

9 takeaways for entrepreneurs from bruce springsteen's autobiography

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“ I’m glad I’ve been handsomely paid for my efforts but I truly would’ve done it for free,” rocker Bruce Springsteen writes in his new memoir and bestseller *Luck*. Springsteen, one of rock’s brightest stars for 41 years (and still going strong), is obviously referring here to his love of the music and his E Street Band have provided fans worldwide for decades: *Born to Run*, *The River*, *Greetings from Asbury Park* and *Wrecking Ball* are among the artist's 18 studio albums (and there are more to come).

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En route, Springsteen has garnered 20 Grammys; two Golden Globes; an Oscar (for the song *Streets of Philadelphia*, which accompanied the film); the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction, in 2014, into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; and more. Not to mention the many, many 80, 000-seat stadiums he's filled to capacity. (His Oct. 7 book-tour appearance at New York’s 1, 500-seat Town Hall sold out in six seconds).

But the kind of financial success Springsteen has attained (sold to date and concert tours and licensing agreements that) has carried with it business responsibilities. And that has meant business lessons, both good and bad, along the way, which he details in his book.

In short, Springsteen is not just “ the Boss” -- a moniker conferred in the '70s when he nightly collected and doled out his bandmates' pittance wages following appearances at Jersey Shore clubs. He's also an entrepreneur.

Certainly, the New Jersey native would likely characterize himself only as a singer-songwriter: "Entrepreneur" probably wouldn't even figure in, given that his manager, Jon Landau, and staff oversee his seven E Street bandmates (and 12 fellow musicians), plus stagehands, sound people, instrument technicians, publicists, deals and more.

But go ahead: check out *Born to Run*, the memoir. Not only is it a good read, but entrepreneur-fans will find plenty of indications there that like any startup king, Bruce Springsteen has learned a lot along the way about negotiation, leadership and company promotion.

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1. Be who you are.

As a teenager haunting the tiny, down-and-out rock clubs of the Shore, the-then high-schooler Bruce summoned the nerve one night to wander up to his long-haired "guitar hero" Walter Chichon (of The Motifs) to mumble his admiration. But there was something more: "[Chichon] was living proof that the real thing could exist right there in Central New Jersey," Springsteen writes. "If you were powerful enough, you could be different, your own man. The nine-to-fivers, the straights, the high-on-Mama's-and-Papa's moneyfrat boys would just have to eat it."

2. Embrace your modest beginnings.

In 1975, heading to Britain, "the isle of our heroes" -- The Beatles and Stones, whose members he'd later play beside -- Springsteen reflects on the hard work and dismal settings that preceded that moment: "all those

unfriendly gigs and rough houses, a decade's worth of firemen's fairs, carnivals, drive-ins, supermarket openings and hole-in-the-walls where nobody gave a s--- about you."

He mentions, too, playing at a trailer park, even a mental hospital, all in preparation for that moment of proof, at London's Hammersmith Odeon, the band's first stop in Europe. He and his E Streeters had finally made it.

3. Don't second-guess your role as leader.

Once his early bands, The Castilles and Steel Mill, evolved into The Bruce Springsteen Band, Springsteen made peace with his decision not to share power. " If I was going to carry the workload and responsibility, I might as well assume the power," he writes. " I didn't want to get into any more decision-making squabbles or have any confusion about who set the creative direction of my music." He calls this " one of the smartest decisions of my young life," because boundaries were set down at the start.

Bandmates weren't always happy -- in later years Springsteen would have clashes with his guitarist and lifelong best friend, Steven Van Zandt, who subsequently left the band for some years, and the late saxophonist Clarence Clemons. Springsteen also ruffled feathers when he decided, in 1999, to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as a solo artist. But his E-Street bandmates showed up, nonetheless, to support him and cheer him on. (.)

4. Do what makes you unique.

" My voice was never going to win any prizes," Springsteen writes of his early years. " My guitar accompaniment on acoustic was rudimentary, so that left the songs. The songs would have to be fireworks ... the world was filled with plenty of good guitar players, many of them my match or better, but how many good songwriters were there?"

5. Don't be afraid to fail.

At his audition with legendary record producer John Hammond, who'd " discovered" Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin and Billie Holliday, Springsteen lowered his expectations. " I would have been in a state of complete panic, except on the way up in the elevator I'd performed a little mental jujitsu on myself," he writes. " I thought, 'I've got nothing so I've got nothing to lose. I can only gain should this work out. If it don't, I still got what I came in with.'"

Hammond listened to just one song (*Saint in the City*) and announced that he would sign Springsteen to Columbia Records.

6. Protect yourself.

Springsteen writes at length about the contract dispute he had -- with first manager Mike Appel -- which kept him from recording for two long years. He'd signed what a lawyer would later call a deal even worse than the infamous one the Lenape Indians got for selling Manhattan. " I was totally ignorant in the ways of the law, musical or any other kind," Springsteen writes. " I knew no lawyers; I'd been paid in only cash my entire life and had never paid a cent of income tax, signed an apartment lease nor filled out any

form that might bind me in any way. I had no credit card, no checkbook, just what was jingling in my pocket.

" In the end," he writes, " I would've signed Mike's jockey shorts, if he'd presented them to me, to get my foot in the door." But when the first million bucks came in, he watched the entire sum go straight into Appel's bank account. He then reconsidered his lack of business acumen.

Eventually, he split with Appel -- while remaining friends. He then hired Landau and signed agreements with his E Street bandmates. He was smart enough, along the way, to buy all his music back from Appel before it became truly valuable.

Meanwhile, on the down side, all his proceeds from the *Darkness on the Edge of Town* tour went to pay his considerable tax debt to Uncle Sam.

7. Hold on to what makes you, you.

Springsteen is hardly shy about the surfeit of ego that has made him, him. " When you're on tour, you're king," he writes (adding, " and when you're home, you're *not* "). He also writes about those hundreds of hours he spent in the studio mixing band members' contributions, back in the days before sophisticated mixing equipment.

" We needed to ruminate, contemplate, intellectualize and mentally masturbate ourselves into a paralytic frenzy," Springsteen writes. " We had to punish ourselves until we'd done it ... OUR WAY! ... Like Smith Barney, we made our money the old-fashioned way; we *earned* it."

8. Stay on top of your people.

Springsteen and the band were performing at Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium before a crowd of 60, 000 when the singer began his usual countdown to *Born in the USA* and Max Weinberg fired up his drum set. But where was the band? Turned out Roy Bittan and Nils Lofgren were locked in a deadly Ping-Pong battle backstage. Those two realized their error only when they heard Springsteen's reaction reverberating around the stadium stands: " Your ass is in a sling and I'm going to burn that f-----g Ping-Pong table DOWN!"

The musicians high-tailed it to the stage as anxious moments ticked by. " I stood, not too happy, pants metaphorically around my ankles," Springsteen remembers, " experiencing one of the greatest weenie-shrinkers of all time. Ping-Pong tables were banned for years. Heads rolled."

9. Evolve

After 16 years of togetherness, Springsteen parted ways with his E Street bandmates to work with other musicians. To raise the bar on harmony, he even brought a woman into the band: Patti Scialfa, whom he would marry years later. He experimented with a horns section, sang Pete Seeger's folksy/political music and more. He then reunited with E Street, with whom he still plays today.

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" People always asked me how the band played like it did night after night, almost murderously consistent, NEVER stagnant and always full balls to the

wall," Springsteen writes. " There are two answers. One is they loved and respected their jobs, one another, their leader and the audience. The other is ... because I MADE them!"

So, yes, Springsteen is an entrepreneur and one of the great songwriters of our time. But he's never let anyone doubt that he's also " the Boss."