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The Boy Kings: A Journey Into The Heart Of The Social Network



Synopsis

Kate Losse was a grad school refugee when she joined Facebook as employee #51 in 2005. Hired to answer user questions such as “What is a poke?” and “Why can’t I access my ex-girlfriend’s profile?” her early days at the company were characterized by a sense of camaraderie, promise, and ambition: Here was a group of scrappy young upstarts on a mission to rock Silicon Valley and change the world. Over time, this sense of mission became so intense that working for Facebook felt like more than just a job; it implied a wholehearted dedication to “the cause.” Employees were incentivized to live within one mile of the office, summers were spent carousing at the company pool house, and female employees were told to wear T-shirts with founder Mark Zuckerberg’s profile picture on his birthday. Losse started to wonder what this new medium meant for real-life relationships: Would Facebook improve our social interactions? Or would we all just adapt our behavior to the habits and rules of these brilliant but socially awkward Internet savants who have become today’s youngest power players? Increasingly skeptical, Losse graduated from customer service to the internationalization team “tasked with rolling out Facebook to the rest of the world” finally landing a seat right outside Zuckerberg’s office as his personal ghostwriter, the voice of the boy king. This book takes us for the first time into the heart of this fast-growing information empire, inviting us to high-level meetings with Zuckerberg; lifting the veil on long nights of relentless hacking and trolling; taking us behind the scenes of raucous company parties; and introducing us to the personalities, values, and secret ambitions of the floppy-haired boy wonders who are redefining the way we live, love, and work. By revealing here what’s really driving both the business and the culture of the social network, Losse answers the biggest question of all: What kind of world is Facebook trying to build, and is it the world we want to live in? ***

“Logging on to Facebook that first day, in retrospect, was the second, and to date the last, time that any technology has captured my imagination. The first was when Apple advertised the first laptop, the PowerBook, in the 1990s” with the words, “What’s on your PowerBook?” “World domination,” my teenaged self- answered instinctively. That’s what these devices were made for, I thought: so small and yet so powerful, so capable of linking quickly to and between everything else in the world. From the laptop, I could write and distribute information faster than ever before. It was intoxicating to imagine, and Facebook’s sudden, faithful rendering in 2004 of the physical world into the virtual felt the same. What could you do, now that you could see and connect to everyone and everything, instantly? “But what, also, could be diminished by such quick access? In the realm of ideas, it seemed easy: Who wouldn’t want to distribute and discuss ideas widely? However, in the realm of the personal, it seemed more complicated. What

was the benefit of doing everything in public? Is information itself neutral, or do different types of information have different values, different levels of expectation of privacy, different implications for distribution and consumption? Should all information be shared equally quickly and without regard to my relationship to it? And, finally, and most important, as we ask whenever we begin a new relationship with anything, would this be good for me? • -- From the Introduction

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Histories

Customer Reviews

The media attempted to show this book as a tell-all about the culture of working for Facebook (which it does, to an extent) and seeing what really drives Mark Zuckerberg and makes him tick (which it doesn't). First and foremost, this book is about the adventures of Kate Losse and her journey up the ladder of Facebook, a story made all the more remarkable considering the male-dominated culture she worked in. Losse takes us on a ride that begins with a Johns Hopkins graduate joining Facebook's customer-support team, through to her promotion to the Internationalization team, and shooting all the way up to being Zuckerberg's official ghostwriter. The story goes back and forth between reading like a description of her work culture and reading like a

lengthy diary entry, as she goes from stories of AIM chats (using AIM at work was a requirement) and long hours into the night (as the engineers were often required when writing algorithms) to parties in Las Vegas and annual trips to the Coachella music festival. Although the book is extremely well written, it is not particularly memorable and at times Losse's thoughts, although thought-provoking, become repetitive as she constantly questions whether Facebook is really bringing people together or turning the world into one big virtual reality. If you've seen the movie "The Social Network", then very little of the information presented here - about Facebook's work culture as well as Zuckerberg himself - will come as a surprise. That is the main criticism I have for the book - you don't learn much that you didn't already know or could guess at. The culture is very much like a frat house, with the guys often playing games like chess and beer-pong and sometimes sending erotic messages (usually in fun, but not always) to the female workers.

Facebook, as portrayed in Kate Losse's book *The Boy Kings* is a case study of Silicon Valley culture in the twenty-first century. In many dimensions, Facebook is an impressive achievement that has taken years of engineering work. As I write this, Facebook has a billion users, spread throughout the world. Ms. Losse was involved in the birth of some of Facebook's first overseas networks and was the program manager for the internationalization effort. Facebook has defined social networking and has changed the way many people interact. Along with its impressive achievements, the Facebook described by Ms. Loose can also be seen as an exemplar of many of the things that are wrong with The Valley. In 1956 William Whyte wrote a book titled *The Organization Man*. In *Businessweek*, David Leonard writes that *The Organization Man* was "A critique of society as much as business culture, the book diagnosed groupthink--a term Whyte coined--in the suburbs as well as the boardroom, and became one of the century's most influential pieces of commentary." Although Facebook claims that their ethos is "move fast and break things", what they have created in many ways mirrors the corporations of their Grandfather's generation. Corporations in the 1950s expected conformity and so it is with Facebook and many other Silicon Valley Companies. I once spoke to a start-up that was building a "App" for the Apple iPhone which, they claimed, was going to change the world (an iPhone App, really?) The actual nature of this change is rarely stated but everyone is supposed to buy into the idea that they are doing transformative work.

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