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The Antidote: Inside The World Of New Pharma



Synopsis

In 1989, the charismatic Joshua Boger left Merck, then America's most admired business, to found a drug company that would challenge industry giants and transform health care. Barry Werth described the company's tumultuous early days during the AIDS crisis in *The Billion-Dollar Molecule*, a celebrated classic of science and business journalism. Now he returns to tell a riveting story of Vertex's bold endurance and eventual success. The \$325-billion-a-year pharmaceutical business is America's toughest and one of its most profitable. It is riskier and more rigorous at just about every stage than any other business, from the towering biological uncertainties inherent in its mission to treat disease; to the 30-to-1 failure rate in bringing out a successful medicine even after a molecule clears all the hurdles to get to human testing; to the multibillion-dollar cost of ramping up a successful product; to operating in the world's most regulated industry, matched only by nuclear power. Werth captures the full scope of Vertex's 25-year drive to deliver breakthrough medicines. At a time when America struggles to maintain its innovative edge, *The Antidote* is a powerful inside look at one of the most intriguing and important business stories of recent decades.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a biomedical scientist I really enjoyed this book. It is the sequel to the author's previous volume "The Billion Dollar Molecule". Both books provide a fly-on-the-wall account of Vertex Pharmaceuticals, an innovative biopharmaceutical company that brought two breakthrough medicines - one for hepatitis C and the other for cystic fibrosis - to market two years ago. Both these

drugs were the first of their kind and have given thousands of patients a new lease on life. From a broader perspective however, the author's goal is to shed light both on the immensely challenging process of bringing a new drug to market and the brilliant scientists and driven personalities that make it possible. Werth's account of Vertex focuses mainly on the hepatitis C drug, with the cystic fibrosis drug playing a smaller but still important role. The previous book was much more science-heavy than this one, emphasizing the chemistry, biology and computer science that goes into the early stages of drug discovery. In spite of the intense scientific competition and research depicted in that volume (much of it spanning the late 80s and early 90s), Vertex did not bring a successful drug to market until 2010, underscoring the challenge of drug discovery in which you have to furiously paddle simply to stay afloat. The two books thus mirror two different phases of the company: the first dealing mainly with the science and the birthing pains of a new startup, and the second dealing with the transformation of the startup into a commercial enterprise. You will thus find much more of the business, legal and commercial aspects of drug development in this volume. Boardroom deliberations and the subtleties of drug pricing litter the narrative.

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