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Jay Nathan
The Peter J. Tobin College of Business St. John's University, New York City, USA

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In the introduction, the author’s forthrightness is supported by his statements: (1) “many of my experienced, trusted mentors have died.” (2) “…those who dealt with my late-night phone calls, who helped me start companies, build products, and run board meetings or just be a better person—they were gone. Some much too early.”

After a quick reading of the introduction, it became clear to me that it is an insightful book to read and, as many times as possible, to reflect on what was presented in parts and in the individual chapters. It is a fascinating book for anyone interested in understanding the journey and frustrations that go along with creating new products and innovative approaches to processes. So, I bought the book to understand the authenticity of the author’s experiences, felt immediately the urge to author its book review and share my thoughts in the hope of reaching wider audiences.

While engaged in drafting this book review, I realized I should pause after each part and the chapters in it to reflect on them for a few days before proceeding further with what the author intends the readers to understand. I did that for each part, and after the six parts, it is a book about Tony Fadell’s personal journey, which describes his experiences. The author promotes this book as a “mentor in a box,” and indeed, it is so without question. It is also a book of collection of nuggets.

Yes, it is true that the book follows the author’s career, cover to cover. And, it is conveniently, from the author’s perspective, divided into six parts: (1) Build Yourself, (2) Build Your Career, (3) Build Your Product, (4) Build Your Business, (5) Build Your Team, and (6) Be CEO.

Part 1 has chapter titles such as adulthood, getting a job, heroes, and do not (only) look down. These are everyone’s challenges as we pass through the life stages. And what struck me is the sketch of the “Pocket Crystal” that was envisioned by Fadell’s colleague Marc Porat in 1989, which later became the design for today’s iPhone.

So, according to the author, the Pocket Crystal was a beautiful touchscreen mobile computer that combined a cell phone and fax machine that let you play games, watch movies, and buy plane tickets from anywhere. This was in 1989, when the...
Web did not exist. This is truly a nugget that I learned, and I am sure the curious readers would learn as well.

Tony Fadell, the author’s first passion, was to work for General Magic, especially with Bill Atkinson and Andy Hertzfeld, who started the company. In the following Part 1 chapters, emphasis is on learning and improving the existing products from the user-friendly perspective. And the author was enthusiastic in characterizing the “job” as about “solving easy to use problems.” He (the author) points out that “if you make it, they will come” does not work, unless the technology is ready to be accepted by the marketplace. The “Heroes” chapter is utterly amazing. It is a nugget with statements such as “the true heroes are humble” and advises anyone to follow their curiosity, not “how much money they can make.”

Part II chapters are about building career: (1) the author’s career began at General Magic, where a typical customer was called “Joe Sixpack.” This imaginary guy, according to the author, was never going to buy the product Magic Link, and this was before the Internet. The idea for the Magic Link comes from businesspeople who are on the move, beginning to use email, notes, and digital calendar. They needed all their contacts on a mobile device instead of a 10-pound laptop; (2) managing teams, improving processes for making products; (3) understanding data and opinions in navigating innovative products; and (3) staying focused and align with mission-driven people, if not, prepared to go someplace else, where you can build your product.

In Part III introduction, the author reveals that the first iPod was not designed at Apple and was not even designed for a handheld device. In the late nineties, people used MP3 audio files and stored them in hard drives. Stereos used CDs and tapes, and the author saw the potential for digital audio jukebox. That is how it began in the quest for an iPod, which can store 1000 songs in a device that can be kept in your pocket. On page 91, Figure 3.0.2, the Styrofoam model, the author proudly showed it to Steve Joh in March 2001 and got a green light to go ahead with the iPod project. The rest is history.

The next chapters are full of wisdom and profound advice to think beyond the prototypes and make the intangible tangible. An insightful theme emerged: make things worth making, that is, fulfilling a new and different customer (user) experience (journey). The Nest, a do-it-yourself thermostat Tony Fadell created,
became a successful product. Added to the Nest thermostat, an incredible Nest screwdriver with four heads was created, which made installing the thermostat so easy. A chapter on Storytelling begins with Steve Jobs telling the entire world about the iPhone in 2007. In 1984, Apple introduced the Macintosh, and in 2001, it introduced the iPod. According to the author, a product’s story is its design, features, images and videos, customer quotes, reviewer tips, and conversation with support agents. So, it is the sum of what people see and feel about this thing that you have created. In the closing chapter of Part III, the author makes the following remarks: it takes at least three generations of any new, disruptive product before you get it right and turn a profit. Three stages a revolutionary product typically goes through: (1) Product market fit, (2) Profitable product, and (3) Profitable business.

Part IV is about “Build Your Business.” In it, the career of the author comes full circle. And now, he is ready to build his own business. The chapter titled “You can only have one customer” caught my attention. It covers insightful details on VCs, CEOs, CIOs, B2B, and B2C. CEOs constantly think about the next “big thing” and request ideas from everyone in the company. The last chapter focuses on crisis management. The insight here is the necessity for building your team, which is discussed in Part V.

Part V consists of chapters on building your team, which are divided into: hiring, breakpoints (adding layers of management), design for everyone, a method to the marketing, product managers, death of a sales culture, and lawyer up. The author nicely presents the organizational development from his own experiences, starting small, then breaking out into specialized teams (or departments). He emphasized coaching and mentoring while he was building his team at Nest. The organizational culture evolved as the size grew from five to one hundred. Marketing is involved alongside product design and creation, and he quotes Steve Jobs, “The best marketing is telling the truth.”

Final Part VI is about being a CEO. The author, in this part, talks about his experience with Nest, the thermostat, how to protect it when nobody is at home, and the sensor in every room in the house to monitor CO. This is the CEO’s responsibility. In 2014, Google bought Nest. It reorganized under the umbrella of “Alphabet.” So, Nest became part of Alphabet’s acquisition. Soon after, it became interested in selling to the likes of Amazon, but later decided to keep Nest in its portfolio. The chapter on corporate has insights on public boards and private
company boards. Another nugget from the author, “Jeff Bezos once told me never to join anyone else’s board. It is a waste of time. I am only going to be on the board of my company and my philanthropy. That is, it!”

This is truly a fascinating book, which reveals the true nature of how new, innovative products are created, and the arduous journeys of enthusiastic people with curiosity who take great personal and financial risks to make it happen so that the rest of the world can enjoy the benefits.

**Jay Nathan**

Jay Nathan, Ph.D., is a tenured full professor of management, The Peter J. Tobin College of Business at St. John’s University, Queens, New York City. Previously he was a tenured professor at the Kania School of Management at the University of Scranton, Pennsylvania. Dr. Jay Nathan is a Fulbright Scholar to Thailand, Poland, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Hungary, and Romania. He served six years (2017-2022) as board director of the U.S. Fulbright Association. In 2023, the American Fulbright Association elected him to the Fulbright Prize selection committee. Professor dr. Jay Nathan is a past president of the Global Awareness Society International. He is enthusiastic about business education and development, especially in poor and developing nations around the world—and he sees the world as one large campus.