

Popcorn for the New CEO – Book Review

If you're anything like me you have a busy lifestyle. Let's face it being an entrepreneur is as much about perfecting your time management skills as it is about building a team, product and identifying market fit. That's why when I heard about Popcorn for the New CEO, a startup mentorship business advice book that combined truly practical advice in a snackable and digestible content format. I had to have it.

I can hear your inner voice saying, book.. what?! I barely have time to redesign my logo, pitch to investors let alone spend time with my family. I hear you. But this book will allow you to formulate actual real-life strategies and solutions that will help re-identify what is important and how to balance that entrepreneurial life/work balance. Curious to know how? Read on!

This book asks the tough questions whether you're looking to close an investment, get talent to sign their contract, or a customer to engage with you. Whether you're a first-time founder looking to raise your B round or a seasoned CEO. This is the book that will help you navigate and chart unforeseen waters with a sturdy wheel and captain (being Author Caroline Franczia) helping steer you in the right direction.

Finally, a business book that is light on reading yet heavy on practical advice. I thought I knew what it took to run a startup and be a successful CEO until I read Caroline Franczia's book "Popcorn for the New CEO"

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Caroline Franczia is the founder of Uppercut-First a consultancy for startup founders. Franczia is a seasoned sales expert. After starting her career with large IT companies Oracle, BMC Software she spent 4 years in Silicon Valley soaking up the American startup ecosystem. This time spent working abroad equipped Caroline with a broad international perspective on the cultural nuances and methodologies that apply to both US and European-based startups. They call Caroline the tech CEO whisperer and after reading her book I now understand why!

This must-have startup guide book provides a step-by-step map of how to succeed in the international startup world. Franczia weaves in relevant quotes from leading industry heavy-weights and utilises quotes from iconic hit films such as Wolf of Wall Street, Home Alone, and Pirates of the Caribbean just to name a few.

This entertaining approach to business writing is both super effective and reminds us to think big, never underestimate the importance of confidence, and most importantly that there is often no success without failure first, Franczia uses the famous Jordan Belfort quote to kindly remind us

"Failure is your friend"

Franczia has a writing style that is catchy, fast-paced and cuts straight to the point. Drawing upon iconic business leaders, relatable quotes from cult classic films, it is clear from page 1 that Franczia's intention is to help shift our mindset to enable us all to unlock startup success.

Popcorn for the New CEO is something of a cult classic book in itself, appealing

to both the product developer to the burgeoning CEO in all of us. Although unlike many new age self-help business books on how to become a better leader or fulfil your inner goals this book provides genuine practical advice from how to prepare for your next meeting to adopt a winning attitude.

Each chapter tackles a different aspect of the startup journey and concludes with a plot summary/overview of key learnings from the chapter and a Ready, Set, Action list of must-dos that you can implement from day 1, 53, or 354 of your startup journey. Wherever you are on your startup journey it's never too late to implement change and rise to the top!

One of my favourite chapters is chapter 3 "Stop Pitching, Even if You're a CEO". Maybe it's my inner former 10-year-old self that loved Star Wars but this chapter offers insight into the CEO mindset and the temptation to think just because you have a CEO status that you therefore must exhibit mystical powers to fast-track a company to Jedi status. Franczia even draws upon the wise words of Yoda to remind us that we are always learning and must be open to keep on learning.

"The Jedi who believes that he is more important than others only demonstrates that his opinion is to be ignored"

The book offers the reader rewards at the end of each chapter with chapter summaries, key away learnings, and questions to ask both yourself and your startup team, advisors and investors. The "Ready, Set, Action" must-do's at the end of each chapter are perfect for helping formulate your business strategy. Not only does it list actionable tips but it also provides business scenarios that help you brainstorm which roadmap will bring you closer to success.

There are many aspects to this book that resonate with me, one, in particular, is this confronting dialogue about not settling for second best. A common theme throughout the book is to encourage you to challenge your preconceived ideas of startup success. Franczia's writing encourages you to re-access the people you go into business with, be it, cofounders or investors. Do due diligence when selecting the right team and also how to reverse engineer what would appear as roadblocks with practical tips on how to tackle issues such as workplace bullies and building a cohesive sales team.

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Caroline Franczia

Franczia's ability to draw the reader in each and every chapter is clever, often opening up each chapter with a relatable movie scene and how we can learn from films such as "*Back to the Future II*" to "*Pretty Woman*". Yes, this book just might make you appreciate these cult classics and even dust off the DVD collection or dig into your Netflix archives for some business research thanks to Hollywood filmmaking!

The author continuously reminds us that mindset is key and that "If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything" Understanding your sales cycle and how and when to scale your team, deliver your message and launch your product is often some of the most challenging aspects for any startup CEO. Thankfully this book lays out the roadmap for you to experiment, challenge, and learn whilst all becoming a better CEO.

This book is most definitely for the modern CEO as it also encourages and recognises the importance of researching and aligning social media accounts as well as annual reports with overall company objectives. Building trust is also a common thread in the book, especially when navigating partnerships. Likewise understanding your sales cycle and customer journey are also elements throughout the book. An emphasis on understanding and getting to know your customer with genuine practical tips equip the reader with actionable tips to turn their sales team into a robust sales force.

Thankfully it's not only a guide for how to lead a healthy business plan but also a healthy lifestyle. Franczia recommends how to eat well and maintain an optimal lifestyle/work balance to keep you firing on all cylinders and not burn out. No rock is unturned in this book and really makes for a wholistic approach to business skills. Reminding us to eat, sleep and exercise and being conscious of not neglecting your personal life or as just as the "Home Alone" protagonist Kevin McCallister blatantly points out in the movie the consequences of being blind sighted.

"I made my family disappear"

The author also grapples with the complexities of whether to go freemium or

premium business model. Franczia draws upon one of my favourite movies “Pretty Woman” and illustrates this scenario when Vivian encountered Edward

Edward “You can’t charge me for directions!”

Vivian “I can do anything I want to baby, I ain’t lost”

This is a perfect example of remembering what you bring to the table. If you’re solving someone else’s problem and they need something you have then consider your premium business model. Don’t sell yourself short with Freemium options. The book weighs the pros and cons of each model and will leave you appreciating the importance of conducting a pricing strategy before launching into a pricing model that might devalue your overall hard work. Lasting advice Franczia gives is:

“Never underestimate the value of what you are building. No empire was created by giving out software for free”

Chapter 11 is a knockout, literally. In this chapter, Franczia deals some powerful points leaning upon the movie, Million Dollar Baby. This chapter is especially powerful if you have a B2B SaaS model as there are plenty of wonderful practical tips on how to influence both prospects and stakeholders.

The book explores pricing strategy in Chapter 12 drawing upon one of my favourite movies, Oceans Eleven. Importantly Franczia reminds us that startups are often valued on the amount of money they raise rather than the actual amount of revenue generated and with this in mind gives advice on how to focus on the end goal or what can seem at times like mission impossible – being cash flow positive.

Ultimately this book reminds us that business is often a big gamble and the hand you're dealt often dictates how successful you will be, illustrating the volatile yet co-dependent relationship between a founder and an investor. Franczia quotes Oceans Eleven to best illustrate this paradox.

Danny 'Cause the house always wins, Play long enough, you never change the stakes. The House takes you. Unless, when that perfect hand comes along, you bet big, then you take the house"

Each chapter unlocks so many valuable and most important fundamental tips for any budding founder or CEO that you just can't help keep turning the pages.

From pricing strategies to negotiation skills to scaling right, this book covers it all. In fact, the book even makes you re-evaluate your entire business model and dive deeper into your value proposition be it with the benefits of utilising data, partnering/networking, or building a business that works towards one unified end goal.

Another element for success Franczia employs in the book is the MEDDIC methodology in which she believes can serve as a common language to enable different departments to ultimately act as one catalyst to "accelerate communication between department and maximise your customer experience and revenue".

If you need direction on how to navigate, stakeholder issues, product issues, executive alignment issues then Chapter 18 is for you. The all-time cult movie "Pulp Fiction" paints the perfect backdrop for Franczia's examples on customer churn and business model issues. Quoting Jules

Winnfield "If my answers frighten you, then you should cease asking scary questions"

This quote also sums up this book. If you aren't ready to understand how to run a successful startup then don't read this book. It delivers hard facts and doesn't beat around the bush. Be prepared to reassess everything you thought you knew about startup success and make changes. Changes that will not only move the needle forward but if implemented correctly will have you producing an entire new product line in no time!

If you're on the path to scaling then this book will also help you understand when is the right time to scale and the art of company transformation by targeting complex deals and aligning both marketing and R&D to make transformation possible!

How do you onboard and scale your sales team? How do you implement a win/win sales culture? And how do you ensure you hire the right salespeople? How do you reward high achievers? Well, I can't possibly tell you the answers to these vital questions but, "Popcorn for the New CEO" sure can!

Although the book highlights the importance of a positive mindset it also acts as a cautionary tale and reminds us that when raising capital or looking for new sales strategies that simply hoping the deal will go through is simply not enough. The book draws parallels to one of my all-time fave films "Love Actually" (Yes, I'm a hopeless romantic) when Mia says

"I'll be hanging around the mistletoe, hoping to be kissed"

This book will no doubt kick you into action and simply waiting for an opportunity to knock on your door will no longer be a thing instead go out and beat down that door! And if you finish the book like I did in one day and want MORE! Well, you will just have to wait until Franczia publishes the sequel which a little birdie tells me might just be around the corner in 2022.

If you can't wait until then. Franczia also provides a laundry list of must-read amazing books that can help quench your thirst for more startup navigation tools. I won't list them all here but to say this is a list that will keep even the most active minds up all night is an understatement! And if you want to get some of Franczia's time then do visit her consultancy Upper Cut First and schedule some office hours with her to perfect your sales pitch, strategy and to ensure you have the perfect upper hook business style to soar like a true startup CEO champion.

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