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Book Review of *Backable: The Surprising Truth Behind What Makes People Take A Chance On You* by Suneel Gupta with Carlye Adler. London: Endeavour, 2021.

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In his famous book *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*, the well-known author and investment guru Robert Kiyosaki recounts a tale where he advises a struggling writer to raise the chances of literary success by adopting a more sales and marketing-related focus to their endeavours. At the same time, Kiyosaki notes wryly of himself that he is someone who happens to be a best-selling writer, rather

than necessarily a traditional author with the best literary style (Kiyosaki, & Lechter, 2017 [1997]).

This anecdote neatly illustrates the challenges that those active in the arts, literature, and other creative industries can face in ensuring their dreams, aims, and objectives become reality. Marketing oneself and ensuring that the right people are behind the creative project has become part of everyday life in a variety of domains. To take examples from the classical composers – would Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner have been free to create their musical masterpieces without the support of their patrons? In many cases, support from others – including those with the necessary resources, influence and power – may be one of the hallmarks of the successful professional in the creative industries as well as in other spheres of human endeavour.

In his new book *Backable: The Surprising Truth Behind What Makes People Take A Chance On You*, the American entrepreneur Suneel Gupta, developer of the successful healthcare start-up Rise, focuses on how people can develop the skills required to pitch to backers to ensure that their ideas become reality. With pitches becoming ever more important in today's world, this message will surely resonate with professionals not only in the creative and managerial fields, but also in other domains – for example in academia, where individual career paths can depend not only on teaching and publications, but also on keynote lectures, influential presentations, and successfully attracting new grants from external funding sources.

Aimed primarily at a popular readership, *Backable* is written in a clear and approachable style, and is based on interviews with and insights from numerous successful entrepreneurs, advisors, and venture capitalists in a variety of fields. At its core, it is underpinned by Gupta's own journey from being a certified 'failure' (at least, according to *The New York Times* (Martin, 2014)) to a successful entrepreneur, public speaker and author. As the title of the book suggests, Gupta outlines a series of steps – outlined here very briefly – that seemingly ordinary people can follow in their pitches in order to become 'backable'.

The method is divided into seven useful steps, with the first highlighting the importance of self-belief and the necessary emotional investment in a given idea, accompanied by the need for concepts to gestate, as well as the

role of ostensibly ‘throwaway’ tasks in the creative process. The following step underscores the need to create a ‘story’ behind the idea, complete with a pivotal ‘character’, which serves to create an emotional connection between the idea and its potential backers. This aspect is deepened in the third step, which focuses on the need to gain what Gupta terms an ‘earned secret’ – that is, some additional nugget of useful information that cannot be gleaned merely through an internet search but requires significant time and effort to obtain and thus will impress the backers during the pitch. In the fourth step, Gupta highlights the need to ensure that a ‘backable’ pitch is not merely new, but inevitable, which can be done by examining the bigger picture and creating the necessary momentum around a given idea. This is deepened by the fifth step, which centres on the notion of inclusivity, including the possibility of involving the backers in the realisation of the process. The sixth step focuses on the need to practice your pitch and of airing your ideas, no matter the venue, with the final step centring on the importance of removing one’s ego from the whole process.

What is notable about *Backable* is the fact that at each stage of the method, Gupta uses a wealth of real-life examples taken from top performers. Though, as noted previously, the book is aimed largely at a non-academic audience, nonetheless the book contains an appendix with highlights from nine of the many interviews that Gupta and Adler conducted with entrepreneurs and investors. In addition, the volume has a full set of chapter-by-chapter endnotes with a list of relevant sources appended.

In summary, *Backable: The Surprising Truth Behind What Makes People Take A Chance On You* has much to commend it. As such, it represents a welcome addition to the literature on the topic, and the principles it contains will be relevant to a wide public – as noted previously, this includes not only researchers and scholars in a variety of fields, but also those professionally active in the creative and cultural industries. Quite simply, the book is recommended for anyone who has an entrepreneurial dream that they would like to see fulfilled in real life.

References

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