

Don't discount the Bruce Halle story

By **Harvey Mackay**

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To say Bruce Halle is driven is putting it mildly. The Discount Tire Co. founder's life story is the subject of a new book, "Six Tires, No Plan," which I guarantee will inspire every person who reads it.

Author Michael Rosenbaum has perfectly captured the essence of this fearless tire maven. I've known Bruce for a long time, and he is undoubtedly one of the nicest people you will ever meet. He is also a bulldog when it comes to his business.

Entrepreneurs in particular need to have this book in their collection. His story entertains, educates and exemplifies a work ethic and customer service mentality that is the gold standard.

In 1960, after a couple false starts in other businesses, Halle rented an old plumbing supply building, tidied it up, hung up a sign and displayed his stock: six tires, four of which were retreads. It took three days before the first customer walked through the door, and four more days before he sold a tire. Halle admits he had no business plan, just the desire to be able to support his wife and three young children.

By the end of 2011, Halle owned 820 tire stores, with annual revenues north of \$3 billion, flourishing in a commodity business with headquarters in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Just as he did with his original store, Rosenbaum writes, "Halle personally scouts out the locations for each store, and the company supplies the capital to buy or lease the property, build the store and provide the inventory and equipment. The store manager is responsible for hiring, training, marketing, scheduling, customer service and cost control — the same roles Halle had with his first store more than 50 years ago.

"Halle has made a promise to his people: Do a good job, and I'll provide lifelong opportunity for you. Following that simple promise, Discount Tire has increased its revenues in every single year since 1960 and has never implemented a layoff."

How did he do it? The ever humble Halle says: "I think of myself as an ordinary guy, who goes to work every day and has been lucky enough to live as long as I have, and I have been blessed to have beautiful people around me. People sometimes say, 'Gee, how did you do what you do? How did you build the company?'

"Well, I worked at it for 50 years ... You do the things that anybody did when they started a business. You sweep the floors. You wash the windows. You clean the bathrooms. You talk to all the customers. You create some advertising programs. You pay the rent and try and make it work and little by little, all the pieces kind of come together."

Of course, there's a lot more to it than that, and Rosenbaum steers readers through Halle's story from childhood to the present. He doesn't skimp on details, and he includes the bumps in the road as well as the fast track.

Think you've got what it takes to be an entrepreneur? Are you willing to take the risks and face the pitfalls that Bruce did? Are your priorities straight?

"In his vision, success comes from focusing on what each person owes to his family, to future employees and to the next customer coming in the door. Everyone has an unbreakable contract to pay forward to the next customer, the next employee and the next generation," Rosenbaum writes.

What really gives this book traction is the abundance and variety of lessons from Bruce's life. Astute entrepreneurs will learn plenty about:

- Risk-taking
- Treating employees and customers well
- Hands-on involvement
- Giving back
- Handling adversity
- Maintaining focus

OK, aspiring business owner: What's he got that you don't? Bruce has a fairly simple credo: Find something to like in everyone. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt.

Negative thoughts are a waste of time. Be kind, and have a passion for humility.

Lattie Coor, past president of Arizona State University and now chairman and CEO of the Center for the Future of Arizona, says of Halle: "Who he is and how he expresses it, what he does with it, is absolutely a manifestation of someone who knows who he is, knows what he wants, knows what he wants to do and doesn't need to show off."

If ever a businessman had bragging rights, it's Bruce Halle. If ever there's a businessman you will never hear bragging, it's Bruce Halle.

Mackay's Moral: Let Bruce Halle's example steer you. You'll avoid some of the big bumps in the road.

Harvey Mackay is the author of The New York Times No. 1 bestseller, "Swim With the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive."