The Creator's Code

By Amy Wilkinson

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Consultant and entrepreneur Amy Wilkinson's book, *The Creator's Code,* is a step-by-step guide on how to become a successful entrepreneur based on 200 interviews with those who have achieved the heights of entrepreneurship — from well-known pioneers such as Howard Schultz of Starbucks to less well-known names, such as Sarah Blakely, whose idea for footless pantyhose became the billion-dollar company Spanx, and partners Alexis Maybank and Alexandra Wilkis Wilson, who launched the wildly successful Gilt Groupe online fashion platform.

Carefully parsing the transcriptions of her interviews, author Amy Wilkinson was able to synthesize the responses into just six essential skills required for entrepreneurial success.

Some of the essential skills in *The Creator's Code* are not surprising to any reader who has researched or experienced entrepreneurship. The first of her skills, for example, is to "find the gap." Most entrepreneurs achieve their success by unearthing an unmet need or finding a gap that needs filling with a new product or business model.

Wilkinson, however, is not satisfied with a pithy prescription followed by examples. She explains to her readers how they can find the next billion-dollar gap by identifying three archetypes of entrepreneurs: sunbirds, who transplant ideas from other areas, architects, who build from the ground up, and integrators, who combine different concepts. Shultz is a "sunbird" (named after the hummingbird-like bird who moves pollen from flower to flower). Shultz made his millions by having the foresight to realize that transplanting Italian coffee shops, with their baristas and long menu of fancy coffees, would fill a need that no one before him had fathomed.

Spanx's Blakely is an architect, building up her company from just an idea. Maybank and Wilson, of the Gilt Groupe, are integrators, who combined e-commerce and fashion to build a unique company based on online flash fashion sales.

Another of her more familiar skills, to "fail wisely," is also presented with fresh, practical how-to information. More than just being resilient, Wilkinson argues that successful entrepreneurs know how to manage failure. For example, in addition to placing small bets (rather than risking it all), Wilkinson found that many entrepreneurs set failure ratios — proactively deciding how much failure they were willing to accept before giving up. The key to failure ratios is thinking in terms of a portfolio of risks. For example, Stella & Dot founder Jessica Herrin has a 1-to-3 ratio, accepting to fail at one out of three initiatives she attempts.

The four other essential skills at the heart of *The Creator's Code* are less familiar. "Drive for daylight" is Wilkinson's phrase for keeping focused on the road ahead. "Fly the OODA Loop" is the skill to be more agile than competitors. The phrase comes from the world of aviation dogfights, when American pilots were taught that the key to winning air battles was to Observe (get information), Orient (prioritize the information and ignore the irrelevant), Decide (on a course of action) and Act. "Network minds" is the ability to bring together "the brainpower of diverse individuals." Wilkinson's innovative ideas for networking minds include designing shared spaces, fostering flash teams, holding prize competitions and building work-related games. Her code closes with the somewhat surprising "gift small goods" — a call for generosity that strengthens relationships and increases productivity.

In *The Creator's Code,* Wilkinson offers a solid framework for building up entrepreneurial skills, supported by fascinating, detailed stories of the creativity and hard work required to turn an insight or an idea into a thriving enterprise.

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