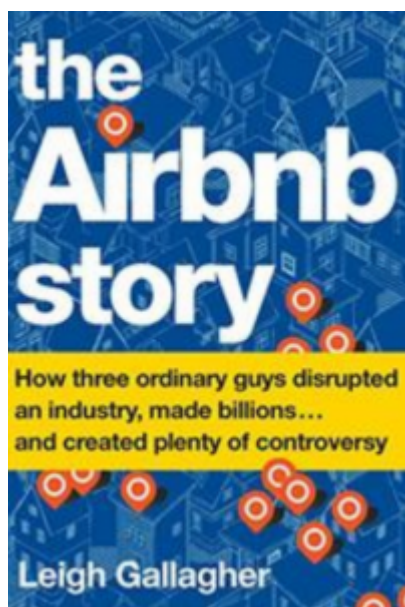


LTN Book Club: Good read on creation of Airbnb

By Kathryn Reed

Disrupter. That's what Airbnb has been to the lodging industry and communities where it operates.

Airbnb is part tech company, part lodging company, part tourism company. It is anything but ordinary. And that's what those who like it love about it.



Author Leigh Gallagher captures the entrepreneurial spirit of the three men (Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia, and Nathan Blecharczyk) who founded the company in 2008 in San Francisco by delving into their world. The concept of the business is simple – strangers renting rooms from strangers.

“The Airbnb story: How three ordinary guys disrupted an industry, made billions and created plenty of controversy” (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017) is a look at this start-up, the fragile beginnings, the meteoric rise, the controversies, the struggles, the future.

It's in part a book about business – the Silicon Valley in particular. It's venture capitalists, it's finding a niche and filling it, it's fulfilling dreams, learning to adapt, flying by the seat of their pants, and being anything but conventional.

It's part biography – three men found a way to launch a concept multiple times until it finally took hold, how they struggled financially, but now are part of the Bill Gates-Warren Buffett club that promises to give away the bulk of their wealth. The vulnerabilities and naïveté of the founders are revealed.

Gallagher, who is an assistant managing editor at *Fortune* magazine, does not shy away from delving into the controversies Airbnb and similar businesses have brought to the communities where they operate. Nor were some of the horror stories of guests glossed over.

It's not a book championing Airbnb. Instead it sheds light on how it came to be, the struggles and where it plans to go from here. It talks about how the hotel industry has changed how it does business because of the shared rental market, and even highlights how chain hotels themselves were once disrupters.

It's \$30 billion valuation (it is still a private company, though predictions are an IPO is in its future) is larger than Hilton and rivals Marriott.

There is one mention of Lake Tahoe in the book, which showed the author's unfamiliarity with the location – suggesting the region is one municipality and not realizing these short term rentals in the basin are governed by one city and five counties. The reference is to how Tahoe is logical to have property management companies operate listings. In the same breath was an inference that the area doesn't have a housing problem.

"In cities where there is a real housing issue, however, like New York, (Chesky) says the policy should very clearly be one listing per host," Gallagher said. If she knew the Tahoe-Truckee market, she would have pressed him more or not used the Tahoe area in this context.

That was the only disappointment in the book.

Agree or disagree with the concept of short term rentals, this book is a fascinating look at three people who had the gumption to take an idea and turn it into a billion-dollar business. While their success is phenomenal, the process to get to where they are and to not rest on their laurels is inspirational.

- Please join in the discussion via commenting. Feel free to pose questions. Please keep the discussion to the book and questions.

- **Questions:** What did you learn that surprised you the most from reading this book? Would you use a company like Airbnb – why, why not? What are your opinions about the sharing economy? How have companies like Airbnb changed how you travel? If you had the money to invest in Airbnb in the early days, would you have backed these men – why or why not?

- The **next book** will be “What Unites Us” by Dan Rather and Elliot Kirschner. From the jacket cover, “With a fundamental sense of hope, ‘What Unites Us’ is the book to inspire conversation and listening, and to remind us all how we are, finally, one. Rather brings to bear his decades of experience on the frontlines of the world’s biggest stories. As a living witness to historical change, he offers up an intimate view of history, tracing where we have been in order to help us chart a way forward and heal our bitter divisions.” The review will be posted on *Lake Tahoe News* on Feb. 1.