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# Onward: How Starbucks Fought For Its Life Without Losing Its Soul



## Synopsis

In 2008, Howard Schultz, the president and chairman of Starbucks, made the unprecedented decision to return as CEO, eight years after he stepped down from daily oversight of the company to become chairman. Concerned that Starbucks had lost its way, Schultz was determined to help it return to its core values and restore not only its financial health, but also its soul. In *Onward*, he shares the remarkable story of the company's ongoing transformation under his leadership, revealing how, during one of the most tumultuous economic times in history, Starbucks again achieved profitability and sustainability without sacrificing humanity. A compelling, candid narrative documenting the maturing of a brand as well as a businessman, *Onward* represents Schultz's central leadership philosophy: It's not just about winning, but the right way to win.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I read this book specifically to better understand a CEO's perspective in starting a company and then coming back to save it. Howard Schultz's very personalized account demonstrates the commitment needed to keep a vision and mission statement going as later leaders start to vary from the initial vision and as the economy inevitably affects the business. Schultz casts some blame on leaders who succeeded him, but most of Starbucks' issues seemed to be caused by the recession more so than internal decisions. If one recalls how many personal finance experts were recommending to skip the \$4 latte as a way of saving money, this loss of business they suffered through 2008-9 shouldn't have been too much of a surprise. With that said, the book was still

interesting in seeing the difficulty of micro-focusing on each individual customer experience while simultaneously macro-focusing on growth. There are definitely advantages to being on every street corner, but the more spread out the company becomes the harder it is to make that experience unique but consistent for those who want the same product and experience in any location, fast but leisurely for those who aren't in a hurry, and successful for the company that can't help but focus on growth when opening multiple stores every day. Schultz effectively describes all the variables he considered through this time period to "thread the needle" to get the best of this small and big focus. While it's hard to recognize that the successful companies we depend upon are typically short-lived, this book does a good job of showing why. A founder's focus and commitment to the original vision for a company is difficult to pass on to successors who have to be equally if not more committed to pushing it forward and adapting to changing customer tastes and competitive threats. As Schultz points out here, his successors couldn't accomplish that even though they were good people. Like Michael Dell of Dell Computer, Schultz cared and resolved to come back and make the necessary adjustments to carry Starbucks through. The average CEO probably wouldn't do that. And--as other reviewers have observed--what will happen the next time Schultz retires. It's why so many businesses don't last over extended periods and inevitably submit to competitors who come up with better ideas. Even several years after it was published, this book is a good read to understand these long-term challenges that all businesses face. Today--as Sears, J.C. Penney and (gasp) even Walmart--seem destined to fail, "Onward" helps to explain why killer business models must be constantly tweaked or else they will eventually stagger and then fail.

After reading Howard Schultz' first book "Pour Your Heart Into It" I must admit that I was highly excited to read is "sequel". However, I must admit that I was a bit disappointed. Not to say that this book was not a good book, because it actually was. Nevertheless, I feel that I expected more from this one. Many of the chapters dragged on and I found a lot of the stories and lessons very repetitive. However, I will add that I still admire Howard Schultz and everything that he has brought to the world in the Starbucks company. I also respect his business values and work ethics and feel that he is one to learn from and emulate. He fought the recession head on and was able to bring Starbucks back to its glory. My first suggestion to readers would be to read the first book mentioned above. Then you can read this book as sort of a suffix or even a quick read.

It's a book that discusses the re-energizing of a aging brand and a study of how to focus and lead in times of difficulty for a company. It also is a vehicle for the founder to express his passion for the

firm he created, and how that drove the decisions and growth of the company. It also seems to be a platform to discuss his regrets for some difficult decisions along the way which I wish he would have gone through in some more detail. However, a great read for someone trying to understand what makes a company beyond the numbers.

First, this was a well-written book. I have to say that it was an enjoyable read, but it didn't fully meet my needs. I'm not a huge Starbucks fan (I'm just not a big coffee drinker). I'm a grad student flirting with entrepreneurship, so I was looking at this book with a surgical eye. What appealed to me: The passage about his biologist/chemist colleague who tinkered with different instant coffee formulas (I can't help it. I'm biased!), learning of Starbucks' philanthropy (had no idea) and how Schultz turned the company around (this piqued my interest). But, I did a lot of skimming... A LOT. Maybe it wasn't fluff for the ardent Starbucks fan, but it was for me. The take away message: remain passionate, don't grow too quickly, think outside the box and give back. I didn't need 350 pages to get that message. The best chapters, IMO, were 27-Innovate, 28- Conviction, 29- Connecting Dots and 30-Balance. On the whole, I came away liking Schultz and the Starbucks brand. His passion is palpable and it saved his company. Whenever I'm in the mood for coffee, I know where I'll get it. I just won't buy a second Starbucks book.

It's self promoting and company marketing piece. The self deprecation and acknowledgement of company shortcomings are spun positive. For example, the reference to Sorbetto failure. There is no acknowledgement of the competition such as Jamba Juice which has 20+ years in that market and no doubt a more efficient supply chain. To say it failed for "too many" product launches and the like are not addressing all the reasons it failed. The company should have acquired a company with experience and efficiencies and folded it into the company as they have done with the bakery recently. You develop new product that can fulfill profit requirements but, as you emphasize throughout, this product did not support you "culture and the integrity" of the brand. It was feeble attempt to haphazardly integrate a product having no business in the product mix. It was an attempt at a high margin product line extension and it failed, whether from arrogance and/or inefficiencies in an unfamiliar niche. Don't BS yourself, your partners and your customers. Stick to your game plan and be sincere. This book is very transparent and tells half-truths.

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