

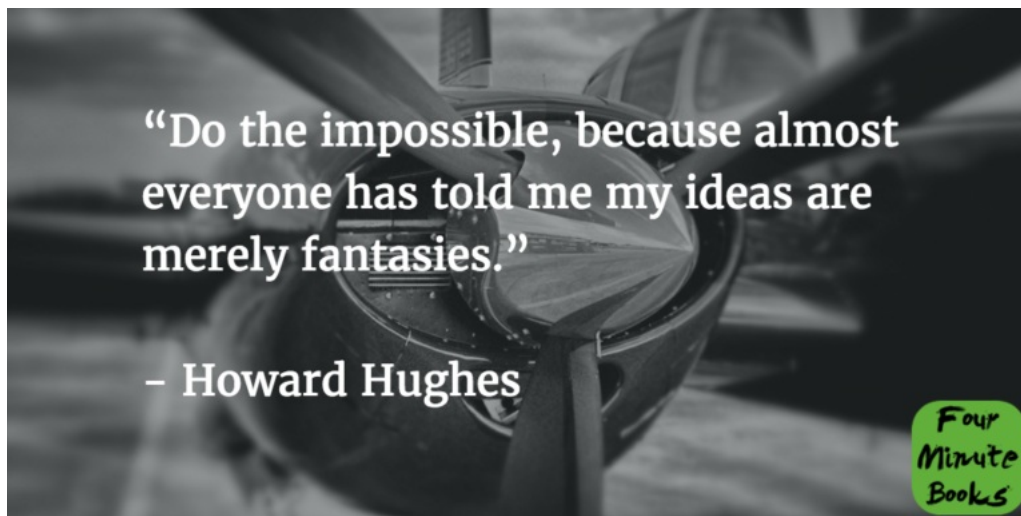
Howard Hughes: His Life And Madness Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Howard Hughes: His Life And Madness* details the birth, childhood, career, death and legacy of shimmering business tycoon Howard Hughes, who was a billionaire, world-renowned aviator, actor and industry magnate.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Howard Hughes is right up there with John D. Rockefeller, Henry Ford and Andrew Carnegie. Heir to one of the world's largest manufacturers of oil tools at the time, the world lay at his feet at just 18 years old. After the sudden death of his parents, Howard had to grow up fast. He had no interest in stepping into his dad's footsteps, however, and instead turned the business towards his passions: aviation and film-making.

Hughes has shrouded himself in mystery for most of his life, partly due to the public attention he received, but mostly because of his troubled character. In 1979, three years after Hughes's death, Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele took it upon themselves to provide a thorough account of his life.

I think there are several high-level lessons to draw from *Howard Hughes: His Life And Madness*. Here they are:

1. Stick with what you know.
2. You can either complain about the system, or use it to your advantage.
3. A single positive event can't fix a lifetime of bad habits.

A biography allows you to consume and learn from an entire human life in just a few hours. Humans only learn from mistakes, but nobody says they have to be your own, as Warren Buffett says. So let's learn from Howard Hughes!

Lesson 1: Double down on what you're good at.

As part of his preparations to shoot a movie called Hell's Angels, Howard Hughes actually learned how to fly a plane. He found so much joy in aviation, that he decided to pursue a career in it and help the field transcend what people thought was possible at the time.

It turned out that Hughes was brilliant at designing, building and then flying racing planes. He beat the world record for speed by 40 mph (coming in at 354 mph) in 1935. Next, after a re-design of the same plane, he beat the American cross-continent record with a west-to-east-coast flight in just 7 hours, 28 minutes and 25 seconds in 1937. In 1939, he even broke the previous record for the fastest trip around the world – bringing it down to 4 days from a previous 8.5.

It's always good to keep experimenting, but you also have to know when to stop and return to what you're good at. After 1939, Hughes tried developing military planes, a flying boat (the Hughes H-4 Hercules, nicknamed "The Spruce Goose" – with the biggest wingspan in aircraft history to date), and even helicopters – all without success.

He kept insisting on trying new things, when the world clearly wanted him to design, build and fly racing planes. **Always know when to return to your circle of competence.**

Lesson 2: You can complain about the system, or you can use it to your advantage – it'll persist either way.

Hughes had always wanted to own a major airline, so he'd been buying stock of a company called Trans World Airlines, or TWA, since 1939. When a senator caught wind of the impending takeover, knowing that TWA had recently been granted approval to fly overseas, he pled with the National Defense Program to launch an investigation into the Hercules project and make Hughes the subject of a Senate hearing.

Why? Senator Ralph Owen Brewster happened to be an associate of Pan American World Airways – Pan Am – a major competitor of TWA.

Hughes knew Brewster had a few skeletons in his closet, so he used his connections to get several articles into the press, publicizing Brewster's connections and potentially corrupting entanglements. On the day of the hearing, Hughes played the role of the bigger man, treating the debate like a non-issue, and even demonstrating the H-4's capabilities during a hearing break with a short test flight. The 1,500 attendants and spectators were delighted, and the hearing was closed without pressing charges.

Howard knew the system was crooked and that it was being played against him. He could've complained and insisted on the truth being told all he wanted, and would probably have gotten nowhere. **Instead, he accepted the system the way it was and turned the tables right on his opponent.**

See the world as it is, accept it, and then make use of it the best way you can.

Lesson 3: One single, positive event can never make up for a lifetime of bad habits.

Hughes eventually did get his hands on TWA, which he also brought to the brink of bankruptcy. After management had had enough, a decades-long trial ensued, leaving its mark on Hughes's mind. He'd been struggling with painkillers and drugs for a while at this point (mostly codeine), and was becoming mentally unstable.

In a fit of desperation, he hastily married a 30-year old actress in Las Vegas at 50 years old, seeking the security the rest of his life couldn't provide him with any longer. Hughes hoped the marriage would stabilize himself, as well as keep his employees from having him institutionalized. After the ceremony, he moved to Vegas and kept trying to reinvent himself by buying a lot of real estate, eventually owning roughly one third of all the gambling establishments and hotel rooms on the strip.

But one good deed can't possibly make up for a lifetime of bad habits, so his physical and mental health kept deteriorating, until he was nothing more but a shadow of himself.

Announcing and going through with a bold move sounds and is great, but it's only meaningful if you can back it up with the choices you make every single day, when things are dull and boring, but you have to be consistent to keep them alive.

Howard Hughes: His Life And Madness Review

This took forever to write. Biographies always do. You know why? Because so much history turns up. There are people out there who've dedicated their entire lives to studying the history of Howard Hughes. Naturally, it's super hard for me to come up with valuable lessons from his life with just a few hours of research, and it's easy to justify exploring more and more – especially when you're curious like me (or Brian Grazer).

But I still think it's worth doing every time, because I can't possibly make all the experiences they had to live through to learn those lessons. Any biography is a good biography to learn from and *Howard Hughes: His Life And Madness* is no exception.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- What paranoias Howard's mother instilled in him

- How he broke with the rest of his family
- Why his first marriage ended
- What other, crazy, failed projects he was working on
- The two phrases he kept using
- What happened when he completely disappeared from the public
- Why he showed himself once more
- How he died

Who would I recommend the Howard Hughes: His Life And Madness summary to?

The 15 year old who loves model airplanes, the 39 year old who's never settling and still always chases the next idea, and anyone who often makes big resolutions, but fails to fulfill them.