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Big Book is worth its weight in wisdom

By [Stephen Turnbull](#)

Columnist: Business book reviews

According to author and entrepreneur Tom Gegax, “(t)he business world has two constants - change and accelerating speed. It has one variable - your ability to keep up.”

That’s the basic premise for Gegax’s new opus, *The Big Book of Small Business: You Don’t Have to Run Your Business by the Seat of Your Pants*. Weighing in at 464 pages, *The Big Book of Small Business* provides a wealth of information to be read and digested, then kept within arm’s reach for further reference down the road.

Gegax initially started out as a rising executive working for Shell Oil Company. After a few years with Shell, he became disillusioned with the stifling corporate environment there and left to start his own business. Starting with a \$60,000 loan cosigned by his parents, Gegax struggled for years but managed to turn a small tire store into a \$200 million tire empire, with 150 stores throughout the Midwest selling a million tires a year, called Tires Plus.

Having now sold his Tires Plus operation for a bundle, Gegax is a much sought-after business consultant. With this background behind him, he’s taken his experiences and fine-tuned them into a thorough guide for anyone intent on starting, shaping, or expanding a small business.

The book is written in the first person and peppered with references to Gegax’s past experiences, whether positive or negative, successful, or less so. Gegax has employed a simple, down-to-earth writing style that readers won’t need an advanced business degree to understand. As with Collins Business books generally, bullet points and boldface are abundant; thus readers won’t feel like they are trudging through a dense economic treatise.

The *Big Book of Small Business* is organized chronologically, if you will, and thus first deals with the initial issues any fledgling entrepreneur is likely to face. At the start of the book, Gegax provides the reader with a firsthand analysis of the pros and cons of foregoing the world of steady paychecks for one in which income may from time to time be uncertain. He discusses the initial difficulties he faced, the uncertainty, and the lack of

an equitable balance between work and family life.

Once you've read Gegax's cautionary advice section and decided to take the plunge, the book then takes you through the initial basics of researching your market, writing a business plan, getting funding, positioning yourself amidst your competition, and protecting you and your interests legally. From there, Gegax takes you through the steps necessary for building a successful mission statement or concept, as well as a clear vision for the future and a set of ethics under which to operate.

As your business gets off the ground, *The Big Book of Small Business* will remain an invaluable guide for day-to-day operations on broader topics such as coaching, teaching, and communicating with employees. In addition, the book includes a great deal of information on some of the tougher issues all business owners have to deal with, such as the legal issues involved with hiring, retaining, and if need be, firing employees.

Amidst all the rock-solid nuts and bolts advice Gegax offers, he also provides another level of instruction with the goal of helping you to become what he terms an "enlightened entrepreneur" as opposed to a "seat-of-the-pantser." An organization built around the concept of an enlightened entrepreneur will be one that guides valued employees in a "caring, accountable culture, one supported by efficient processes and clear communication." In addition, such an organization will provide "the right mix of inspiration, incentives, and educational enrichment to grow through self-coaching."

According to Gegax, Tires Plus didn't really begin to take off until he had the proper mix of all these factors firing simultaneously. Essentially, Gegax developed systems which enabled managers to be not only tough-minded and profit-driven, but also required them to treat employees fairly and as people, not just as assets.

If your New Year's resolution involves starting a business, fine-tuning one, or perhaps expanding, pick up a copy of *The Big Book of Small Business* and get busy reading. You'll save yourself immeasurable amounts of wasted time and effort, and probably a few headaches and panic attacks as well.

I hope the coming year brings you much success in all your endeavors. Many thanks for reading during 2006, and I resolve to keep the worthy reading suggestions coming.

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