



LET IT GO : The Entrepreneur Turned Ardent Philanthropist

Stephanie Shirley , Richard Askwith

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Dame Stephanie Shirley is one of Britain's leading philanthropists and has donated most of her life to helping good causes, especially those close to her heart.

This fascinating memoir charts Dame Stephanie's life from her time as a child in Germany and arrival in England as an unaccompanied Kindertransport refugee through to her retirement and dedication to charity. It is an amazing read which will take you through the entire range of emotions - from happiness at the success of her original company Freelance Programmers through to the ultimate sadness of losing her only child.

This Kindle edition has been specially formatted by Andrews UK and includes photographs from Dame Stephanie's personal collection.

"Whether the challenges are being a child refugee, having an autistic child or creating a fortune (then giving it all away) by founding a tech company at a time when women were supposed to be home baking bread, Dame Stephanie Shirley's cinematic memoir inspires us all to keep reaching. Never stop reaching." - David Puttnam

"I feel lucky to count myself one of Steve's friends, and I am so happy that, by sharing her story with us in the pages of this book, she will inevitably acquire many more admirers and fans. We may never be able to achieve a fraction of her success and influence, but the example of her generosity and unflagging attempts to use her hard won fortune to do good will inspire all of us to do just that bit more to leave the world a slightly better place than we found it." - Jane Asher

"There is an entire business course in this book: about the dangers of profitless growth, the difficulties of succession planning, and the problems of managing clever people. But more important, this engrossing story of an extraordinary life is filled with lessons in what it means to be human." - Michael Skapinker, Financial Times

"The word 'inspiring' is greatly overused, but Stephanie Shirley's story is one of those rare cases in which it truly applies. This book is an extraordinary tale of creativity and resilience, and of the power of well-targeted philanthropy to transform the world" - Oliver Burkeman, Guardian journalist and author

LET IT GO : The Entrepreneur Turned Ardent Philanthropist Details

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Filipa Bento says

I've finished reading this impressive autobiography of Dame Stephanie Shirley's life. From a child saved from the horrors of nazism to a successful IT entrepreneur, this woman's life is nothing but dull. Her determination and strong will are incredible. It's also a good book for entrepreneurs, feminists, moms and people who seek some sort of inspiration in their life. I loved reading and learning a bit more about this woman. It seems to me that women who have amazing impact in the science, business fields (you name it!) are always ignored by the general public, given a wrong sense of women's capacity in these areas. As such, i think this is a good learning book for young girls and boys.

Erin says

First watched a TED talk that Shirley gave that got me interested in her life and her views. I picked up this book hoping that I would get more empowered from her stories, but found Shirley as another human being - strong reserves and wicked determination, yes, but with her fair share of worries and insecurities and jealousy as she had to let go and watch others pick up where she had left. Also, she was lucky have the right skillsets at the right time at the right place - replicating FI model abroad did not work, as for example, in America, women had more access to work than in Britain, so the model did not fit well. Looking back it may look like she had all the right combination of conditions, but living in that time and recognizing this then would have required thinking outside the box. This makes me consider my current situation and skillsets, and look for missed opportunities that would fit me like a glove.

Martin says

Let IT Go - Loslassen, Startup, Loslassen

Der Titel "Let IT go" ist ein Wortspiel: Im Zentrum steht die Informationstechnologie (IT), aber der rote Faden der in englischer Sprache verfügbaren Autobiografie von Stephanie Shirley ist das Loslassen (let it go). Der Autobiografin blieb auch nichts anderes übrig. Loslassen lernen, loslassen können - das ist die Klammer der drei Themen, die die Vita der Autobiografin prägen:

- Die Trennung von der Heimat und das Ankommen in der Fremde;
- Ein Startup in den 1960er Jahren, als Computer und Informatik in unserer Gesellschaft noch nicht allgegenwärtig waren (aber bereits unumkehrbar auf dem Vormarsch);
- Ein besonderes Kind und der Umgang damit.

Vera Stephanie Buchthal war fünf Jahre alt, als sie und ihre neunjährige Schwester im Sommer 1939 von den Eltern mit einem Kindertransport von Wien nach England ins Exil geschickt wurden. Die Entfremdung des Flüchtlingskindes von den eigenen Eltern war eine der harten Folgen, die Stephanie Shirley in ihrer Autobiografie beschreibt. Sie erzählt auch, wie sie im Laufe der Jahre in England angekommen ist, im Alter von 18 Jahren die britische Staatsbürgerschaft angenommen und ihren Namen in Stephanie Brook geändert

hat.

Stephanie Shirley berichtet von ihren Erlebnissen in einer Männerwelt, beginnend mit ihrer Zulassung zum Mathematikunterricht als einziges Mädchen in einer Jungenschule, später gefolgt von einer Anstellung bei der Royal Mail (Post). Dort entwickelte sie Software in der Abteilung für Statistik, lernte die gläserne Decke kennen - und machte sich 1962 mit ihrer eigenen Softwarefirma F. International selbstständig. Die Schilderung der Entwicklung des Unternehmens vom Startup (wie wir das heute nennen) zu einer gefragten Consulting-Gruppe ist ein Stück spannende Wirtschaftsgeschichte, auch um Genderpolitik, Homeoffice, Mitarbeiterbeteiligung, Digitalisierung und Irrtümern und Missgunst im harten wirtschaftlichen Wettbewerb.

Ein anderer - und erkennbar schmerzhafter - Erzählstrang ist die Geschichte des Sohns von Stephanie und Derek Shirley, bei dem Autismus diagnostiziert worden war. Der Umgang mit den daraus folgenden Belastungen für das Ehepaar steht ebenfalls im Zentrum der Darstellung, vor allem die erheblichen finanziellen und organisatorischen Anstrengungen zur Verbesserung der Lage des Sohns und ihre Auswirkungen auf den Alltag. Daraus entwickelt sich neben einschneidenden Krisen auch ein nachhaltiges Kümmer um wohltätige Einrichtigungen. Als Stephanie Shirley im Jahr 2007 durch den Verkauf ihrer Unternehmensanteile zur drittreichsten Frau Großbritanniens wurde, wird der Einsatz eines Großteils ihres Vermögens für wohltätige Zwecke zum neuen und bestimmenden Lebenswerk der Autobiografin.

Mich wundert, dass das sehr lesenswerte und bereits 2012 erschienene Buch nicht auf Deutsch verfügbar ist. Vielleicht liegt es daran, dass die Geschichte der Unternehmerin und ihres Startups zwangsläufig auch Phasen des Scheiterns enthält - das Scheitern wird hierzulande meist als Schlusspunkt behandelt, nicht als Zwischenschritt. Und vielleicht liegt es auch daran, dass die Geschichte des Flüchtlingskindes von einer Integration im Gastland erzählt, die maßgeblich auf eigener Tatkraft beruht.

Grahambootle says

Like some of the other reviewers, I downloaded this book after hearing the author being interviewed on the radio.

She has certainly lead a very interesting and eventful life and generally I enjoyed the book, the last chapter seemed to be a name check of the great and the good that she's met which I could of done without....

The part that raised my hackles was where in one chapter she mentions how good outsourcing IT jobs from the UK to India has been great for the UK IT industry and in the next chapter she seems embittered that after she stepped down as MD her company don't need her as much any more.

As an IT worker that has been 'let go' a couple of times because unit labour costs in India are cheaper, I found it hard to have much sympathy for her on that one.

Donna says

What an incredible woman! What a life!

To give them a better life, she and her sister were given up by their parents (her father was Jewish) at an Austrian train station right before Nazi occupation. They were sent off to England to start a new life with new parents.

My favorite parts of this audiobook were the bits that I found astonishing. She began from such humble beginnings and went on to create her own multi-million dollar company while juggling married life and life with her autistic son. Eventually she became a philanthropist.

When she was knocked down, she never failed to rise again. When one door closed, she quickly found another one to open. I admire that kind of tenacity.

Now with all that being said, some of the ins and outs about her business endeavors, weren't so interesting and lagged in spots. But that doesn't take away from the fact that her life was interesting and she used her money for good.

This was 3.5 stars but I was completely impressed by her accomplishments so 4 stars.

Judy Williams says

The only reason this book didn't get 5 stars from me is because I'm not sure others would like it as much as I did. Stephanie Shirley reminded me of myself, and reading this as I contemplate retirement couldn't have been more timely. I did get a bit tired of reading about all her awards, and I didn't need to know any of that to be impressed with what she did. I was interested in the story of how she built her company but even more interested in her life as the mother of a severely autistic son, with the challenges that presented. An excellent read.

Keith Hanson says

An Amazing Trek Through the Birth of an Industry

Stephanie Shirley will make you feel at once empowered to conquer the world as she did, and that you are not doing enough to advance your own life, business, cause, or dream.

The sheer number of her accomplishments are astounding, and she recounts them as if they were simple solutions to problems. She shows how they were anything but simple, but while reading, it almost all seemed inevitable with her being the force pushing it all forward, and the historical recounting of her battles and successes flows easily.

She candidly breaks down real financials during key events of the business, and you get to ride the roller coaster with her as she was told it would never work.

Seen through today's lens post-bubble, post globalized work forces, what she did was timed just right and executed incredibly well, and she transferred power/empowered her successors over and over.

She created a company of freelance software programmers who wrote punch card code at home, when the industry wasn't writing software for hire, would never think a woman could run this business, and would have never thought a woman could do it all from home. This was pre-Internet, dear review reader!!!
Incredible!

She did it with unbelievable stresses in the home AS WELL as in business, and she did this far better than anyone I know could.

And she managed, in the end, to have created a lasting ideal that survived multiple versions of her original dream. Even later into her 80's, the company mission, vision, and values she started - with £6 and a mission statement - still influences the company heavily today.

So should you read this?

You should: Read this if you're a freelancer, programmer, or work from home. Read this if you are a consultancy or agency owner (like me), wondering what the future of work should look like, or want to know more about agency succession and philanthropy. Read this if you are a woman entrepreneur looking to beat the odds.

Her story will inspire you while at the same time give you exactly the right perspectives on your own problems, with these fantastic nuggets of wisdom for consultancies (and later succession strategies of consultancies) every few pages.

She is particularly a role model for women, women entrepreneurs, and women programmers. One can only imagine what the U.S. might have looked like today with someone like her pushing them forward. Her and more of her mold are sorely needed here.

Laurie says

Absolutely amazing. Dame Stephanie Shirley has lead such an interesting life achieving great success in business while dealing with a complicated home life. Her story is so intriguing and shows what determination and doing what you know/feel is right, despite what anyone one else thinks, can lead to amazing things. Her view on Philanthropy was very interesting as I haven't heard anyone else speak about it that way. It's amazing the difference one person can make.

Clare Sudbery says

Bought for me as a leaving present by my wonderful colleagues at LateRooms.com, and a very good choice. As a female software engineer I was very very interested to read of Dame Shirley's adventures in the profession in the 60s and 70s. I was absolutely gripped by her journey.

Liz says

I decided to read this book after hearing the author interviewed on the radio. A truly interesting and inspiring

woman. I enjoyed the parts of the book that were more about her personal life - struggles, lessons learned, and wise advice. However, what slowed me down a little was that there are lengthy segments that go a bit deeper into topics that would be more appealing for the habitual reader of business books/professional how-to's. I guess this isn't that surprising since the author herself notes that she's always preferred to converse with people about their academic and business concepts than their hobbies or holiday destinations. I think with a bit more editing, it might have sounded more polished, but also read as a more compelling, fluent experience. That said, I can honestly say I've read every page, and if you decide to pick it up and skim through some of the sections on computer systems or the finer points of corporate turnover, you won't be missing out on the major points. :)

Karen says

An absorbing read, Dame Shirley tells her story from birth to date with clarity and some level of detachment considering how strongly she was affected by events.

I admire Dame Shirley's determination, imagination, cheerfulness in the face of huge difficulties and her story is interesting without being oversentimental in the recounting.

As I finished this on International Women's Day I reflected that this story of one woman's life should be compulsory reading for children at secondary school. It would build respect in the value of women in the workplace and give girls inspiration to achieve their career goals.

The home life which Dame Shirley reveals about her son helped me to better understand autism. I was shocked and sympathetic in equal measure.

Well worth taking the time to read, the time will fly by anyway.

Shannon Mcg says

Great book and inspiring. Her generosity and desire to make changes in the business world simply because it was right is striking. I would have rated it the book higher but I use audibles and I am very particular about the sound quality. Dame Shirley is an iconoclast.

Sarah says

So good! An awesome tail of an entrepreneur and philanthropist. Her heartbreak story of her experiences raising an autistic child in the 60's was difficult to read, but very honest and insightful. Also, how she came to view having traveled on the kinder trains and being separated from family is powerful and useful for others in dealing with trying situations.

Sheila says

Found the start of this book with the 'Kinder Train' bringing Jewish children to home in the UK, really interesting. Also the story of Stephanie growing up, starting work, meeting her husband, having her autistic son, Giles and starting up her business. The early days of Stephanie starting her 'all female' computing business from home were interesting and inspiring. However, when she goes on at length about the business

expanding, the various take-overs, staff changes and profit sharing, the book became very dull for me. I don't know or understand much about the computer business and unless you do, the depth of detail was overwhelming. Stephanie summed it up much better in the final chapter when her legacy became more inspiring and interesting. Perhaps for the general reader this was enough detail. By contrast, the story of her son, Giles, and his various problems was inspiring and thought provoking. I was inspired by her experience causing her to want to sink her money into autism and tackling some solutions. Good parts in a book that was largely fairly tedious.

Elza says

Very interesting story of the development of the IT industry since the 1960 and the evolution of women workforce in STEM. I also enjoyed the personal story of the author. However, the last few chapters about her lessons and morals are boring and arrogant. They almost sink the ship.
