

Make Your Own Job

How the Entrepreneurial Work Ethic Exhausted America

A New Yorker Best Book of the Year A sweeping new history of the changing meaning of work in the United States, from Horatio Alger to Instagram influencers. How Americans think about work changed profoundly over the course of the twentieth century. Thrift and persistence came to seem old-fashioned. Successful workers were increasingly expected to show initiative and enthusiasm for change—not just to do their jobs reliably but to create new opportunities for themselves and for others. Our culture of work today is more demanding than ever, even though workers haven't seen commensurate rewards. *Make Your Own Job* explains how this entrepreneurial work ethic took hold, from its origins in late nineteenth-century success literature to the gig economy of today, sweeping in strange bedfellows: Marcus Garvey and Henry Ford, Avon ladies and New Age hippies. Business schools and consultants exhorted managers to cultivate the entrepreneurial spirit in their subordinates, while an industry of self-help authors synthesized new ideas from psychology into a vision of work as "self-realization." Policy experts embraced the new ethic as a remedy for urban and Third World poverty. Every social group and political tendency, it seems, has had its own exemplary entrepreneurs. *Make Your Own Job* argues that the entrepreneurial work ethic has given meaning to work in a world where employment is ever more precarious—and in doing so, has helped legitimize a society of mounting economic insecurity and inequality. From the advent of corporate capitalism in the Gilded Age to the economic stagnation of recent decades, Americans have become accustomed to the reality that today's job may be gone tomorrow. Where work is hard to find and older nostrums about diligent effort fall flat, the advice to "make your own job" keeps hope alive.

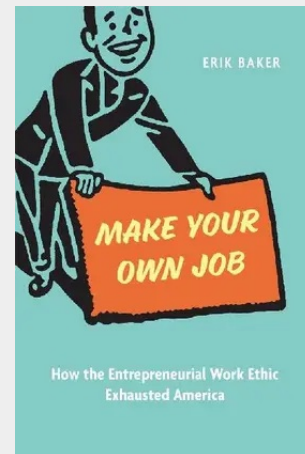
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38,00 €

38,00 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

sofort versandfertig, Lieferzeit: 1-3 Werktage

Artikelnummer: 9780674293601

Medium: Buch

ISBN: 978-0-674-29360-1

Verlag: Harvard University Press

Erscheinungstermin: 14.01.2025

Sprache(n): Englisch

Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2025

Produktform: Gebunden

Gewicht: 660 g

Seiten: 352

Format (B x H): 158 x 235 mm

