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# Elon Musk: How The Billionaire CEO Of SpaceX And Tesla Is Shaping Our Future



## Synopsis

South African born Elon Musk is the renowned entrepreneur and innovator behind PayPal, SpaceX, Tesla, and SolarCity. Musk wants to save our planet; he wants to send citizens into space, to form a colony on Mars; he wants to make money while doing these things; and he wants us all to know about it. He is the real-life inspiration for the Iron Man series of films starring Robert Downey Junior. The personal tale of Musk's life comes with all the trappings one associates with a great, drama-filled story. He was a freakishly bright kid who was bullied brutally at school, and abused by his father. In the midst of these rough conditions, and the violence of apartheid South Africa, Musk still thrived academically and attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he paid his own way through school by turning his house into a club and throwing massive parties. He started a pair of huge dot-com successes, including PayPal, which eBay acquired for \$1.5 billion in 2002. Musk was forced out as CEO and so began his lost years in which he decided to go it alone and baffled friends by investing his fortune in rockets and electric cars. Meanwhile Musk's marriage disintegrated as his technological obsessions took over his life ... Elon Musk is the Steve Jobs of the present and the future, and for the past twelve months, he has been shadowed by tech reporter, Ashlee Vance. *Elon Musk: How the Billionaire CEO of SpaceX and Tesla is Shaping our Future* is an important, exciting and intelligent account of the real-life Iron Man.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When I walked into Barnes & Noble two weeks ago, I wasn't actually looking to purchase a book. Usually, I go in, browse for 30 minutes, and get out. But when I walked around to the Physics and Science section, the first thing I saw was Elon Musk's face. Inevitably, I picked it up and began reading. 2 pages in, I decided I was in this for the long haul and sat on the floor, right there in the middle of the store. 15 pages in, my friends finally found me and forced me to leave. But I couldn't part with this. I needed this book. Those first 15 pages captured me like so few books do (in fact, only one book in the past year has totally stolen my attention like this). So I bought Elon Musk feeling on top of the world and excited to keep reading. I travel a lot between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, PA, so, since I'm in the middle of taking classes in Pittsburgh, I swore to only read this book on the bus, because I knew once I picked it up again, I wouldn't put it down. I was right. The next day, I got on the bus, got to reading, and tuned out the world. Three hours later, I was nearly halfway through -- and WOW. Vance's writing style flowed right through my mind. No clunky sentences, no jarring phrases. It's such an easy book to read, despite the complex nature of the contents. Elon Musk, if you don't know, is a biography. Yes, a biography. You'd expect the case-study of someone's life to be boring and uneventful, dragging until the very end. This wasn't the case at all. Vance opens the book at an interview with Elon Musk himself. The first line, a quote from Musk, "Do you think I'm insane?", perfectly captures the whole context of the biography. Because as you experience the story, as you see the challenges Musk went through to reach the pinnacle he's at today, the question nags at you. Musk isn't soft-spoken, or easy on his employees, or a man who kicks his legs up on his desk and snoozes while his companies mill around him. Vance shows how Musk is both the CEO and an employee of his companies, simultaneously the teacher and student. He gets in the work, asks all the right questions, gives all the right orders. His vision is THE vision, and if you get in the way, Musk has been known to fire you on the spot. Musk breaks every convention, every tradition, every standard. Vance takes you deep into the details, from Musk's childhood and lineage in South Africa, all the way to Canada and the United States, where the bulk of the story unfolds. When Musk looks at big businesses, he sees unmovable behemoths that refuse to change their methodologies. American innovation became a thing of the past. Technology and industry was growing - but

nowhere near as fast as it should. So we follow Musk's journey from his small start-ups, Zip2 and X.com, and move into his larger, more permanent ventures, namely SpaceX, Tesla, and SolarCity. I myself am a huge fan of Elon Musk. Still, until the past year or two, I only thought of him as "that guy who made SpaceX" and "that guy who runs Tesla." Until reading this book, I never knew the struggle -- no, the hell he went through to make and keep these companies. You think, oh, he just has a lot of money. Yeah, now he does. But did you know SpaceX and Tesla were hours away from going bankrupt? Did you know that the Falcon 1 rocket kept failing, and one more failed launch literally meant the end of SpaceX? Did you know SpaceX tested these rockets on an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and would fix problems they encountered in a matter of days, as compared to months by standard companies? This book is the first time Musk has explicitly let anyone interview him for a biography. Aside from a few questionable quotes that have been publicly denounced by Musk after the publication of this book, we're still given a tremendous amount of insight into his head and how he runs the companies. Vance interviewed more than 300 people and spent over two years compiling this account. And I have to give credit to how up-to-date the information is. There are several events Vance mentions that occurred into 2015, such as the first landing attempt of Falcon 9 on the sea barge, which took place in January, and he refers to the second attempt as being in a couple weeks, which means that Vance included this information on a very tight deadline, probably mid-March (the second landing attempt happened on April 14, 2015). I want to congratulate you, Mr. Vance. Well done. Very well done. I'm going to reread this book in a few weeks (probably after the scheduled June 19th third Falcon 9 landing attempt, this time on solid ground, as opposed to a barge). Anyone who wants a ridiculously thorough insight into Elon Musk's life and companies should read this book. It had me from Page 1 all the way to Page 363, and even the appendices that come after. This is an incredibly inspiring book, an important look into a game-changing business strategy, and a valuable lesson to the world. As Musk says, "If something is important enough, even if the odds are against you, you should still do it."

The best thing I have read on Elon Musk so far (and from what I understand, the only one that he has participated in himself). Vance is an excellent writer, and you may or may not be familiar with him from Bloomberg Business and other high profile writings. I loved the insight into Musk and how he operates, and you get a very broad and complete picture of Musk as a driven visionary that is absolutely set on delivering some of the most aspirational goals of any human in history. You also get some great insight into the overall ecosystem around Musk - his companies (SpaceX and Tesla primarily), relationships with other companies and gov entities, as well as the important people

around him. Many bios give you a timeline of the person, but little insight into the broader context and I appreciated that in this book. You get unique insight into his personal relationships, how he coped with things that went wrong (not always a pretty story), and how he manages through both failure and success. Since you learn so much about his childhood and formative years, you get a good grounding on why he is the way he is, and how those relationships developed. Finally, you get a lot of detail around 'green' industry, space exploration, etc. which really fills out this ecosystem and delivers an inspiring and educational view of one of the most intriguing people of our lifetimes. The book almost seems to ask "What are you going to go out and reinvent?" Well worth reading and even gifting to friends who may be fans.

Solid, well researched book about Musk's early life, early companies (Zip2 and PayPal), and current companies (Tesla, SpaceX and SolarCity). Throughout the book, Vance doesn't just let a startling assertion or quote stand still, he researches events to give the reader a balanced view of what transpired. This is especially important as there have more than a few highly charged emotional events in Musk's life and it would have been all too easy for a biographer to highlight the sensational at the expense of providing insight about complex events. Vance starts the biography by delving just enough into Musk's early life to help understand who he has become. He then launches into fairly detailed accounts of his early companies (Zip2 and PayPal). These accounts are invaluable as there is little else available about these companies that is reliable and not agenda driven reporting. SpaceX gets the most coverage in the book, befitting Musk's passion and time spent, although there is a reasonable amount of time devoted to Tesla and a relatively quick overview of SolarCity. Oddly enough for a 400 page book, I sometimes wished he would provide a more blow by blow account - for instance there was no insight at all into any board meetings in any of the companies. In addition, Vance does not delve in any real depth into the complex technology that Musk has created, relegating the very few verbatim explanations from Musk to footnotes. There was a lot of boosterism about the companies, and while Vance did try to describe a timeline, in the end the book had a lot of unconnected vignettes and stories. Having said all this, it is a very readable, very interesting book. The 2008 triple Musk meltdown (personal life, SpaceX and Tesla) was gripping. Most people who have not been watching Musk's every move for the past 20 years will find lots of new information here, presented in a very balanced and entertaining way.

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