murphy's law. In fact, I suggest you heed Murphy's law and strategize defensively, or rather, proactively. Because if nothing else, it will save you from optimism bias, which is the psychological term for when you assume nothing bad can happen to you.

One of our strengths at Sky Zone is that we never make this particular assumption. We always look for ways to anticipate and hedge against future problems. But even when you're doing everything you can, trouble can and will still happen. Then you have to know how to respond in a crisis to right the ship.

What do you do in a crisis? How do you remain proactive when every fiber of your being wants to be reactive?

#### Expect the Unexpected

Expecting the unexpected isn't a fatalistic worldview. It's a worldview built on faith. When you have faith, you'll do whatever you can to protect what you've built from unseen threats. When you truly believe in what you're doing, you'll remain proactive. You'll make wiser choices when you face a crisis because you'll welcome the unexpected. You'll recognize it as a chance to grow and learn.

When trials and tribulations come, you discover a ton about yourself and your business. You find the gaps that need to be filled. You find the areas where you can improve the experience for everyone. You become more creative, more resilient, and more innovative. Entrepreneurs need these skills, and they grow best in the midst of the unexpected.

Success is never simply a case of getting the business off the ground; it's keeping everything going when the worst-case scenario hits you. No matter what your business is, the unexpected will come for you. You have to learn how to become proactive before the crisis hits. When you learn to expect the unexpected, you not only prepare yourself to weather the storm, you also water the fields for the unexpected good. Present pain prepares you for future opportunity.

---

## CHAPTER 8

### Full Circle and Into the Future

It's a bizarre blessing that we humans can't predict the future. Life simply doesn't allow it because life isn't linear. It weaves, meanders, finds a dead end, reroutes, and takes one

You can't control the external factors, so double down on the internal factors that you *do* control.

”

path over another. And like a trampoline, for every down, there's a chance to spring back up again. But my favorites are the full circle moments.

### The Power of Joy

The joy factor happens when you're able to look at the full circle of your journey and be grateful for every failure, every win, every trial, and every triumph. True joy can't be purchased. Rather, it overflows into generosity. It's a feeling that becomes a powerful experience unto itself. And it is a great foundation for building a beautiful future.

Through Sky Zone, we've experienced financial success, but that's never been the prime motivation for us. Even when I regarded trampoline parks as a side gig, the motivation was always joy. Never underestimate how motivating it is to provide others with a powerful experience. The joy factor is what will keep you going through whatever challenges you face. Money alone can never sustain you through the trials of entrepreneurship.

Ask yourself, Is there a way I can provide joy to people? What is a unique, joyful experience people are willing to pay for?

### Challenge Your Own Assumptions

The future for any business is filled with uncertainty. But there is one certainty for any business: If you only do the same old same old, you won't move into the future. The biggest breakthrough in our business model happened when I was proven wrong when I tried something new. Because, usually, you don't even know you're wrong until you try out a new path.

Surround yourself with people who will challenge you to try something new and challenge your assumptions. Because those assumptions could be keeping you from important breakthroughs. Especially the breakthroughs that will take you into the future. So have the humility to question your own assumptions, let others be right, and try something new.

### The Future of Fun

Successful businesses always have an eye on the future. They don't get so stuck in the past that they forget what's most

important: bringing joy to people now. When you commit to elevating the experience for customers and consistently innovating, the future becomes your best friend.

You can build a future on either philosophy: branching out or evolving. It all depends on your business's core strength. No matter which model you follow, those are the two keys: Find the joy and keep an eye on the future. None of us can predict the future, which is why it's so important to live with an open mind and be ready to change.

From retail to technology to sports, everything comes back to being aware of current trends and leveraging the moment. When you can appreciate the past, keep your finger on the pulse of the present, and look with excitement to the future, you become something much more than a fad business: you become a full-circle business.

---

## Conclusion

One of the greatest joys of my life now is having the opportunity to pass on what I've learned. Whether it's in a college auditorium or a one-on-one mentoring session, I'm driven by the idea that my experience will help others get their own ideas off the ground.

With that in mind, here are some of the key takeaways from my journey:

#### 1. Find opportunity in failure

In dark times, the challenges and failures you face contain seeds of opportunity. Failure can disrupt our previous path, initiate a paradigm shift, and allow us to consider new possibilities going forward.

#### 2. Dare to ask big

In business, have the courage to make the audacious ask. You don't have to have an abrasive personality, but you can stretch your willingness to ask for more—even if it might seem unrealistic.

#### 3. Deliver joy

Entrepreneurs no longer need to focus on eliminating pain points or solving a problem as the premise for delivering a product or service. As we move forward into an age of abun-

dance and continued technological progress, some of the most successful business concepts will be those that deliver joy and fun to consumers.

#### 4. Move to the frontier

Look to the unlikely path and the road less traveled. Seek to identify industry segments that are still fledgling or not fully formed, and position yourself there as an entrepreneur. The U.S. has a rich history of people striking out for the next frontier because that's where the most fruitful opportunities are.

#### 5. Pursue constant growth

Never be static. Always look to level up. Search with a desperate urgency for the next way your business can grow, even when things are going well. Pursuing growth isn't just about expanding the volume of your business; it's about always innovating and looking to the future with imagination.

#### 6. Build relationships and leverage partnerships

You can't do everything on your own. Whether you operate within a pack or a pride, you need the synergy of good people around you. Entrepreneurship is always a group journey, so look for the best partners you can bring along and relationships you can develop.

#### 7. Be proactive in a crisis

The path of entrepreneurship is an inevitable rendezvous with problems and crises of every kind. Sometimes, the volume and magnitude of problems to solve can be overwhelming and paralyze us. True entrepreneurs must act and not be acted upon. Always lean into being proactive and meeting a crisis or problem head-on.

If there's one way to sum all this up, it's to never forget the power of experiences. The next success story won't be about a piece of technology or a marketing niche. It will be about the experience created. No matter the product or service, it's about the memories and joy you provide for people.

Always ask yourself how you can infuse the power of experience into your business. What is the experience you are going to create for others? And how far off the ground will that experience take you?



**Case Lawrence** is the founder and former CEO of CircusTrix, now Sky Zone, the world's largest trampoline park company, with hundreds of locations and millions of annual guests. A pioneer in active entertainment and the experience economy, he has been featured in *Forbes* and *The New York Times*. Lawrence was named Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year and later recognized as CEO of the Year by Utah Business. He teaches entrepreneurship at Brigham Young University and serves as chairman of This Is the Place Heritage Park. Lawrence holds degrees from Duke Law School and Brigham Young University and lives in Utah.

*Off the Ground: From the Brink of Bankruptcy to a Billion-Dollar Trampoline Empire* by Case Lawrence. Copyright© 2026 by Case Lawrence. Summarized by permission of the Publisher, Forbes Books. ISBN 9798887507217. Summary published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. Copyright 2026 Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. For permissions and reprints, please contact [service@summary.com](mailto:service@summary.com). 48SS07B