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February 1, 2001 11 min read This story appears in the February 2001 issue of Entrepreneur. Subscribe » If you're like us at Entrepreneur, and like millions of children and adults around the world, you're not just a fan of the Harry Potter books- you're a fan in withdrawals. It looks like the next book in the series, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, may not hit bookstores until 2002, and the first film will not be released until November. You have two options: Go crazy, or read this article. Like many entrepreneurs, Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling started in humble excavations and with big dreams. She had to write the entire manuscript of the [first] book because she couldn't afford to have it copied, notes Jeff Blackman, a business growth specialist in Glenview, Illinois, and author of Result\$ (Successors). Now more than 30 million [Harry Potter] books have been sold. It is a remarkable testament to [her] perseverance and passion. Rowling studied French and literature, not business, in college. But she worked for several years at the Chamber of Commerce in Manchester, England. Maybe something rubbed off, because young Potter can teach us a lot about running our own businesses. We're not making this up. Even The Wall Street Journal ran a story about how the business Muggles embrace the books, referring to emails like owls and ATMs like Gringotts. (Confused by that sentence? See Potter Mouth.) Of course, because the Harry Potter books are apparently for children, some of the hidden and not-so-hidden business lessons may seem fundamental. But, like all eternal truths, it is a good idea to visit them again occasionally. So get milk and biscuits, pull up a chair, and let's read a story . . . Book 1: Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone: Two: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets Book Three: Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban Book Four: Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire Book 1: Harry Potter and the Wizard's Stone Plot: Ten-year-old orphan Harry Potter lives in a closet under the stairs of the house of his careless relatives, Mr. and Mrs. Dursleys and their dimwitted son, Dudley. Harry learns that he has sorcerer's blood and has to go to the railway station on Kings Cross's 93 4 platform to travel to Hogwarts, a school for wizards. There, for the first time, Harry makes friends. He also confronts his enemy, Lord Voldemort. Business lesson No. 1: Understand the different cultures of your business. On Harry's first day at Hogwarts, he and the other freshmen meet the sorting hat, which tells his audience: Try me on, and I'll tell you/ Where you should be. Once donated, the hat sends each student to one of four dormitories: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw or Slytherin. The most talented wizards (including Harry) are sent to Gryffindor, and the spooky bunk in Slytherin, where you'll find Draco Malfoy, the most evil high school student in the fictional universe. Do you know what's really going on in If you're not sure, check out The Shadow Knows for tips on how to decide which of your employees gives the real power. The bigger your business gets, the more cultures it will have, and you have to pay attention to them, says Don Andersson, a business coach in Cranford, New Jersey, and author of Hire For Fit (Oak-hill Press). When he read the first Harry Potter book, he immediately noticed how Hogwarts academic culture reflects the corporate world. If you want a new hire to thrive, the person making hiring decisions needs to understand the corporate culture well enough to know where [the candidate] will be best, Andersson said. An employee may have amazing skills, but in the wrong culture they don't really want to [work]. Business lesson No. 2: When you own a company, you should be in good company. Your partners and employees are everything; You realize that, don't you? Such wisdom is exemplified by Harry's best friends, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley. Hermione lies to a professor to keep Harry and Ron out of trouble for confronting a troll, and Ron risks death in a live-action chess game so Harry can prevent the wizard's stone from falling into the wrong hands. But loyalty is not enough. You also need employees and partners who want to tell you what they mean, not what you want to hear. And if they're smart, the better. Potter Mouth If you haven't read the books, here's a quick guide to key terms: 9: The platform where the train goes to take Harry to Hogwarts. You'll never find it if you're a muggle. Gringotts: The bank where wizards keep their money; fierce goblins guard it. Hogwarts: The seven-year Academy of Magic Harry attends. Mudblood: A derogatory slang term for the offspring of a muggle and a magical parent. Muggle: A person without magical powers. It can be spoken as an insult or with a touch of compassion in one's voice. Owls: Owls carry messages back and forth not as fast as email, but funnier. Quidditch: Think of football at cost, and you have the idea. Book two: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets The action: Harry returns to Hogwarts one year later to discover that an evil being turns students into living statues. Business Lesson No. Sometimes the rules must be bent or even broken. Caryn Beck-Dudley, professor of business law and ethics at Utah State University, Logan, observes: If you kicked the Hogwarts students out every time they made a mistake, you wouldn't be left with a very virtuous organization. And you didn't even want Harry Potter. When you're trying to create a work environment that makes people enjoy coming to work, treating people like people should be tops of your list. Read Manage your employee better to learn how to do it. Just as entrepreneurs rarely adhere to a 9-to-5 regime, Harry breaks a curfew for sneaking around school and fighting evil. When he flies on the broom against orders, he is not punished, he is rewarded with a coveted place on Because he flew to help a classmate, and he is the best broom flyer the school has seen in ages to the delight of students, professors and even

principal Albus Dumbledore. But if Dumbledore was like many bosses, Beck-Dudley says, he would focus on the bad things Harry did. So, either Harry would leave and take his skills elsewhere, or his creativity would be shattered. If Harry Potter worked for most companies, he would have been fired by now, Beck-Dudley claims. Sometimes harsh punishment is not the best remedy, she notes. Business owners often fire someone because it's the easiest [route], without realizing that it creates an environment where people are scared and unproductive. Hogwarts includes everyone. You won't be severely punished if you don't succeed. Poor Neville [one of the students] tries hard but never does it completely and is still part of the group. The focus is on how he contributes instead of how he doesn't. Book three: Harry Potter and the Prisoner of the Azkaban Plot: Our Hero Returns to Hogwarts, hoping to stay out of the way of the notorious killer Sirius Black. Business Lesson No. This theme runs throughout the series, but seems best illustrated in this installment. Harry and Hermione are good at making contacts that pay off. Before the book begins, Hermione has arranged with one of the teachers to take three classes simultaneously (via time travel) and move on academically. But Harry is the network king. In the Chamber of Secrets, he meets Dobby, a house elf who later saves his life with advice in the Goblet of Fire. In Azkaban, Fred and George Weasley (Ron's brothers and Harry's classmates) give Harry a map of Hogwarts that shows where individuals are at all times. In Goblet, Harry assists his opponent, Cedric Diggory, during the Triwizard tournament; Later, Cedric returns the service. If not for his contacts, Harry would probably have been made a long time ago. Need to refurbish your networking skills? Make Connection can tell you exactly what you need to know to meet and greet with the best of them. Business Lesson No. Little goes as Harry expects, but he learns to be flexible in this book. (If you haven't read this and want to, consider skipping this section.) After hearing that he cannot visit the magical village of Hogsmeade with his fellow students, Harry plans to spend the day reading. But when he gets a secret map of the school, he discovers a tunnel to Hogsmeade- which later helps him expose the bad guys. And while many heroes (entrepreneurs) could be forgiven for not wanting to team up with someone who was once the competition, Harry befriends Sirius, who becomes one of his closest allies. Harry's willingness to quickly change direction impresses Blackman. The choices you make affect your future, he explains. Do you choose to innovate, imitate or vegetate? If the last, you also abdicate. So much of Harry Potter is about innovation thinking creatively from a unique perspective. Dumbledore museums, the consequences of our actions are always so complicated, so diverse, that predicting the future is a very difficult business indeed. You can make predictions for your business, but you can't trust them. Book four: Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire The Plot: Harry returns to Hogwarts and competes in the Triwizard Tournament. Business lesson No. 7: Entrepreneurs triumph over large companies. Anne Warfield, a business coach, professional speaker and owner of Impression Management Professionals in Minneapolis, believes that business lesson is the most important thing in the books. No matter how insignificant we think we are, we can have a powerful effect, she said. What's important is to get the tools to develop this potential in ourselves. Harry does just that at Hogwarts and ends up best Lord Voldemort. Business lesson No. 8: Adequate funding is essential. Invest wisely. The money Harry inherits from his parents and saves along the way allows him to give money when George and Fred Weasley need funding for their magic joke shop. Who would have thought? Harry Potter may not grow up to be an entrepreneur, but he's already a venture capitalist. Rating The Characters We asked business experts how Harry and his cohorts would fare as entrepreneurs. Harry Potter Qualities: kind, ethical, courageous, stubborn, independent As an entrepreneur: He would be great. He would be willing to work his way through problems to find the answer, said Impression Management Professionals business coach Anne Warfield. His Achilles heel: He can't trust others enough, dealing with each adventure on his own. As with the spiders, he didn't think through the father he put Ron in, because his quest to get the answer drove him, warfield says, referring to the time Harry convinces Ron to follow him into the Forbidden Forest of the Chamber of Secrets. Ron Weasley Characteristics: loyal, courageous, ethical, but sometimes envious of the more successful as an entrepreneur: He should work with a friend or mentor. He would be a better vice president than [CEO], Warfield said. He has strength of character, but . . . His Achilles heel: Leading is hard for Ron, Warfield adds. He expects Harry and Hermione to pre-send the ideas. Hermione Granger Characteristics: intelligent, ambitious, loyal, extremely ethical, serious, kind, friendly As an entrepreneur: She would probably do better than Harry. She's logical, detail-oriented and has connections, Warfield says. She would be the most visionary and insightful. Her Achilles heel: She can overwork her people, warfield says. She doesn't know how to lighten up. Draco Malfoy Properties: mean, unethical, evil, the kind of guy who would send orphaned Father's Day cards As an entrepreneur: His type often goes a long way, says business professor Caryn Beck-Dudley of Utah State He would be surrounded by yes men and would manipulate to make things happen, warfield adds. He wanted to succeed as long as he got the organization started and sold it. His Achilles heel: He's evil, and you know what usually happens to the villain in the end. End.

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