



Disrupted: My Misadventure in the Start-Up Bubble

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For twenty-five years Dan Lyons was a magazine writer at the top of his profession--until one Friday morning when he received a phone call: Poof. His job no longer existed. "I think they just want to hire younger people," his boss at *Newsweek* told him. Fifty years old and with a wife and two young kids, Dan was, in a word, screwed. Then an idea hit. Dan had long reported on Silicon Valley and the tech explosion. Why not join it? HubSpot, a Boston start-up, was flush with \$100 million in venture capital. They offered Dan a pile of stock options for the vague role of "marketing fellow." What could go wrong?

HubSpotters were true believers: They were making the world a better place ... by selling email spam. The office vibe was frat house meets cult compound: The party began at four thirty on Friday and lasted well into the night; "shower pods" became hook-up dens; a push-up club met at noon in the lobby, while nearby, in the "content factory," Nerf gun fights raged. Groups went on "walking meetings," and Dan's absentee boss sent cryptic emails about employees who had "graduated" (read: been fired). In the middle of all this was Dan, exactly twice the age of the average HubSpot employee, and literally old enough to be the father of most of his co-workers, sitting at his desk on his bouncy-ball "chair."

Mixed in with Lyons's uproarious tale of his rise and fall at Hubspot is a trenchant analysis of the start-up world, a de facto conspiracy between those who start companies and those who fund them, a world where bad ideas are rewarded with hefty investments, where companies blow money lavishing perks on their post-collegiate workforces, and where everybody is trying to hang on just long enough to reach an IPO and cash out.

With a cast of characters that includes devilish angel investors, fad-chasing venture capitalists, entrepreneurs and "wantrapreneurs," bloggers and programmers, social climbers and sociopaths, *Disrupted* is a gripping and definitive account of life in the (second) tech bubble.

Disrupted: My Misadventure in the Start-Up Bubble Details

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From Reader Review Disrupted: My Misadventure in the Start-Up Bubble for online ebook

Todd N says

At the height of his Fake Steve Jobs fame, Dan Lyons gave a talk at Google's Mountain View campus. I was unable to go due to travel or more likely some stupid meeting, but several friends went. One of them was excited to report that Mr. Lyons was just like me — even down to the acne scars all over our necks.

While I'm a fan of Mr. Lyons and I really enjoyed the book, I'm not sure how I feel about him taking the job at Hubspot in the first place. If you are taking a job with a purposely vague title like "marketing fellow" — and oh, how the tech industry loves to lift titles from other industries like that — then it's reasonable to assume that flexibility will be required in the responsibilities of that role.

So this was "not a culture fit" and not in the age discrimination way (though there was plenty of that) if someone takes a vaguely defined role and then essentially complains about the lack of structure while asking permission to do stuff. Perhaps this came from working in more structured newsrooms? I have no idea because my idea of what newsrooms are like comes from Mencken's Newspaper Days and the Daily Bugle in Spiderman comics.

Having gotten that unpleasantness out of the way, I still greatly admire the little tech carpetbagger for his determination to leave no bridge unburned and for his sharp observational skills. I was so captivated by the book that I read it straight through in one sitting. I started a list of all the things that I felt Mr. Lyons got right about startup culture along with my own thoughts:

- * Being "managed out": I've only seen it happen to other people (natch), but the part with Trotsky is about as good of a description of being managed out as you are going to read.

- * Early employee/Friend-of-CEO effect: The book perfectly captures the way that early employees (and they are loaded up with stock, so when the company goes public they will make oh so much more than you will) can hunker in to the company and make life miserable for everyone else.

- * Boiler room approach to tech: Basically anything that can't be automated (outbound calling, approving ads or websites, turning pages in a book) at tech companies are done with rooms full of recent grads. The bottom 5-10% are culled every so often and replacements are brought in. There are buildings full of these people in and around Mountain View.

- * BS creation myths for start ups: It has always annoyed me how most startups need a creation myth. YouTube has this story about the founders being at a dinner party and wanting to share videos that they made blah blah blah... But you can go on archive.org and see very clearly that it was set up to be a dating site, sort of a video Hot Or Not. I am certainly guilty of repeating these false narratives at countless sales calls though.

- * Age discrimination: I was being called "old man" and similar even back when I joined Google at 35. I even remember in my early 30s the son of the CEO where I worked scrunched up his face and asked me, "What are you? Like 40?" I'm still not sure what he meant by that. I still get a comment every few weeks or so that I'm not crazy about, so I close my laptop and stop working for the day in response. I don't think my age affects my ability to get hired because I've always felt smarter and more employable than just about everyone around me. I went to a conference a few weeks ago and half a dozen companies were interested in

hiring me (though I'm very happy where I am now thankyouverymuch).

* Can't step in the same river twice: Mr. Lyons paints this as a bad thing, but he captures the chaos and change at a fast growing start up. It means there will be wasted effort, which isn't great, but it also creates great opportunities. And when I feel like quitting a start up job I remind myself (or someone else does) that everything will change in about 3 months anyway, so I put a tickler in my calendar to reconsider until then.

* The weird linking of personal and work life: This has only gotten worse over the past decade or so I have noticed. The way he almost gets fired for a FB joke is worse than anything I've seen, but I don't doubt it. It was really common for co-workers to date early in my career, but now I know of apartment buildings where the majority of the apartments are taken by people from one company. The norm today seems to be for co-workers to live and play together in a huddle like puppies. This is something obviously not possible for middle aged workers, except maybe as the premise of a sitcom.

* Discrimination against funny people: In Silicon Valley genuine humor is always frowned upon and turned against you, mainly because humor always has an element of truth to it and shows a clarity of perception, two things that are never tolerated in tech. In almost every review I have had, my sense of humor has shown up in the "negative" or "needs work" column, even when managers are friends. So if your humor idols are Wilde, Thurber, Benchley, Mencken, Lynde think twice before saying anything and don't drink too much at company events. If you think Friends and Big Bang Theory are hilarious, you will go far. They may even put you on the April Fools Day joke committee.

* VC, industry-level view: The more the book zooms out, the more it becomes truly great. This is where Reporter Lyons takes over from Tech Carpetbagger Lyons and I learn a whole bunch of stuff about how this current boom is being funded and how the wealth is being transferred. These parts are worth the price of the book alone.

* BS review methodology: Google used to do this too. They had this big long Drake equation thingie where they plugged in your performance, your department's performance, Google's performance, etc. The upshot every year was (1) you are average, (2) the company is spectacular, (3) here is a bunch of money, (4) shut up and go eat some free food. It felt like a sad Christmas each time. It always came out to just over my expected bonus anyway, so I never understood the psychology of messing with my head.

* No one understanding pop culture references: This always trips me up, being a generation ahead of most co-workers. There was a time when a Caddyshack reference *always* got a laugh in sales situations. (Hey Lama, how about a little something for the effort?) I was talking about a recent vacation, and I mentioned that my Spalding Gray Swimming to Cambodia moment finally happened when Jethro Tull came on the radio in my bitchin' Camaro. The conversation quickly ground to a halt. I realized it would take at least 20 minutes to unpack all of the dated cultural references I made, so I softly said "never mind" and saved it for people closer to my own age. I try to stick to Classical Greek and Roman references because they are the foundation of our culture and it's not my fault if people don't get them. You'd be surprised how often you can work in a reference to the Thirty Tyrants or Xenophon's Anabasis.

* Asymmetric loyalty mores: My career spans three recessions, so I'm always ready to bug out like a M*A*S*H unit. I don't keep any more on my desk than I can fit in my backpack. I've seen layoffs blamed on everything from 9/11 to California's Governor Davis. Everything except poor management.

* Open offices: The next logical step in the modern office is to have organ grinders walk around while monkeys jump on desks knocking things over. If I didn't know better I'd think that our backs are exposed to

emphasize that we workers are low-status primates.

What was missed or what I'd like to read in the sequel (I'm available to speak on deep background):

* McKinsey colonization. If Mr. Lyons had stuck around a few more years he would witness the stage where the ex-McKinsey and a few ex-Bain consultants come in to form a "biz ops" department and start rationalizing the business processes. I am usually long gone by then. This was dramatized in Office Space when the "Bobs" come in, except these Bobs are way smarter than me, way better educated than me, and super super evil. God help anyone who doesn't fit neatly into one of their spreadsheets.

* People staying too long at companies: In my experience people stop learning useful skills around 5 years at a company unless they change positions or radically change what they are working on. After those 5 years, they just learn company politics (how to hire friends, how to fly 1st class, what VP to schmooze for what). So when someone leaves (or more likely is laid off) after 10 years they will expect to be paid for 10 years experience when they really only have 5 years of relevant experience.

* Push down of risk and upside: There was some mention of egregious rounds like Groupon's last round, but a discussion of investor preference and conversions and cram downs would have been great too. Also I'm pretty sure that Mr. Lyons had to wait 6 months to sell his stock. This is the standard these days so that preferred stock has plenty of time to bail out first if necessary. The other trend is that companies go public at a way higher valuation these days, which reduces upside for rank and file employees. (Netscape went public at a valuation of \$1B for example, barely a "unicorn.") Not that there is no upside at all any more, just that the fabled stories from the MSFT and dot com era don't necessarily apply. And the tax laws still suck, so I'm pretty sure Mr. Lyons was taxed as if it were cashing in a lottery ticket instead of collecting something he had earned over a period of a year and a half.

* Apology for the section on Bozos: Bozo is a the maiden name of my step-grandmother, and it happens to be a common Hungarian surname. Using it as a term of abuse is insulting to Hungarian-Americans. My step-great-grandmother was a very kind woman who also happened to receive a tremendous amount of crank phone calls. This is the kind of discrimination that we have had to face as long as I can remember.

Even though Baby Boomers are the people that said "Don't trust anyone over 30" and pretty much invented age discrimination, it turns out that age discrimination is bad now that it's happening to them.

And not only did the Baby Boomers not save the world, they didn't even manage to save enough for retirement, so we need to un-age discriminate them into high paying jobs right away. We Gen Xers understand, so we'll step aside for a decade or two.

As long as we get hilarious and insightful books out of the deal like this one, I guess it's a fair trade off. Highly recommended, especially if you are working in tech or a tech adjacent company.

Matt says

A world full of douchebags, brainwashed dummies, bullshit artists, and "fake, fake, fake!!!" enthusiasm is the HubSpot that Lyons describes in Disrupted. The characters are memorable, and real, and sad in many ways, but also entertaining because Lyons, you get the feeling, has a cynical sense of humour about life and

its cohabitants.

Outside of the hilarious depiction of the cultish world at HubSpot, this book is important because it outlines some of the major issues in Silicon Valley.

- Overinvestment
- Style over substance
- Snakeoil merchant CEOs (and investors)
- Unethical hiring practices
- Hypocrisy

While he does paint a scathing portrait of the day to day life at HubSpot, the 'Start-Up Bubble' part of the title is more telling of Lyons' message, and indeed it's important.

A company can foster whatever 'kooky' internal cultures it wants, it can sell 'growth' and 'revenue' as more relevant than profit, it can gamble on its IPO and sucker thousands of public investors into buying shares, but at the end of the day, it's downright irresponsible to propagate unsustainable growth in an already fragile economy. Essentially, this is the point Dan Lyons drives across, using multiple examples from the Silicon Valley ecosystem. Both the start-ups and their investors are complicit.

The book probably went to press before he could make a note of the recent slowdown in VC funding. A number of stories have started to circulate about the difficulty founders are having in raising money while tech bubble stories continue to get published on a regular basis. I'm sure Disrupted will help these types of articles grow...exponentially.

Hana says

An out-of-work, fifty-something journalist takes a job at HubSpot an actual start-up tech company in Boston. The result of this cultural mismatch is one hilariously funny book that also makes serious points about the latest stock market bubble in companies with dubious business plans, flim-flam 'management teams', rapacious venture capital backers, and fishy accounting.

Lyons strips away the trappings of free beer and ice cream, catchy slogans and can-do pep talks to show how companies like HubSpot systematically (and very cleverly) exploit young people who are paid terrible wages, worked to the point of burn out and then are 'graduated' (aka fired) the minute their performance lags. Lyons indulges in too much personal whining in the final couple of chapters, but the book is still well worth reading for an inside look at start-up company excesses.

As a former Wall Street analyst I've seen more than a few stock market bubbles and I can promise that this latest version, like all the others, will end badly. And as a once deeply devoted Goodreads reviewer I was cast back by this book into the dark, distressing months following a surprise Goodreads /Amazon 2015 Thanksgiving/pre-Christmas "design update" which generated thousands of negative comments from users. The pattern of sloppy programming, clueless marketing, careless disregard for customer responses, prioritization of Big Data harvesting and relentless focus on artificial accounting metrics...etc., etc. is a theme in Lyon's book that will resonate with serious GR reviewers. I'm still recovering from Goodreads shock #1, digesting the equally obnoxious Goodreads rollout #2....

Kim Marques says

Wow ... I hated this book!!

First of all, let's get something out of the way: this book is not funny. It's, I dunno, petty. And a bit vindictive.

But what's the most disappointing is the author makes some good points: about how tech companies are de-valuing labor, about how the funding and IPO model is broken. But he wraps it in such self-aggrandizing, ageist bullshit that it's impossible to take seriously.

In the first 15 pages, he talks about how astounded he is that Hubspot has hired him for a marketing position when he's got no marketing experience. Then he loses his mind that his boss is only 5 years out of college. Um, how are you surprised? This guy has 5 more years experience than you do - of course you report to him.

From that point on, you never hear about someone without also hearing about how old they are. He complains that everyone makes him feel old while he's busy writing a book about how young and dumb they all are. Pot? Meet kettle.

He also seems pretty out of touch for a guy who was a Newsweek tech reporter. If you reported on these companies so much how did you not know what you were getting into?

He complains that there's no diversity in tech, but then gets excited when he's in an LA writers room with all dudes where he can make jokes about "huge cocks and dry vaginas". He openly mocks his company on Facebook and wonders why he gets in trouble.

Now do I think he had some legitimate gripes about Hubspot? Sure. But I expected an experienced journalist to be able to frame it in a way that didn't make me hate him. Instead, he came across like a grumpy old man who had an axe to grind.

If you're looking for insight into the current state of the tech industry, this isn't your book. You want to hear a guy talk about how great he is and complain about his coworkers for 250 pages? This is your book.

Laura Bergells says

Ugh. The cluelessness! The lack of awareness and growth on the part of the author was a hoot. And horrifying to read.

It's a fish out of water tale. A journalist in his 50's gets fired and needs new employment, fast. His wife is unemployed. He has two young children. He begrudgingly takes a job at a tech startup called Hubspot, hoping to stick it out for a year or so -- in the hopes of striking it rich in their upcoming IPO. It's all naked greed for him.

Although he has covered the tech beat for decades, he is shocked -- SHOCKED! -- to discover that ageism,

racism, and sexism are real phenomena in the tech industry. How could this be happening? To other people, sure, but to him? He's white! And a male! What happened to his privilege? Why is life so suddenly unfair?

As a journalist, he says he never earned much money, but he got to party on the Forbes yacht with celebrities. He hob-nobbed with the wealthy. He jet sets all over the world. Why aren't all his young new colleagues at Hubspot fawning all over him? He's important. He's somebody!

At Hubspot, he is the old guy. He has never worked in technology before. He knows nothing. He repeats throughout the book that that he is naive. And yet, he cannot fathom why he isn't running his department.

The author instantly feels humiliated when he learns his boss is young. The author actually says in a meeting that he would like to kill someone. He doesn't understand why this makes his colleagues uncomfortable. He's edgy! He's cynical! Why don't they respect that?

He chats with a white male colleague -- within earshot of a young woman colleague -- about firing a 19-year-old woman. Why did he fire her? Although nothing untoward happened between them, working closely with a young woman was uncomfortable. For his wife.

Yes, this really happened. Yet, he can't understand why he is being forced to apologize to his colleague. He's not creepy and sexist! She's an over-sensitive, passive-aggressive bitch who ratted him out to HR! What's wrong with her?

Also, frequently writing "yes, this really happened" and "this literally happened" after describing an event is something that literally happens in this book. It literally happens a few times every chapter. It really happens. Really. And literally. This literally happens. A journalist literally does this as a stock device.

In the end, the author cashes out on an IPO and leaves. He now works as a writer on an HBO series, Silicon Valley. Because he's a writer and has experience working at a startup. So you see, he has special insight. Also, he can sit in the writer's room and make big dick and dry vagina jokes and no bitch will rat him out to HR. He likes this.

This is actually and literally what he took out of his startup experience. Other than good pay, travel, insurance, and stock options, he learned something.

What did he learn?

Ageism and lack of diversity at a startup is bad: but at the old boy's club in California?

IT'S AWESOME.

Make no mistake -- Hubspot is a shitty company with a crappy product. Startup culture is indeed toxic. Ageism, sexism, racism -- yes, they are real and ongoing issues at tech companies.

The author, however, continually expresses his disappointment for all the crassest and clueless reasons. He was only in it for the money, but he still felt that somehow, he just wasn't getting the respect he so richly deserved just for showing up. And being a white male.

Yes. This literally happens.

Alan says

I was torn between a 1 star and a 5 star review. The 5 stars because I can't remember the last time I read a book that made me so angry. I was initially really excited to read this - like the author I am a 50+ guy who jumped into the much younger world of start-ups. I was curious about his thoughts and experiences, both good and bad. Given his journalism background, I had really high expectations. I was completely let down. This book was really just a polemic about the evils of start-ups and their culture, both in general and a high level of specificity the company he worked at HubSpot.

Is there a culture of ageism, sexism, racism, etc. at some start-ups? Absolutely. And at established companies? Of course! These issues are not start-up issues, but societal issues. Is HubSpot a weird place to work? I really have no idea - based on the author's experience, yes, but unfortunately we only got one side of the story. Is IBM a weird place to work? Perhaps if you're 25 years old - who is to know?

Further, the author trashed the product, but he never said if he ever used it or not. And I'm not sure he realizes that ageism is a two-way street. He is so critical of the younger generation that is leading the company that he refuses to give them credit for building something. He may not like what the product is intended to do, but it doesn't mean it doesn't do it well. I don't like what Marlboro does, but that doesn't mean it doesn't do it well.

What irked me the most is as a fish out of water at the start-ups I have worked at, I try hard to break the stereotype of the old cranky guy who refuses to adapt - in short, what younger employers fear. What I do is try to learn as much as I can from my much younger co-workers (I've learned tons!) and embrace the energy and spirit of passionate, intelligent people putting their heart and soul into creating great companies. He criticizes the HubSpot team for feeling they are doing something "revolutionary", but why is that wrong? Everyone should feel that about their company!

In short, I've worked for or with about six start-ups, not all were started by white males or even predominately male. I never saw a nerf gun, but did have lots of candy. Some companies flourished, some didn't. All were exciting, intellectually challenging, and amazing places to work. I'm truly sorry the author didn't have the same experiences I've had.

Dan Herman says

Dan Lyons is a Journalist. I can't emphasize that last word enough. Nor, it seems, can Dan Lyons.

Lyons, a former Time writer and internet content raconteur, found himself in his early 50s without a decent job. After decades of covering the latest 20-something billionaires, he (sensibly) decided he wanted to jump into a startup to try to make his own big hit. Disrupted is his tale of woe, bemoaning the millennials and their shoddy union sensibilities and their loud music (no, seriously).

I don't want to dismiss Lyons' takedown of his former employer, Hubspot, as a simple case of "Old guy doesn't get how things work now." There's absolutely no doubt that the management, owners and coworkers at his new employer are insane. The problem is, the things he brings up as issues on which to prosecute an

entire industry/generation aren't exclusive to either the industry or that generation: As someone who's worked for a marketing agency, the headquarters of a multilevel marketing company and yes, even newspapers, all of the traits and peculiarities he mentions are things I've encountered. The trait of "being a shitty manager/coworker" is not endemic to a certain age group; it's more just an indicator of shitty people.

Don't get me wrong, the book is fun! See him learn that manager does not equal friend when his crazy direct supervisor's power-tripping petty bullshit constantly tears into Lyons after acting like they're best pals. Watch through some veiled sexism (paraphrase: "I'm not saying all women are shitty, but the three or four whom I interact with the most and are the only ones I talk about in depth in the book are terrible workers AND people") as he grovels to the PR manager for offending her (paraphrase: "I don't understand why she's all upset just because I said an interview she arranged for the CEO went terribly."). Revel as he reveals just how freaking out of touch he is when he tells us about his "hundreds of thousands of Facebook followers" then acts shocked and violated when it turns out his employer is watching what he writes and doesn't particularly enjoy his raining criticism down upon them.

As a former journalist, I particularly disliked the part where he complained about how much better journalists are as people. DID YOU KNOW that journalists: a) don't like meetings; b) would "[slam] doors and [turn] the air blue with profanity" if their boss made them a promise and then someone up the line changed their mind; c) if made to go to training, make fun of each other and the instructors and intentionally waste time. Oh, and also joke about killing someone in front an HR person; d) are lousy when asked to write someone beneath their level, like lead-generating blog posts (because of all their JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE).

Some of those are true, about some of the journalists I've worked with. Most are not. (Though, in fairness, journalists - especially older journalists - do tend to complain a lot that they're not allowed to say literally whatever they want in the newsroom, regardless of sexism/racism/profanity/just terrible ideas. As someone who's listened to a lot of them, this censorship is decidedly in everyone's best interest.) In fact, I'd bet you could replace the word "journalist" with "white guys who worked a white-collar job in the 80s/early 90s" and a lot of Lyons' complaints would have exactly the same meaning. Please note that I'm not calling him racist; I'm saying he's a overprivileged twit.

I'm not so much upset with the book or the writing as I am the idea of the book. Michael Lewis rose to fame with his (then-)shocking expose of the financial industry in Liar's Poker precisely because we didn't already know about. Lyons tended to follow trend stories (he did write for Time, after all) back when he wrote regularly, so his explosive reveal that "most web-based startups have terrible products and even worse business plans" isn't shocking, it's late and, most importantly, lazy. There's lots of good journalism out there about the bad and the good of our current economic/business/cultural climate. And it doesn't require taking a single company as evidence/harbinger of the doom of all things.

In a way, it's a tale of two mistakes. His, for his choice of employer, and me, for choice of reading material. I doubt either of us will make the same mistakes again. Oh, well. Unlike most of the readers of this book, at least I learned something.

Mark Jacobsen says

This book gets five stars for its sheer importance. It is a long-overdue takedown of the worst aspects of Silicon Valley culture, employing time-tested weapons for challenging hegemonic wisdom: sarcasm,

ridicule, and satire. No sacred cow goes unslaughtered, and the result is one of the funniest books I have ever read. The book is not perfect. Lyons has an obvious axe to grind, his vulgarity is off-putting, and his mean-spirited takedowns of specific colleagues made me squirm. Nonetheless, this is a book the world needs, and Lyons' acerbic humor is what allows him to take on the juggernaut of Silicon Valley startup culture. Absurd and humorous anecdotes aside, the book is at its best when Lyons steps back from his own situation to reflect on the broader dynamics of the start-up bubble: nonsensical business culture and practices, exploitation of naive workers, rampant inexperience, discrimination (particularly ageism), the substitution of marketing for quality, the grow or die mentality, and incoherent business strategies that succeed only in enriching a handful of founders and investors. Whatever one thinks of Lyons' style, I hope the book ignites a much-needed conversation about the start-up bubble. And if the bubble does burst, I suspect many will look back on Lyons as a prophet.

Philip Hollenback says

This was a fun read that anyone in the tech industry can relate to.

One reason I knocked my rating down is the "aw, shucks" tone the author takes. He makes it sound like he found the job, worked there a few months, and then realized he would write a book about it. I call bullshit - he went in to the job knowing full well he was going to write about it. I mean, he was a tech writer for Newsweek beforehand so it's not exactly a stretch.

I also felt that the author really downplayed how much of an a-hole he was at work. In several places he feigns surprise that people at HubSpot got mad when he said shitty things. He also talks about how people are just like that in newsrooms - so how could you blame him, right?

Newsflash, Dan: if you come in to a new environment and start making sarcastic public remarks all the time about people you work with, nobody is going to like you or want to work with you.

But anyway, the story was entertaining and Lyons raised some good points about ageism in the tech industry.

David Yoon says

I get it. I'm an old guy working in high tech, but I've always been here and in Canada we're at a slight remove from the unicorn madness infecting some other tech centres. I can understand Dan's snark and I've seen evidence of ruthless backstabbing, hi-tech mean-girling, hare-brained revelations from egotistical narcissists, Kool-aid slurping wage slaves, frat boy programmers and more - his just goes to eleven.

But calling out the bro-coders out for their frat boy antics then gleefully recounting the dick, fart and shit jokes you live on in the writers room seems disingenuous. I understand you calling out the 20-somethings for their lack of experience, but can you please not mention you were kind of a big deal at Newsweek again?

I'm not sure what I wanted from this story. Maybe more snark or some sort of narrative so that it didn't just feel like a book-length bitch session. Dan manages to be at a complete remove from everyone involved in the story so that it feels like he's just lobbing spitballs at the tech industry now that he's safely hidden behind the protective apron of Hollywood.

Maybe if you work in hi-tech and still can't explain what it is you do to your folks you can send them this so they get a feel for how far removed from reality the crazy farm can get.

Cynthia Shannon says

This book was a delightful read and I recommend it to anyone who has ever worked, or known someone who has worked, at a start-up.

Charlie White says

This book affected me at a profound level. I was the oldest employee at various startups for a decade, and Dan Lyons accurately described the absurdity and frustration I encountered at all of them. He crafted his story so well that I felt transported back to that special hell of a fifty-something writer toiling away for years in a frat-house sweatshop with a "team" of ill-prepared (yet oh-so-special) snowflakes.

If you find yourself considering employment at a similar company, and if you're "old" (over 40 and certainly over 50), please read this book before you sign anything or accept any job offers. It's a cautionary tale that is the most perfect description of the current startup "culture" I've ever read. It made my blood boil while reading it, and at the same time I found myself laughing out loud throughout.

"Disrupted" is a remarkable achievement, giving both prospective employees and investors a razor-sharp look inside a hellhole that seems so pleasant from its exterior. I loved this book and hope all my former, present and future colleagues take the time to read it.

Shannon says

The author is so deeply unlikeable and the narrative so unreliable that it's hard to get any wisdom out of it, like trying to understand the ravings of a resentful teenager.

More to this point: He sounds like a nightmare to work with.

He calls people "bozos, graspers and self-promoters, shameless resume padders" for nothing more than setting up a personal website [working in tech], joining Toastmasters clubs to improve public speaking skills, and organizing kayaking outings.

He doesn't like how his coworkers over-use exclamation points, so he sends out sarcastic company wide emails roasting people: " 'Jan is the best!!! Her can-do attitude and big smile cheer me up every morning!!!!!!' (Jan is the grumpy woman who runs the blog; she scowls a lot.)" Poor Jan.

He has no problem with running a scam as long as he gets his: "Even if I stay only one year, I will get five thousand options, and if the IPO goes well, those options could be worth some money." He expounds on this crashingly boring and quease-inducing point multiple times making it seem like he's a complete tool.

He characterizes everyone at Apple as "brainwashed corporate zombies who all truly believe they are doing

incredibly important work." If you're the average decent hard-working person trying to do nice things and not scam anyone, Lyons' response to this is: haha, sucker. His greatest admiration is saved for people who sold worthless startups like Netscape at the high point of a boom or joined months before an IPO and got rewarded out of proportion to their work.

I generally think that reading books is preferable to not reading books but in this case you probably don't want to spend any more time in the author's mind.

Jean says

Dan Lyons had been laid off from his job as a technology editor at Newsweek. In his hunt for a new job he was hired by a Boston start-up company called HubSpot. On his first day of work Lyons realizes he is out of place. He is a 52-year-old, married with children and drives a Subaru outback. His fellow employees are very young, single, wear orange colored clothes (the company color) and sit on beanbags. Lyons states it was like a Montessori frat house. Lyons was hired as a marketing fellow and also was given some stock options. It turns out the company created software for sending out spam.

Lyons tells of his time at the company and his problems with the loose way the company was run. The book dramatically shows the difference between the ages. The book reveals some important social issues that society needs to address such as age discrimination.

The book is well written and in many ways it was hilarious. Lyons sheds some light on some troubling issues in the start-up culture. I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. Lyons narrated the book.

Huyen Chip says

Great storytelling, great insights. Dan Lyons managed to expose many things that are wrong with Silicon Valley in a relatively short book. However, I wouldn't call this book an "entertaining read".

There are many cringe-worthy moments in the book. But it could just be that I'm too close to Silicon Valley for comfort.

John Dito says

Gimme a break, im 49 I work at a "unicorn" startup and this is not accurate for my company or any I know. The author chose a super douchy business segment (marketing) to begin with and got sold a bill of goods by guys who specialize in that. His resentment and characterizations of the "culture" show no empathy at all for people who he points out are new to the working world. He was looking for an IPO like everyone with half a brain is and had blinders on going in.

He is obviously bitter over not seeing the death of print journalism and his embarrassing short sighted-ness. Im embarrassed to be in the same generation as this guy.

Dont demonize a whole group of people over your failure. Grow a pair.

Hannah Frisch says

If you work in tech and ESPECIALLY if you work for a start up....this is a must read. Being one of the millennials that are constantly referenced throughout the book, I found it enlightening. I found myself bursting out laughing, but then almost crying....because his perception of what "motivates us" is tragically accurate. I can see why his analysis can be interpreted as insulting, but I find it to be more of a reality check. Biggest takeaway: Though it seems like common decency, be very nice to your older coworkers with real world experience (especially if you work for a "young" company where the average age is 26). You never know if they are secretly being recruited for a highly coveted spot as a writer for an HBO series, which if you were perceived as an arrogant imbecile, you will be mercilessly parodied.

John Norman says

It is with some regret that I give this book 5 stars, because I have met some of the people in this book, and there is a lot here that is undoubtedly a hatchet job (more about that in a moment). But it's so damn entertaining, and bears so many truths about the world of Internet startups, that I have to acknowledge that this is a "must read."

Dan Lyons shows realistically and with great humor that some Internet startups have built a culture that engages in trivialities, is ageist, sexist, and not very diverse. If you're in college or in your 20s and think that you want to get involved with a startup, read this. Meanwhile, his subject is a marketing company (his is HubSpot) -- some of which are the bottom feeders of the Internet. These are companies that provide the tools to send spam and cultivate attention through devious link-baiting and other technological tricks. Ironically, the marketing company in question centers its lead generations not on the "inbound marketing" techniques they champion, but via a call center boiler room where they exploit (according to Lyons) cheap "bros" as employees. Lyons also pays witness and is a victim to some very crude management and power moves that I have seen in my own time in startups.

And why are these startups so badly managed? Not very well articulated here, the answer is growth. These companies must grow or die, and the "hockey stick" of growth provides berths for a lot of people who should have been shed by such companies earlier. Indeed, Lyons's own hiring is probably evidence of the desperation of a company that is growing very fast and doesn't really understand its own business. They think they have a place for an ex-writer for Newsweek, but really, they don't. They're acting on a fantasy. But is that surprising? Not when the company can't yet figure out their business model and how to make money.

I'm a 20-year veteran of startups, and am older than Lyons, so much of his testimony rings quite true. I have been very lucky myself and so far have not seen much age discrimination, though everywhere I see the lack of diversity he describes. As an industry, we're trying to fix that, but it's going to take a long time.

Having said all that, Lyons is incredibly naive in his own narrative. He gets his job via the CEO and the CTO, but then finds himself neglected by the chief marketing officer. Welcome to the working world! Lyons should have picked up much earlier that there is really no place for him at the company. He sticks around, and sticks around, and his protests that he needs his paycheck strike a false note because he very swiftly gets an opportunity to write for the "Silicon Valley" series, and eventually snags a writing gig at ValleyWag.

Why not sooner? Hard to say. He seems to think there is some dignity in his old job -- journalism -- where he prides himself in being able to trade dirty jokes. Really? That's the good old place?

There is a constant drumroll of negativity regarding the CMO, but the reality is that he presents very little evidence that the CMO cares at all. The insinuation is that the CMO is irresponsible, but the presentation of the facts on that score is pretty weak. Eventually the CMO is fired for events that seem to be about capturing the manuscript of this very book - but so far the records are sealed and so it's all a hypothesis.

Finally, a huge gap is the story around HubSpot's engineering and product teams. Lyons notes frequently that the software is mediocre, but yet customers stick with it. Maybe we should infer that the product is not so bad. Knowing some of these people, again I'll suggest that the perceived gaps in the software have a lot to do with growth and the stress around shifting product requirements and the competitive landscape.

Once again, to the college or 20-something reader: There are great technology startups out there that have a real mission. Seek them out. And let's hope that someone writes a book as entertaining as this one that is about a company that does right by its customers, shareholders, and the public.

Emily Lomaka says

First up: HubSpot garners zero sympathy from this girl for being exposed in this fashion. I know these places exist because I worked for a "lite" version of them in a different industry. As a woman (and 38 years old at the time), I felt very out of place in a company that encouraged alcohol-infused fraternization with my coworkers both on and off the clock. Mind you I didn't feel out of place because I didn't drink (I love beer!), but because I wasn't partial to making myself vulnerable to people who had zero vested interest in my personal or professional well-being. My disinterest in partaking naturally made me feel disconnected, sad and ancient, and so I left after a year for greener pastures, as they say.

So yes, the HubSpot "culture" is deplorable; however, Lyons doesn't do himself any favors here. In fact, I was sincerely amused that someone who had the opportunity to write a book and shed himself in the best light possible would paint himself as such an arrogant tool. But therein lies the problem: Lyons doesn't recognize his own haughtiness. Instead, he believes that (contrary to what he's actually written) all of his actions at HubSpot were perfectly thoughtful, rational and reasonable, and all of HubSpot's responses to his actions were grossly inappropriate or blown way out of proportion.

The truth of the matter is, HubSpot is a terrible place to work AND Lyons is a terrible employee and coworker.

For instance, if you're going to cry foul over age discrimination, maybe it's best not to belabor the point that all of your coworkers are numbskulls walking around waiting for their brains to finish forming (because they're too young and stupid to be in the positions they're in, you see).

Or, maybe it's not entirely unreasonable for your boss to ask that you coordinate podcast schedules and guests with the blog and marketing teams so they can promote it, being that you work for a company that shills marketing tools. (Lyons' reasoning is that since one of the idiot executives is hosting the show instead of himself, the podcast is doomed for failure and no one will listen to it so why would anyone bother putting any effort into promoting it.)

Or, maybe it's not wrong that your female coworkers think it's inappropriate to discuss at work with another male colleague how you had to fire your 19 year old German au pair because your wife was uncomfortable with her presence (the nudge nudge wink implication being your wife was obviously jealous because another woman in near proximity threatened her sexuality). Nope, that's not offensive at all...or at least not to anyone who matters in your world, amirite ol' chap?

There are dozens of these types of encounters which Lyons documents in his book, many of which find him begrudgingly - and insincerely - apologizing to some person or another because they've overreacted to his completely rational behavior. Yeah, I don't buy it, and the fact that this isn't fiction and Lyons put this out there for the world to critique is indicative of his obtuseness.

I really hate to be so hard on this guy, but I have a weak spot filled with distaste for all forms of hubris. A little humility goes a long way, bro.

Stephen says

This book is an amazing piece of investigative journalism. It took a lot of guts to write. The legal hurdles are enormous, for one, enough to destroy anyone who hasn't covered his or her bases. And Lyons's method of truth-telling will make him feared by other companies, enough that it's doubtful he'll ever get hired again.

It is obvious from the beginning that the twenty-somethings working at start-up HubSpot do not like Lyons on sight, a "privileged" white man in his early 50s. The need to conform on their part is tremendous, because they are loaded with student debt, and don't have many options for well-paying jobs. It causes them to fall into a cult-like trance of self-help guru nonsense and corporate-speak. This can be irritating to an intelligent person's ears – which Lyons has. But their need to belong is intense, and anyone who threatens their sense of self and well-being, even at the expense of economic justice, is regarded as an enemy.

Lyons's book is hilarious for simply pointing out the obvious, that we're dealing here in a billion and a half valued company that sells a crappy product. And that this outfit from Cambridge, Massachusetts, typical for any suburban Boston enclave of college graduates (I am well aware of them), is a sham of diversity. Well they're not completely white. At least there's the founder, one of two, from Central Asia. He ends up doing what everyone would love to do, make millions of dollars from a relatively small initial investment (500,000 dollars, to be exact, something few of us have), even if that means exploiting countless nameless faces on his way to super-stardom and PowerPoint presentation glamour. Like most of the leaders in this book, he's more into profiting from self-image than managing people.

Throughout Lyons says he'd stop ridiculing everyone for willfully brainwashed conformity if the product HubSpot sold was actually valuable. It's not. It's garbage software to help small businesses run blogs, a sixth-rate one compared to WordPress. College graduates at HubSpot are taking advantage of small business owners who lack the clout to not need the advertising of blogging. Meanwhile they throw parties, eat plenty of candy and are cheery-faced through and through. This is important to bear in mind. Lyons is not anti-corporate but anti-mind control.

As journalism memoir, Lyons's skill at narration is outstanding. He takes you through a year in a start-up, and by the end of it, you understand how a company is made from top to bottom. It is very impressive the way he handles being laughed at by the young millennials, especially the women who need a mutual support system much more than the men do, who are more into self-delusion and following orders to a tee. Needless

to say there are few women in the executive, probably because the women in such a climate aren't very good at following orders. Ordinarily this would speak well for them if they weren't hearing "lean-in" in the other ear.

The epilogue is fantastic and came as a great surprise. I'll resist providing a spoiler – I'm dying to share it – but a great moral is revealed. It had never been Lyons's intent to discover one. It shows how a simple book, a memoir, a little odd 250-page thing, can threaten a company worth a billion and a half dollars to its core. That they could feel so threatened by this speaks volumes about the culture Lyons describes.
