



TITLE INFORMATION

STAY THIRSTY

A Serial Entrepreneur's Tale of Success & Failure

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March 24, 2026

BOOK REVIEW

Entrepreneur Haertzen details career choices and offers life lessons.

The author founded the highly successful food and beverage vending company Rocket Man in 1993. He shares his journey to that point, and his later strategies, in this entertaining new memoir, which offers an insider's look at a hypercompetitive business. In a prologue, he describes a 2007 ordeal at Fort Lauderdale Airport, where he was detained by Transportation Safety Administration officials. Haertzen was carrying \$150,000 in cash with him at the time, and the TSA assumed that the cash must have been involved in an illegal venture. Instead, it came from Rocket Man's successful vending operation at the Super Bowl the previous night. This story provides the starting point for a story that lays out his unique path to success. He describes a childhood in which scarcity was the norm; his father was a child of the Great Depression and brought that mindset to all the economic decisions he made for his family. The Haertzen family lived, dressed, and ate modestly, an upbringing that left the author with a deep sense of resilience and resourcefulness. Mark started work at a young age, delivering newspapers and working in food service at Burger King. Collectively, these experiences led Haertzen to value the hard work put in by employees of all kinds, all of which has helped him to stay humble and empathetic as a business owner.

Haertzen went on to have a successful career in the banking industry in Kentucky before striking out on his own as an entrepreneur. He ran a short-lived coffee shop before embarking on the vending business that became Rocket Man. He says that he found the life of an entrepreneur to be simultaneously freeing and constraining, which is one of the key lessons of this book: Initially, he felt that he had more agency as his own boss, but he soon found himself feeling the stress of financial instability—and he worked harder than he ever did when he was working for someone else. He ended up taking on side hustles, such as consulting, to help support his family while growing Rocket Man. He credits the feedback he received from beverage manufacturers for helping him improve his distribution technology. He effectively gives a blow-by-blow account of the ways that downsizing his operation helped it to grow in a competitive marketplace. At first, the company had both a vending and manufacturing division, but he found that nearly 80 percent of his revenue came from the vending side—so he shed the manufacturing side of things. Over the past two decades, he notes, Rocket Man has become a vending fixture at major sporting and cultural events. In many ways, Haertzen's book resembles other memoirs by successful entrepreneurs, but the author offers readers much more in his comprehensive explanations of the up and downs of his enterprise. The book will have particular value for those with an interest in the vending industry or the business of big-time sporting events.

A remembrance that provides clear insights into one man's path to business success.

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