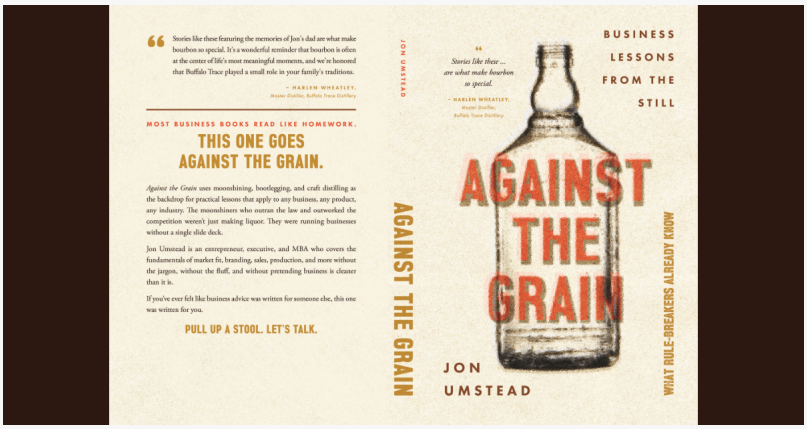
New Business Book ‘Against the Grain’ Distills Entrepreneurship Lessons from America’s Moonshining History

Business executive and entrepreneur Jon Umstead turns stories of moonshiners and bootleggers into practical lessons on leadership and building a business.



Front and Back Covers of Against the Grain: Business Lessons from the Still - What Rule-Breakers Already Know by Jon Umstead, available September 15, 2026

URBANA, OH, UNITED STATES, September 15, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- What can today’s entrepreneurs and business leaders learn from moonshiners, bootleggers, and distillers? Quite a bit, according to author Jon Umstead.

His new book, Against the Grain: Business Lessons from the Still – What Rule-Breakers Already Know, available today on Amazon, uses American moonshining, bootlegging and distilling history to explore customers, pricing, differentiation, reputation, resilience and the value of challenging conventional wisdom.

> “I wrote Against the Grain because the best business lessons are found in the stories of people who learned to adapt, survive, and question the usual way. Moonshiners and bootleggers did all three.”
>
> *Jon Umstead, Author of Against the Grain*

The book features a cover blurb from Harlen Wheatley, Master Distiller at Buffalo Trace, connecting its business lessons to the distilling world that inspired them.

From George Washington’s distilling operation and Prohibition-era rumrunner Bill McCoy to Prohibition-era moonshiner Birdie Brown and moonshine legend Marvin “Popcorn” Sutton, Against the Grain shows how people in very different times confronted surprisingly familiar business problems.

Readers also meet Umstead's father, who gives voice to a feeling many entrepreneurs recognize but rarely say aloud:

"I can't work for other people. I might tell you where to go."

“Moonshiners probably weren’t sitting around talking about customer segmentation, brand differentiation or operational strategy,” Umstead said. “But they understood their customers. They knew reputation mattered. They knew how to differentiate what they made, price it and get it to market. The language has changed. A lot of the fundamentals haven’t.”

Business Lessons from Unexpected Places

Umstead has spent more than 30 years building businesses, leading large teams and helping organizations turn strategy into execution. He also teaches business courses and makes moonshine. As his interest in distilling history grew, he began recognizing parallels with situations from his own career.

“Going against the grain doesn’t have to mean breaking the rules,” Umstead said. “Sometimes it means questioning assumptions everyone else has stopped questioning.”

Stories First. Lessons That Stick.

Rather than beginning with business concepts, the book begins with stories. Readers meet Bill McCoy, whose reputation for genuine, unadulterated liquor became associated with “the real McCoy,” along with moonshiners, distillers, and entrepreneurs whose experiences provide an unconventional lens on familiar challenges.

“Within the first few pages, I was highlighting text and quoting the book in my weekly Executive Group meetings to enhance performance," said Glenn Becker, CEO and founder of Signature Workspace, a national provider of boutique private offices and coworking space based in Tampa, Florida. “Against the Grain is a must-read.”

More Than a Book

Against the Grain anchors Champaign Shine, Umstead’s author platform exploring business, entrepreneurship, distilling and history. The Against the Grain podcast and The Stillhouse Blog extend those conversations through additional stories, guests and lessons from the still.

A public launch celebration will be held September 17 from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. at The Event Vault in Urbana, Ohio, with a moderated conversation, audience Q&A, cocktails and a bourbon tasting.

About Jon Umstead

Jon Umstead has spent more than 30 years leading teams at organizations ranging in size from startups to a Fortune 100 company. He holds an Executive MBA from The Ohio State University,

teaches business courses as an adjunct professor, and previously authored Business is ART: Articulate, Revise, Track. He also makes moonshine.

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