



# **The Misfit Economy: Lessons in Creativity from Pirates, Hackers, Gangsters and Other Informal Entrepreneurs**

*Alexa Clay , Kyra Maya Phillips*

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## **The Misfit Economy: Lessons in Creativity from Pirates, Hackers, Gangsters and Other Informal Entrepreneurs** Alexa Clay , Kyra Maya Phillips

A book that argues that lessons in creativity, innovation, salesmanship, and entrepreneurship can come from surprising places: pirates, bootleggers, counterfeiters, hustlers, and others living and working on the margins of business and society.

Who are the greatest innovators in the world? You're probably thinking Steve Jobs, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford. The usual suspects.

This book isn't about them. It's about people you've never heard of. It's about people who are just as innovative, entrepreneurial, and visionary as the Jobses, Edisons, and Fords of the world, except they're not in Silicon Valley. They're in the street markets of Sao Paulo and Guangzhou, the rubbish dumps of Lagos, the flooded coastal towns of Thailand. They are pirates, slum dwellers, computer hackers, dissidents, and inner city gang members.

Across the globe, diverse innovators operating in the black, grey, and informal economies are developing solutions to a myriad of challenges. Far from being "deviant entrepreneurs" that pose threats to our social and economic stability, these innovators display remarkable ingenuity, pioneering original methods and practices that we can learn from and apply to move formal markets.

This book investigates the stories of underground innovation that make up the Misfit Economy. It examines the teeming genius of the underground. It asks: Who are these unknown visionaries? How do they work? How do they organize themselves? How do they catalyze innovation? And ultimately, how can you take these lessons into your own world?

## **The Misfit Economy: Lessons in Creativity from Pirates, Hackers, Gangsters and Other Informal Entrepreneurs Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Misfit Economy: Lessons in Creativity from Pirates, Hackers, Gangsters and Other Informal Entrepreneurs for online ebook**

**Alex Devero says**

The world of the future is one where conventions are constantly questioned; where innovators who possess different hacks are not only accepted but also celebrated. We should understand that business is no longer just about conforming to a job description, but about unlocking the entrepreneurial and positive deviance of employees. Innovation is about addressing the deepest needs and purpose of humanity.

There is so much we can learn from criminals, rebels and misfits. Learn how the ability to hustle, copy, hack, provoke and pivot can help you push through the limits of establishment and bring innovation to any environment.

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**Rochelle March says**

Awesome! Seriously, a must read for everyone. Incredibly fascinating, insightful, and inspiring.

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**Jonathan Lu says**

Great compilation of storytelling, about those who have found success in the unorthodox. Clearly 1-sided and driven by confirmation bias, as many who have done the same have not reached success. Still well worth the quick read for its entertainment value, featuring stories such as:

Walid Abdul-Wahab – story of paving his own unconventional path through leasing of camels, fighting pasteurization laws, and FDA regulations given its purported medicinal purposes to form what could be a billion dollar camel milk industry. A story of overcoming existing far-reaching regulation that need not apply to a new industry, and leveraging wasted byproduct.

Afweyne – the Somali pirate who transformed “a scrappy, self-funded force into a well-invested, transnational multimillion-dollar industry.” [p13] A story of utilizing principles of capital investment markets to create a new industry in a highly unethical area that none ever thought before.

UX, The Urban Experiment – “A clandestine hacker group we met in France, has a mission to undertake positive collective experiments. Some of its members, among other activities, spend a lot of their time using the unauthorized sections of the underground tunnel system in Paris to break into buildings and restore national artifacts that have, in their opinion, been neglected by the traditional institutions of the French State.” [p17] A story of the efficiency of the leaderless collective motivated by a common goal who are able to perform more efficiently than the bureaucracy of a democratic institution.

“Informality is a key driver of misfit innovation. Removing what strikes most of us as arbitrary, informality is ultimately about supporting people to rise above a job title and giving them permission to unleash their real talents. Informality is about enabling spontaneity, freeing people to depend on intrinsic motivation (their values) and instincts rather than deferring to the rules, codes, and incentives (raises and promotions) imposed by external authorities.” [p27] “Misfits often embrace self-governance because they are distrustful of

authority and not easily coerced into someone else's logic or command." [p29]

David Berdish – the leader of Ford's sustainability program who provoked his colleagues with the question of whether the company's future should continue to be in automobile production vs. a different mode of transport – fought an uphill battle which he knew he would never be rewarded for, but critically had support of key upper management sponsors. A story of the criticality of work ethic, optimism, and passion.

Fabian Ruiz – imprisoned at age 16, and became an entrepreneur upon release 20yrs later all driven by his resourcefulness developed in prison. "Fabian's instinctive urge to hustle – to create his own opportunities rather than sitting back passively to watch his fate unfold – led him to attempt an escape." [p37]. A story of the role that necessity plays as the mother of invention – "much of innovation comes from constraint – from challenge and even scarcity." [p42]

"Amid the characteristics that make a successful entrepreneur, one stood out: juvenile delinquency." [p45] – similar to the "serial entrepreneur" mantra about disdain for authority, with arrest records common among those with the track record for innovation.

Shanzhai – copycat imitation of Western brands/technologies primarily in China and India that often violate intellectual property, but seen even in many cases as an "ethical duty, particularly when foreign companies fail to price their products affordably. Shanzhai is a modern-day solution for a historical Robin Hood dilemma: In the face of tyrannical rule, rob the rich to supply the poor." [p54] "In many ways, intellectual-property pirates exist in response to the inequity of the patent system." [p65] "Much copycat behavior boils down to etiquette. If you are learning and borrowing from others, it's important to acknowledge them." [p72]

Wimdu – a German Airbnb copycat, built by reverse-engineering – a story of the power of iteration over pure invention. "Are there benefits to being a builder versus an innovator? [...] 'Imitators are less likely to become complacent, a significant problem for innovators and pioneers who are taken with their success to the point of underestimating the dangers lurking in the rearview mirror.' Imitators on the other hand, who 'come from behind, tend to be paranoid about others following in their footsteps and are better prepared to repel the attack.' Pioneers are often stuck in one way of doing things – the way they invented - while imitators are often more aware of transformational changes in the market precisely because they imitated." [p58]

"Today's counterfeit products are growing seven times faster than legal goods [...] According to the International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition, the international trade in pirated and fake goods amounts to \$600billion, comprising as much as 7 percent of global trade." [p56]

Anonymous – "hackers fervently believe in taking things apart in order to understand them. In this way, they can see not only the parts a system is composed of but also the connection between them. They are devoted to the perpetual improvement of systems; and in order to effectively improve something, they must have unfettered access to all information pertaining to that system." [p77] A story of the drive for curiosity in fueling innovation.

Pirates – who historically followed an organizational structure similar to Anonymous or The Urban Experiment. "They understood that material inequalities would lead to a lack of trust, an unwillingness to collaborate toward one common goal, and in effect the inability to create a strong civic society." [p82] A story of the importance of empowering each individual regardless of rank.

"The value of provoking is in starting a conversation. A protest movement doesn't last forever [...] But groups of people who ask the right questions or prove alternatives often pave the way for true change to emerge [...] the temporary worlds created by the provocateurs spark dialogue in our mainstream culture and create the conditions for innovation to occur." [p107] A story of the importance of a rebellious spirit.

Gib Bulloch – The Accenture consultant, who successfully lobbied his management to support projects for the benefit of improving lives in developing countries vs. solely those with lucrative financial payouts.

"Having a misfit idea is the easy part. The rest is finding air cover. You need protection from leadership. You need champions across the business.' Bulloch explained that it can be very easy to suffocate innovation within large bureaucracies. 'You can't apply the same management principles to a start-up that you use to manage a large corporation.'" [p112] A story of the need for advocacy when maneuvering a large

organization, similar to David Berdish at Ford.

“these stories show how unwavering belief, commitment to core values, and an unwillingness to let the opinions of others dictate their existence can help individuals undertake a personal pivot that moves their life in a new and ultimately more personally fulfilling direction, even if it is not always understood.” [p128] A story of the importance of self-confidence, to persist beyond the naysayers.

Jason Clay – from small town farmer to SVP of the World Wildlife Fund, and his adventures in bringing in corporate CEO’s to the concept of sustainable agriculture which evolved dramatically from his early days.

“Clay is now more committed to meeting people where they are, rather than forcing his view upon them or being frustrated with them for not accepting his perspective. ‘You need to listen twice as much as you talk, because as long as people are preoccupied with their own problems, they are never going to see the bigger issues.’” [p133] A story of the criticality of maintaining perspective – seek to understand.

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### **Patrik Hallberg says**

Like so many of these books, the first chapters are great and you think you are reading something really new and fresh, but as the book goes on it becomes more mainstream and less misfit. We see the misfit adoption in many areas at the moment and there are some great stories in the book. They start with the misfit philosophy and how it's based on altruism, entrepreneurship, informality, and self-governance. The book then talks about five key principles in the world of misfits. Hustle, Copy, Hack, Provoke and Pivot. The book ends with how you should walk the path of a misfit and the importance of your entourage. In many of the stories the people in the examples never asked for permission, never waited to see what would happen if...they just did it and sometimes it was a very tough path to walk, but they just had to do it.

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### **Throp5 says**

This book is full of interesting stories and people who did bold and fascinating things, but the message never coalesced into a convincing whole the way I was hoping.

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### **Courtney says**

I won this book through a Goodreads giveaway. I absolutely loved this book, and found it to be very inspirational. I was so excited while reading this book that I texted friends and talked to family about reading it. In fact this might be my Christmas gift of choice this year.

This is a book about the "misfits" of business, not limited to criminals, but also including people who go against the grain in order to improve the world in some way. Or, people who think outside of the box.

There are five traits that Clay and Phillips say all "misfit" entrepreneurs have that make them successful:

1. Hustle - Making something from nothing and not being afraid to get your hands dirty. Hardworking, resourceful and resilient, while also having a flexible mind. You improve and are responsive to whatever comes your way.
2. Copy - Building upon what has already been built. Improving ideas and concepts that are in practice.

3. Hack - Identifying a system's weakness and see how it can be improved. Supporting a free flow of ideas. This is about taking on the establishment to change it for the better. You need to develop an intimate understanding of the system you want to improve so you can rebuild it.

4. Provoke - Step out of reality and imagine something different. Don't be afraid to open your eyes and start a conversation that could bring about change. Poke and prod business as usual to get others to wake up to other possibilities.

5. Pivot - To personally enact a dramatic change in the course of your life to pursue greater fulfillment and inspiration.

These five traits are just the surface of the book. I would really recommend this book to anyone with morals and a soul, it's not just about business. This is for everyone who feel like they have a calling and who want to think about things differently. Life can be happy as a sheep, but it can be so much better if you allow yourself to be authentic, because we're all misfits in our own way. We're all different and the difference should be embraced and encouraged. There are better ways of doing things than we're doing now.

There are also a lot of innovative organizations mentioned in the book. Quite a few I wrote down and plan on looking into more.

Favorite quote from the book to leave you with:

"You need to give yourself the permission to cast aside the roles and guises. You have to find the courage to dig beneath all those layers that society thrusts upon us and try to re-discover those true callings. You need to become okay with no longer blindly aligning with the pack. And walking that path of the black sheep over the course of a lifetime can be challenging," Harold O'Neal

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### **Rajat Gupta says**

The title of the book is misleading...it gives you an idea that the book is about the way the informal Entrepreneurs operate their organisations and the lesson that can be learnt from that, whereas it is just a collection of different types of Misfits. A lot of people might like the different stories but for me this book is not what it is expected of and so its hard to go beyond reading around 30% of it. Goes into my "left in between" Shelf.

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### **Elena Nikolaeva says**

This book is a collection of stories, some more interesting than others, about "misfits", "underground innovators" from Somalia pirates to Ernest Hemingway. However, the writers were not really convincing while trying to come up with the solid theory of what "misfits" are or justify the existence of a separate term for this type of people. For example, it's not still clear to me what's the difference between misfits and a broader definition of the word "entrepreneur". P.30 "While misfits and entrepreneurs share some traits - they are natural risk takers who pursue freedom and autonomy through their own passion and hustle -they shouldn't be conflated. misfits are countercultural, self-questioning, and vulnerable. They push boundaries. They challenge systems."

Personally, I also struggled a lot with the style of the book. The thought of the authors repeatedly jumped

from one subject to another. It was often difficult to trace connections between paragraphs and chapters. The words "innovate", "disrupt", "hack" were scattered across the book and quite often did not fit the context. Some sentences looked like they were added just to give the book more volume, without adding anything to the narration.

Overall, I found some of the stories quite inspiring, but you'll have to dig through a lot of empty words while trying to find the ones that will inspire you.

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### **Shawn Fairweather says**

First the Caveat \*This was a Goodreads Giveaway Free Read\*.

I'll start off by saying don't be misled by the title. Are their lessons to be learned from the "Misfit Economy"? Yes. Are they presented here? No. What we have here is cliché filled case studies of specific individuals that in most cases were not that successful. I also do not appreciate celebrating individuals for outright theft, counterfeiting, criminal activity which many here have. Each case study in itself has some form of merit and are a bit interesting to read at times but it seems that just about every study ended up in disaster or at best as a mediocre effort at best. Each study is also done at a very high level with very little detail so if you are looking for specifics or an in-depth examination look elsewhere for your inspiration.

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### **Inderpal Lehal says**

Small real life references makes this book very interesting. Can implement few logics in your own practical life.

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### **Lewis Williams says**

Really a 3.5-3.75 ranking, not a 4 but strong nonetheless. Interesting premise, but too superficial for me; lots of examples of people transforming their situations, but none of them seemed in depth enough to me. I enjoyed this book, and it is a fairly quick read. I would definitely try something else from these authors if they published more work.

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### **Wolf says**

Let me start by saying the book might not deserve a 1-star rating - it's just my personal opinion.

I was expecting a thoughtful investigation, chronology, and analysis of historical and contemporary examples of the groups mentioned in the title. I expected there to be some overall conclusion about these groups, their similarities, their motivations, their impact, and then a small takeaway chapter or section on how society could utilize the more beneficial of those concepts.

Instead of history or anthropology or anything like that, the genre this book belongs to is probably self help. How disappointing. It mentioned many examples of individuals and groups that were indeed hackers, pirates,



gangsters, and informal entrepreneurs as the title advertises, but only provided surface level summaries that irritated me more than educated. Useless, positive 'you-can-do-it-too' conclusions about how everyone should strive to be a misfit and express creativity seemed out of place until I realized I was reading a self help book. There's nothing wrong with self help books - I just didn't want this to be one.

If the lack of thoughtful analysis and chronology I was expecting wasn't bad enough, then the randomly-inserted, terrible phrasing every few pages would've ruined the book for me anyway. (view spoiler)

I'll just put the concluding line here for reference: "While some misfit markets or approaches are still nascent and struggling to gain popular appeal, little by little, as we all start 'coming out' as misfits, a world is emerging that accepts and nurtures the unconventional."

You have got to be kidding me. (view spoiler)

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## **Graham says**

I really wanted to like this more, but for the most part it was a collection of warmed-over Gladwellian "entrepreneurship" and "innovation" clichés about slightly unorthodox ways to, in the end, make a boatload of money. So much of this is the modern state of neoliberalism in a nutshell, from the guy whose nonprofit employer fired him for trying to make money off of indigenous rainforest-dwelling tribes' products to the woman whose career was left in tatters after she was helping recently-released convicts acclimatize to society and ended up in relationships with several of them.

That being said, the chapter on intellectual property - "Copy" - was better than most, if not only because it offered some actual transgressions in the form of subverting IP law (which truly is a deterrent to much *actual* innovation).

At least this was fairly short.

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## **Jody Ellis says**

I want more! I'm hoping there is or will be a second Alexa and Kyra! This book is inspiring, truthful, it is a call to action and shows our changing lifestyles and economy. As we move away from corporation and constraint to freedom of creativity and misfits. It offers comfort and encouragement to the population of misfits. It offers an educational experience exposing misfits I've never heard of.

This book was truly amazing and it's perfect for any adult, or even a young adult who feels they don't fit in.

Thank you Alexa and Kyra for a book that was well written, extensively checked over and error free, inspiring, factual and speaking of a world of the future.

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**Tim Shannon says**

Bit of a management consultant view of the subject, interesting and fun anecdotes but very little substance. Nice beach read and the stories about pirates are neat.

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