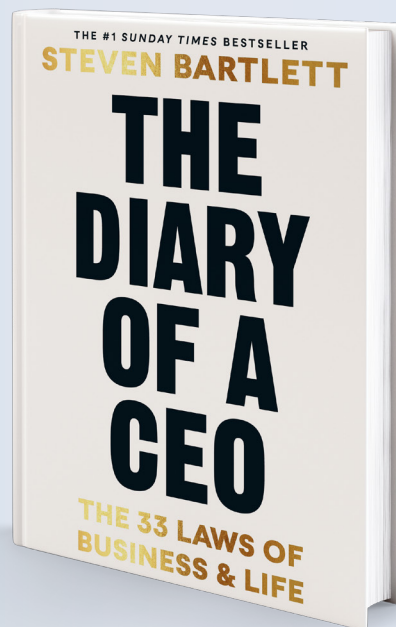


BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



The Diary of a CEO

The 33 Laws of Business and Life

By Steven Bartlett

Steven Bartlett is an entrepreneur, speaker, investor, author, and the host of the UK's No.1 podcast *The Diary of a CEO* - an unfiltered journey into the remarkable stories and untold dimensions of the world's most influential people, experts and thinkers. Steven is an accomplished investor in the health and wellness space with notable investments including Huel and Zoe, and his other investments focus on blockchain technologies, biotech, space, Web 3, and social media. Known for his innovative and disruptive approach to social media marketing, Steven co-founded Flight Story – a marketing and communications company that works with leading brands. Steven has also co-founded thirdweb - a software platform, backed by Shopify and Coinbase, that makes it easy to build web3 applications.

A Book Review by Soundview

The Secret Sauce to Success

In *The Diary of a CEO: The 33 Laws of Business and Life*, Steven Bartlett sets out to do exactly what his title suggests: promote and expand upon 33 laws he has discerned and observed that can make anyone more successful in all areas of their life, be it personal or professional. As Bartlett explains, he has “been the CEO, founder, co-founder or board member of four industry-leading companies that collectively – at their peaks – reached a cumulative valuation of more than \$1 billion.” He uses this experience to help improve the lives of his readers. He separates these laws into four key pillars: The Self, The Story, The Philosophy, and The Team, and uses numerous anecdotes as well as data to defend these laws and to prove their efficacy. While all thirty-three laws are of value and build, in part, upon each other, below are ten laws that encapsulate some of the best he has to offer his readers.

The first pillar Bartlett delves into is The Self, and under the self, he advances nine key laws. The first of which can be said to undergird all the rest of the laws to come, and that is to “fill your buckets in the right order.” These buckets refer to a person’s knowledge, skills, network, resources, and reputation. While theoretically the last three of these buckets can be taken from a person, the first two cannot, once a person has accumulated knowledge and skills, they are theirs forever. When these first two buckets are filled, they can lead to success in the other three as a person who has both knowledge and skills will be able to build their network and increase their resources, all leading to a stronger reputation. To Bartlett, it is important for a person not to skip any of these earlier buckets in order to jump ahead to a later one. As an example, he describes a former employee of his who was given a position in the C-Suite at a company in New York. This job entailed a tremendous jump in both income and responsibility. The employee was offered this job despite having less experience than a person typically would in order to fulfill such a role. Unfortunately for the employee and the company, the company did not survive, illustrating Bartlett’s point that solid knowledge and skills are crucial for success down the line. As such, people are better served by solidifying their skills and knowledge before moving on to larger responsibilities they may not be ready for yet.

In Bartlett's third law he states that "you must never disagree." To illustrate this, he tells the story of his parents' relationship during his childhood. His mother was known to scream at his father for hours at a time, repeating the same ideas over and over again while his father stared at the television, completely ignoring her. This was a tendency that Bartlett brought into his own relationship as an adult. He believes that the health of a relationship is greatly affected by the ways in which a couple handles conflict. He explains a study that proves that people's brains start to freeze when disagreements come into play. Therefore, in order to more easily resolve conflict, people are best served by first finding sources of agreement before trying to change the opinion of another. This will help keep the other person's brain open to new ideas and is crucial in all forms of communication. As Bartlett says, "our words should be bridges to comprehension, not barriers to connection."

In his fifth law, Bartlett discusses the concept of leaning out, and he relates this concept to the CEO of a former large chain of brick and mortar music stores. This CEO did not understand digital music and believed that it would never take off. The world of music today proves his error. Other people, he explains, had similar reactions to the internet, the automobile, and iPhones. Bartlett says that this leaning out is about refusing to listen to new ideas because a person is so sure that their own ideas are right. While this is an arrogant move, Bartlett also explains that it is often a very human move. Part of this is because of the concept of cognitive dissonance which explains how people feel uncomfortable with information that contradicts what they already believe, leading them to possibly ignore such information. Bartlett explains the world will start to experience unprecedented change in the coming years and decades, and this will necessarily increase people's levels of cognitive dissonance. Because of the rate of change in the world and because of people's tendency to lean out, Bartlett urges his readers to lean in and learn more whenever they feel stupid or do not understand something. He says, "leaning out will leave you behind."

Bartlett's second pillar deals with the stories people tell. His tenth law states that "useless absurdity will define you more than useful practicalities." To exemplify this law, he turns to the car company, Tesla. He explains that Tesla is a bestselling luxury car company despite having no advertising budget. The company manages to achieve this by including absurd features in their cars. This absurdity leads people to talk. Examples of some of these absurd features are Caraoke [car-ee-oh-kee instead of karaoke] which converts a "car into a karaoke machine" and a defense mode that defends passengers from bioweapons. Some features are referred to as Easter eggs that owners have to find for themselves. People only talk, write, and share about what is new and unique, so these absurd features provide communicators with plenty to share about. Unfortunately, many companies shy away from absurd features because they want everything to be measurable, and absurdity is hard to measure. He concludes this chapter by saying, "you'll be known for the most absurd things you do."

Going along with his tenth law, Bartlett's eleventh law urges his readers to "avoid wallpaper at all costs." He explains the

concept of habituation which is a neurological device that encourages people to focus only on the things that matter. People can become sensitized to almost anything. Elie Wiesel, author and Holocaust survivor, once explained that when people spent enough time in the camps, they became desensitized to the danger and the horrific sensory experiences they were constantly exposed to. Habituation can occur in far less dire circumstances as well. As Bartlett explains, people are able to ignore a low hum in a room after just a few minutes. This process of habituation is helpful to humans because it aids in survival, allowing people to only focus on the most important details.

Bartlett moves on to discuss semantic satiation which is a type of habituation in which a person will fail to understand a word's meaning temporarily if it is repeated often enough. The brain has heard it so frequently that it knows it can tune it out. While any word can be subject to semantic satiation, certain words take longer to succumb to it. He explains that the word, warning, takes longer for people to become satiated to it because of its strong associations with danger. Marketers and business owners need to be aware of this phenomenon. They need to ensure that their message is heard enough to have an impact but not so much that it becomes wallpaper. To do this, they need to determine "the optimal level of exposure" and work within that level. He explains that when he tried to increase subscriptions to his podcast, he used the often repeated phrase "like and subscribe" with nearly zero results. He realized that this phrase had become so ubiquitous that it was wallpaper, so he changed the wording, and subscriptions soared.

Bartlett has nine laws in his third pillar, The Philosophy. He starts off this section with his nineteenth law, "you must sweat the small stuff." To exemplify this law, he refers to his own podcast, The Diary of a CEO. He explains the tremendous growth and success his podcast has attained, and he credits much of it to his team's incredible attention to detail. One example of this is the research his team does before a guest comes on the show. In order to make the guest more comfortable, they find out what their favorite music is and they then play this in the background, hoping to create a better mood for the guest. Furthermore, they use AI to "test the title, thumbnail and promotion of each podcast episode," and they use AI to translate their podcasts directly into other languages. He believes that his podcast's success can be attributed to the degree to which the team focuses on the small details.

Within Law 19, Bartlett goes on to discuss kaizen [ky-zen]. This is a Japanese word that refers to continuous improvement, and it is espoused by the automobile company, Toyota. Kaizen, he explains, is about taking many small steps rather than large leaps. All members of the company are expected to be making suggestions for change. Some of these changes are small, but they can add up to large benefits especially over time. Kaizen differentiates itself from the underused suggestion boxes ineffectively used at many offices because under kaizen supervisors are tasked with reviewing suggestions and helping employees work on the practical matters associated with their suggestions. Employees are expected to come up with an idea a month, and these cannot be mere complaints



... a company should foster a sense of belonging, a shared mission, an inspirational leader, and a mentality of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’”

but must be solution-focused. Furthermore, the person who comes up with the idea is the one responsible for implementing it. Bartlett concludes this chapter by writing, “While our competitors think consistency or big wins are the paths to the podium, I know – without a shadow of a doubt – the correct route is to be found by making consistently small improvements, sweating the smallest stuff, and fighting for tiny gains.”

In his final pillar, *The Team*, Bartlett lays out his last six laws. In his twenty-ninth law, Bartlett urges his reader to “create a cult mentality.” While Bartlett maintains the ruthless nature of actual cults and believes that, unlike true cults, businesses need people who can think for themselves, he believes that a cult-like commitment to the cause is crucial. He quotes Peter Thiel, co-founder of PayPal, who said, “The start-up uniform [San Francisco workers who wear their work logos on their shirts] encapsulates a simple but essential principal: everyone at your company should be different in the same way - a tribe of like-minded people fiercely devoted to the company’s mission.” Bartlett explains that such powerhouses as Facebook and Apple started with a group of incredibly focused individuals working for the company’s mission.

Bartlett believes that one of the most important decisions people in a start-up need to make are who their first ten hires will be. This is because they each represent 10% of the company’s culture, and as such, they can “irreversibly define your company.” While the original cult mentality will inevitably shift, in order to create this mentality at the outset, a company should foster a sense of belonging, a shared mission, an inspirational leader, and a mentality of “us” versus “them.”

In Bartlett’s thirty-second law, he states, “you must be an inconsistent leader.” To exemplify this idea, he discusses Manchester United. He explains that despite having an amazing first half, the team’s manager, Ferguson, came in and criticized one of their best players in front of the rest of the team, leaving the player confused. The next day, the manager explained to this player that he knew that by criticizing him, the other players would receive that criticism and step up their own game. He knew that this particular player could handle the criticism, so he focused it on him.

Other players are quoted as saying Ferguson was hard on people but knew how to get them to play their best. He is said to understand what his players need and to be able to give them that. Numerous players felt they were treated differently than others, and this is a good thing. This plays into Bartlett’s idea that leaders need to be inconsistent in the sense that they are adaptable and can be what their people need them to be. People, he maintains, are emotional beings and he says, “for us

as leaders, to become the complementary puzzle piece for each member of our team, we must be as inconsistent, emotionally variable and fluctuating as the people in our teams are.

Bartlett’s thirty-third law is not contained within his book. Rather this law brings the reader to a website where the reader has to input their email address in order to get a video explaining the thirty-third law. This law builds on previous ones regarding the importance of knowledge and continuous improvement. Through the email address provided, Bartlett tells his reader that every month, he will send the reader a new law to help them in their continuous process of learning and growth.

Steven Bartlett believes in direct communication as he believes that people ought to express themselves in as few words as necessary but with enough detail to get their point across. In his book, *The Diary of a CEO: The 33 Laws of Business and Life*, he opts for this clarity by breaking down his laws into four cohesive pillars and then providing within each pillar each law as well as a thorough explanation, usually through exemplification, of how he has seen it play out in the real world. Bartlett relies on psychology and experimental science when necessary, providing both facts and anecdotes to support his points. True to his intention, the laws in his book can be applied to any leader of any group, either personal, professional, or within the community, and the laws can help a person advance in all three of these areas.

Book Snaps™ is a publication of Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. Copyright © 2024 Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. For permissions and reprints, please contact service@summary.com. FBR0124A