

About Typo

Monday, 25 September 2006

Last Updated Monday, 18 June 2007

We've all been in debt from time to time. Maybe you borrowed five dollars from a friend, or maybe you ran up something on your credit card you shouldn't have, like a bread machine. Who needs a bread machine? If Armageddon comes, you won't need a loaf of homemade rye.

Or maybe you borrowed a couple million dollars to buy a typesetting company in the Midwest with your best friend and mentor and then watched it all go horribly wrong.

Oh right, that was me…

Typo: The Last American Typesetter or How I Made and Lost \$4 Million (An Entrepreneur's Education) is my memoir about running a typesetting company in Iowa. Here's a summary of the book:

Two months before David Silverman's 32nd birthday, he went to the Charles Schwab branch in the basement of the World Trade Center to wire his father's life savings for the purchase of the Clarinda typesetting company in Clarinda, Iowa.

He and his business partner and mentor, Dan Coyne, a late-middle-aged professional manager, planned to turn around the 50-year-old typesetting company, then raise venture capital for a "roll-up" of the then mom-and-pop industry scattered over the farmlands of the Midwest that were crucial to the big textbook publishers like Pearson, Harcourt and McGraw Hill in New York City. They would then take the company public and make millions.

It wouldn't be easy. Clarinda had been losing money for years and was essentially in receivership. India-based competition was driving prices lower every day. Publishers were merging and needed to cut costs to cover their self-inflicted debts. And morale among the aging workforce in Iowa was at an all time low.

This was no dot com play. David believed in the moral ideals he had learned from his father, which in turn came from the "old" IBM—the one before layoffs when it had become, as his father said, "just like every other company." He wanted to succeed while respecting the employees.

When David had met Dan, he had found a mentor who sounded like his father used to, but knew how to run a business.

He had taken three companies public before and espoused what he called "benevolent capitalism." While every other typesetter in America was either secretly sending their work to India, while firing their US employees, or simply being bought out by Asian-based companies, Clarinda would, under Dan and David continue to hire Americans and even open new plants—including their own Manila plant that paid triple the going wage for "cheap labor."

In a year they had doubled the revenue and staff of the company and were well on their way to purchasing two competitors. So could they buck the "offshore" trend, deal honestly and open with employees and customers, and turn their and their employees dreams into millions?

Absolutely not.

Typo tells the true story of Clarinda company's last rise and fall. And with it one entrepreneur's story of what it means to take on, run, and ultimately lose an entire life's work.

Typo is an American Dream run aground told with humor and moments of tragedy. The story reveals the impact of losing an entire industry and answers questions about what that means for American business.

In Clarinda's fate is the peril faced by "every company," and the lessons learned are applicable to anyone who wants to have their own business, to succeed in a large corporation and not to find themselves stranded by the reality is that is made by shifting markets, outsourcing, and ultimately, capitalism itself.

What others are saying about Typo:

"This is what we would try to teach our MBA students here at Cornell's Johnson School-but we lack Mr. Silverman's sense of humor and timing. When approached by prospective converts to Judaism, Rabbis traditionally refuse them three times. This way, the Rabbis know that anyone who still wants to convert must be highly motivated. The next time I am approached by someone who wants to run their own business, I will simply have them read TYPO."

-Professor Robert Bloomfield, Cornell University Johnson School of Management's Director of Graduate Studies and the Director of the Business Simulation Laboratory.

"TYPO reminded me of many of the highs and lows I've experienced in being a serial entrepreneur. All the optimism and dreams a person brings to a new business venture is captured in this extremely entertaining and at times outright funny book. But so is the heartache and hard lessons learned by many business owners. A worthwhile read for everyone in business but especially for those of us eager to learn through others' mistakes!"

-Steve Kaplan, New York Times bestselling author of *Bag the Elephant: How to Win and Keep Big Customers and Be the Elephant: Build a Bigger and Better Business*

"TYPO tells a great, albeit tragic, business tale. By sharing the painfully personal story of his typesetting company's demise, David Silverman sheds light into all that is challenging and often insurmountable in business. His beautifully written memoir avoids no details about the realities of managing people, the natural conflict between capitalism and humanism, and, in his case, the business consequences of a young owner's naiveté. His poignant memoir brings the "global" issue of globalization to an all-too-human level. By reporting on the demise of the domestic American typesetting industry through the lens of his personal struggles both within and outside the business, Silverman sheds light into both the intractable macroeconomic pressures and the stubborn human dynamics that can, and often do, destroy an enterprise.

Typo is an essential entrepreneurial tale of struggle, learning, and reconciliation set against a disturbing backdrop of shifting economic conditions."

-Tom Ehrenfeld, a business journalist and former editor at Harvard Business Review and Inc. Magazine

"If somebody would have told me that I would read a book about a guy in the typesetting business in the middle of nowhere in Iowa who is living mostly in a Super 8 Motel in one sitting, riveted by the narrative, I would have laughed out loud. But that's what happened to me. TYPO, THE LAST AMERICAN TYPESETTER or HOW I MADE AND LOST \$4 MILLION by David Silverman is fascinating, thoroughly engrossing from beginning to end. I loved the book--no kidding!"

-Lee Gutkind, the "godfather of creative nonfiction", founder of the Creative Nonfiction Foundation, editor of the Creative Nonfiction Journal.

"Here is an author that talks about what sorely needs to be talked about...nearly all successful entrepreneurs have failed along the way!"

-Barnett Helzberg, author of *What I Learned Before I Sold to Warren Buffett: An Entrepreneur's Guide to Developing a Highly Successful Company*

"TYPO is a fascinating tale of how a 30-something learns how business-and life-really works by buying an ailing typesetting business with an equally ailing father figure. The starry-eyed good intentions of the owners of Clarinda make for timely cautionary reading during the latest era of corporate buyouts."

-Amy Feldman, an award-winning writer and journalist

" TYPO is at once a chronicle of the end of an era, a detailed case study of one company's struggle to survive, and one

man's catharsis from the experience.

This soul-baring inside account of the demise of one typesetting company, Clarinda, is a valuable history lesson of the publishing industry as a whole. Silverman has encapsulated the challenge and resistance of the publishing industry to embrace the electronic age in the face of tighter deadlines, low margins, competition, cultural stagnation, along with missed opportunities for management.

In his very readable style, David Silverman's account of buying to trying to change Clarinda; is packed with lessons learned and unlearned that can only be gained through the school of experience. For anyone buying a business in any industry, read this book first."

-Kerri Salls, President of Breakthrough Enterprise

Typo is published by Soft Skull Press.