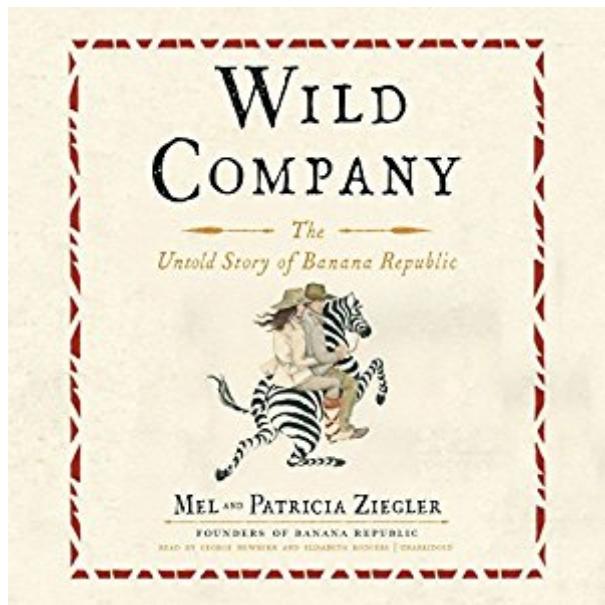


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# Wild Company: The Untold Story Of Banana Republic



## **Synopsis**

With \$1,500 and no business experience, Mel and Patricia Ziegler turned a wild idea into a company that would become the international retail colossus Banana Republic. Reimagining military surplus as safari and expedition wear, the former journalist and artist created a world that captured the zeitgeist for a generation and spoke to the creativity, adventure, and independence in everyone. In a book that's honest, funny, and charming, Mel and Patricia tell in alternating voices how they upended business conventions and survived on their wits and imagination. Many retail and fashion merchants still consider Banana Republic's early heyday to be one of the most remarkable stories in fashion and business history. The couple detail how, as "professional amateurs", they developed the wildly original merchandise and marketing innovations that broke all retail records and produced what has been acclaimed by industry professionals to be "the best catalog of all time". A love story wrapped in a business adventure, Wild Company is a soulful, inspiring tale for listeners determined to create their own destinies with passion for life, work, and fun.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

If fiction, it would be called "magic realism," but "Wild Company" is a real story with a magical plot: Sympathetic characters (two talented, attractive young journalists) struggle against great odds (no money or business experience) to achieve a worthwhile goal (creative and financial independence). The result, readers know going in, is an against-the-grain company called--in one of many inspired moments--"Banana Republic," iconic in its heyday for outfitting a youthful generation in creative style for vicarious safaris. Just how audacious, shaky and danger-filled this sartorial adventure was

will entertain readers, ranging from those nostalgic for a rapidly receding era to the newest business school student seeking inspiration for the future. Considering that Mel and Patricia Ziegler quit dream jobs to go into business with no idea what that business might be, "Wild Company" is an aptly titled tale that asks: just how many obstacles can mere love, determination and talent overcome? And on this safari the endless obstacles are as real and dangerous as Serengeti tigers or crocodiles: floods, deadlines, shysters, burglars, robbers, bank turndowns--all the perils and predators of commerce lined up and waiting. But as in magic fiction, the heroes are given special powers: she is an artist whose eye for fashion is backed by talent with needle and thread as well as pen, capable of re-fashioning short-sleeve Spanish army shirts into must-have haberdashery. His quirky writer's mind thinks outside boxes not yet invented, soaring to dizzying heights in telling catalog readers just how Spain (and other countries) could so err in labeling such treasures "surplus.

Wild Company is the tale of how two people left their unsatisfying jobs, created something they really weren't willing or able to nourish, and ultimately lost control of their creation. Their creation lives on, subsumed in a corporation that neither cares about or wants to remember what made the creation great, just one bland face of three. The Ziegler's both worked in journalism but were unsatisfied with their jobs. They stumbled into running a clothing chain due to a combination of luck, skill (art and writing, as well as an excellent eye for design) and serendipity. The book tells of many highs (finding bargains, excellent sales, extreme customer loyalty) and lows (they seemed to blindingly trust people and hire on a whim at times, which lead "in one case" to the loss of a very productive day's receipts due to a dishonest employee, and "in another case" to tens of thousands of dollars of merchandise being lost to another dishonest employee). I was actually surprised how early on in the chain's story they were acquired by The Gap. That acquisition gave them the capital to expand, add more things to the store and even (eventually) design their own clothing rather than sell (mostly) military surplus. But it also eventually doomed Banana Republic as it was. The earliest sign of this was the clash between the lawyer the Ziegler's had for the deal and The Gap's corporate counsel. Then came three family member's from The Gap's founder to work in Banana Republic. Two of the three seemed to fit in, but the third was an ongoing exhaustion to Patricia Ziegler with weekly and daily clashes over materials, clothing lines, new product launches, the way stores looked, etc. Eventually the Ziegler's left Banana Republic in what amounts to a coup by people within The Gap.

Banana Republic founders Mel and Patricia Ziegler, a journalist and artist/illustrator, had no business training whatever. As they started and grew their safari-inspired clothing company, they got many things wrong. But they got the most important things very, very right. Their creative instincts and uncanny understanding of human nature led them to establish one of the most exciting, thriving and profitable clothing companies ever. Their undoingâ "and that of the companyâ "came from the collision of their (wildly successful) approach with the linear, left-brained world of business â œprofessionals.â •This is a cautionary tale for every b-school student and hotshot MBA who probably knows todayâ ™s Banana Republic only as the mall-based high-end brand in the Gapâ ™s company portfolio. Today, itâ ™s a bit like Ann Taylor, a bit like J. Crew, a bit likeâ lots of other companies. But it used to be something remarkable. From its chaotic origins selling exotic, often peculiar surplus clothing from other countries, it became a sensation with a wide, devoted, and celebrity-studded public.In lively prose, with Mel and Patricia alternating as narrators, the Zieglers recount how, by following their own passions, they tapped a deep, thriving connection with consumer yearning for adventure, whimsy, and style. Unlike most business biographies, Wild Company is filled with humility, remarkable self-insight and great humor. With scrupulous evenhandedness they describe how acquisition by the Gap allowed the company to expand and flourish under initially loose reins.

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