A SAMPLE OF

Everything I Know About Business Books

by Todd Sattersten

The Unbook

Frankfurt 2010 Edition

"UNLESS, we admit that rules of thumb, the limited experience of the executives in each individual business, and the general sentiment of the street, are the sole possible guides for executive decisions of major importance, it is pertinent to inquire how the representative practises of business men generally may be made available as a broader foundation for such decisions, and how a proper theory of business is to be obtained. The theory of business, to meet the need, must develop to such a point that the executive , who will make the necessary effort, may learn effectively from the experiences of others in the past what to avoid and how to act under the conditions of the present. Otherwise, business will continue unsystematic, haphazard, and for many men a pathetic gamble, with the failures of each serious business depression made up largely of the best moral risks.

No amount of theory can be a substitute for energy, enthusiasm, initiative, creative ability, and personality, nor will it take the place of technical knowledge. Now, however, all of the personal qualities may be coupled with an adequate technical equipment, and yet the executive of wide experience may fail through our inability to grasp the broad underlying forces controlling business, a knowledge of which would give a sound basis for judgment. It is a serious criticism of our business structure that it so long lacked an adequate method by which these broad forces may be appraised, their probable course charted, and their application to individual executive problems made reasonably clear."

-Essential Groundwork For A Broad Executive Theory
by Wallace Donham. Harvard Business Review, October 1922

Introduction

THIS is an unbook, which means it is never complete. This idea challenges the very notion of the book which derives much of its authority from the unchanging permanence of the printed page. Software is a better metaphor for the unbook, a work product released in versions over time and continually updated to better meet the needs of the reader. This new way to see a book builds on the unit-of-one capability possible with print on demand technology and finally connects desktop publishing to a near-commercial publishing process. But all of that would make this book sound like a thought experiment.

Everything I Know About Business Books is more importantly a project to pull together a wide variety of writings and materials I have accumulated over the last eight years on the subject of business books. The sample you are about to read opens with my essay titled "How To Read a Business Book," which seems like a good place to start. The section that follows recommends business books in a variety of ways from my year-end list to Twitter posts I have forwarded. There is a section on my book The 100 Best Business Books of All Time. And I end with a short section on critiques. The full edition has some other treats including images and lists.

I put this project together in a little over a week, so I ask for forgiveness for the certainty of both grammatical and typographical error. Speed serves as both advantage and disadvantage with this form of publishing.

An important part of the unbook process is its improvement over time. If you have other materials that you think would enrich this book, I hope you'll share it. You can find me at these places:

- Twitter at @toddsattersten
- Email at todd.sattersten@gmail.com
- Web at http://www.toddsattersten.com.

Thanks,

Todd

READING

How To Read a {Business} Book

DURING my sophomore year of high school, a family moved into our rural, southeastern Wisconsin school district. Their two kids had been educated in the fancy private schools in the inner suburbs of Chicago, which was immediately evident by the books they were reading.

The son was a year older than me and our daily interaction took place when he pulled his French horn from the instrument locker next to the one where my baritone was stored. He was always reading until the last possible moment before band class started. His selections of Poe, Twain, and Fitzgerald were distantly familiar, but one day he entered reading Mortimer Adler's How To Read A Book. You can only imagine the number of times he was sarcastically asked, "How do you read a book about reading books if you don't know how to read a book?" Everyone took their shot. The cheap and easy laughs at his expense showed just how insecure the rest of my class- mates and I were.

I may have been one of the kids mocking that boy, but twenty years later, my view could not be more different. During the year it took to write The 100 Best Business Books of All Time, Jack and I had to start reading a new book at the beginning of each week and compose a thoughtful review of the book's premise and arguments by week's end to reach our contractual deadline. While we had both reviewed books for years, the pace of the book project made it essential for us to discover a set of reading rules that could be used to save time and improve comprehension as you navigate the thousands of business books that are published each year.

Here are some of the things we learned along the way.

Get a Recommendation

Publishers are very good marketers. They spend enormous amounts of time constructing clever titles and designing shiny dust jackets in the hopes you will pick up—and ultimately buy—their books. This is precisely the point where most readers make their first mistake.

Think about the first business book you read. It was probably *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey or *Good To Great* by Jim

Collins, or maybe *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters and Bob Waterman. In any case, I bet you read that first book because someone you trusted recommended it, and reading that first book was likely a meaningful experience for you. It shook your world up just enough that you saw things a little differently.

After your experience with that first valuable business book, you likely logged onto Amazon or ran down to Barnes & Noble in search of more solutions and good reads. And this is where things go bad for most business book readers. Undoubtedly, your second book purchase was a less satisfying experience than your first.

The problem? 11,000. That is the number of business books published in the United States every year. Placed one atop another, the stack would stand as tall as a ninety-story building.

Recommendations reduce the noise. Suggestions from friends and colleagues are best, because they know you and your circumstances. Reliable media sources that regularly review business books, like The Wall Street Journal and BusinessWeek, are also a great source for slimming the pile. Blogs, tweets, and Facebook statuses can be just as valuable. Online booksellers offer customer reviews on their product pages, and physical bookstores have helpful employees who can help you find a book

Worthwhile as they are, recommendations merely reduce the size of the pile. Our next step is to determine which book is right one.

The Promise

All books that are worth your time deliver a clear promise. The author and publisher use several mechanisms to make that promise clear and, when well-executed, these cues align to show the reader what they'll get from their time spent with the book.

Start with the cover. The title gives the book a name. The subtitle tells you what the book is about. Observe the colors used and the fonts chosen. Most business book covers are simple with only text. Sometimes, you'll see an image or author photograph that provides additional clues to the promise. Again, this is all marketing, but if executed properly, you should know what you are getting yourself into.

Next, quickly scan the Table of Contents. The authors provide the outline of the book in a couple of pages. You can see, in bullet-point form, the topics and arguments the authors intend to make.

The order and length of the arguments is clearly displayed. Most business books are made up a three to five major sections, each containing a number

of chapters. Chapters are always titled and often subtitled to provide additional context. Some authors go even further and telegraph the contents of each chapter. You might be surprised how often a scan of the Table of Contents will rule out a book and send you onto the next.

The introduction is THE most important part of any book. Seriously. I am always amazed by the number of people who tell me they skip the introduction and jump right to Chapter One. You may have gotten accustomed to skipping the introductions to Penguin Classics at university, but in business books, introductions are something different. You can immediately sense the tone and pace the author is going to use. Most use a story to illustrate the difficulty or challenge the book is going to tackle. More importantly, the introduction should provide an explicit promise and the path by which it will be delivered. If you can't make it through the introduction, and if it doesn't leave you intrigued, chances are the book isn't going to turn you on either.

In the Introduction to *The 100 Best Business Books of All Time*, we said:

> "The endless stream of new books requires a filter to help discern the good and the better from the absolute best. The solution to that problem is this book, The 100 Best Business Books of All Time."

If you were standing in the middle of your Barnes & Noble business section reading this and didn't think you needed help finding good books, we made it very easy for you to discern that this was not the book for you.

Let's look at a few other introductory promises from some very good business books: From *The Art of Woo* by G. Richard Shell & Mario Moussa:

> "Our attention in this book is squarely on the problems you face when you must persuade others who are, at least nominally, on your team."

They are saying clearly to the reader, "If you were looking for car salesperson skills, perhaps another book would be more up your alley."

From *The Halo Effect* by Phil Rosenweig:

> "Think of it as a guide for the reflective manager, a way to separate the nuggets from the nonsense ... The central idea in this book is that our thinking about business is shaped by a number of delusions ... The ones that distort our understanding of company performance, that make it difficult to know why one company succeeds and another fails."

If you are in the market for a "how to" guide to business success, Rosenweig is telling you to look elsewhere because he intends to puncture our false hopes that there is just such a guide.

Read the whole introduction—generally only around ten pages—and once you combine that with the cover and content elements, you can determine if this is the right book for your problem. If the promise is unclear, or if there is a conflict between cover and copy, move on. If no promise can be found, run as fast as you can the other way, because murky intentions lead to murky execution.

One last note: There are many elements of a book's packaging that are not worth spending time on. The marketing copy on the inside flap is always well-written and persuasive, but don't think it substitutes for hearing what the author has to say in the introduction. Forewords are usually just friends or acquaintances of the author saying nice things about the author or idea. And the endorsements on the interior or exterior of the book offer the same biased references as fore- words, doing little to help you triangulate the promise and path.

Starting at the End

A couple years ago, Les Tuerk—the co-founder of speaker's bureau, BrightSight Group—told me that he started every book at the end. Not at the last chapter or couple of pages, but in the index. Les said that all the key concepts included in the book were easily recognizable, from companies mentioned and famous people cited, to pre-existing concepts specifically called out. And the citations show you exactly where they can be found.

That insight really struck me as novel. And, as I began to apply that advice myself, I found the chances are good that, if there is some version of the problem you are wrestling with described in the index, you are holding the right book in your hands.

Chapter summaries have a similar and equally valuable potential to show you where the meat of the material lies within the book. With the exception of CEO biographies and Malcolm Gladwell narratives, business books are not meant to be read from cover to cover. Skimming is a perfectly acceptable method of reading this genre and chapter summaries can make the process go even faster. More and more books are including short, bulleted lists at the end of every chapter to improve memory retention, but these also act as a substitute for intensive reading. Most people argue that they don't have time to read business books, so don't think of it as cheating, but instead as the time-saver that it is.

Whether you start at the end of a chapter or the end of the book, you will still need to read the book. And the good news is that you will want to once you've perused these fertile areas and found that this really IS the book for you.

It Is Not About You

Congratulations! You are done with the tough part of sorting through the pile of recommended reading you gathered from various sources. If you have done it right, you may have spent ten to fifteen minutes looking through those recommended titles to find the book that is best for you.

Now, while you may think this is finally the moment when you can settle into your comfy chair at home and soak up the solution to your problem, I want you to stop and do something a little counter intuitive: I want to you think about someone else while you're reading.

One of the best ways to improve retention of the material you are about to read is to imagine yourself having to tell someone else about it. That act of imagining yourself as teacher completely changes the way you read. As you turn the pages, you start to anticipate what would be most interesting and applicable to your "class." You begin to organize the structure by which you are going to share this new information. The logical result of this strategy is to record memorable and valuable highlights.

Leave Your Mark

Recording what it is you learned from reading a book should happen both inside and outside that book.

First of all, get over any fear you have of writing in a book. Business books are meant to be inter- acted with. Take a pen and leave notes in the margins. Get out that pink highlighter you used in college and mark up passages that strike you. The guys at Brand Autopsy used to keep a Dog- Ear Score for the number of pages folded over by the time they reached the end. Tim Sanders, in his book *Love Is the Killer App*, suggested that important learning points be written on the first blank page in the front of the book and great quotes for future presentations be recorded on the inside back cover. Personally I became a fan of 3-M Post-It Flags in writing *The 100 Best* for quickly marking pages that I needed to return to later.

Now you need to share what you have learned with the world. It doesn't matter how. Pick a form and a medium and go with it. Steve Cunningham at readitfor.me decided videos were the best way to share his passion for business

books. Chris Yeh builds book outlines on the aptly titled wiki, book outlines. Sean wrote short reviews and provided mind maps drawn on brown paper bags at stickybusinessbooks.com. John Moore uses SlideShare and creates quick presentations with the "money quotes."

Just write a review—100 characters or 1000 words—and give it to someone to read. You get the idea.

Leaving marks in the book and leaving your own mark about what you learned will help you solve your problem and, in tandem, help others solve theirs.

Choose Your Own Path

Many people take a lot of pride in being able to speed-read. Others flaunt it when they read a book cover to cover in 1 day. And many books get recommended with the following sentiment: you won't be able to put it down!

But that's not the way to read a business book. Instead, set at least fifteen minutes aside to read and don't spend much longer than 45 minutes. Too short a time and you can't get your brain calmed down enough to pay attention to what you are reading. Too long and you'll exceed your cranial buffer and start to forget important pieces. One of the common excuses executives give for not reading more business books (which are the most economical way to get new ideas) is not having enough time. Reading for less than an hour at a time means you can move through a chapter in one or two sittings, and an entire book in about a week's time. Just think of the inspiration and information you can gather reading 52 books a year.

If the book isn't working for you, stop reading it and choose another. It doesn't matter if you are 20 pages or 200 pages in. Ignore the $20 and couple hours you've invested and move on. And don't bother to fool yourself into thinking you will return to the book at some later date. There will always be another book on the same subject worth more in its unexpectedness and execution. Always remember that if you took the time and care to choose the right book to solve your problem, the reading should be enjoyable too.

Connect the Dots

Remember those summer book reading challenges staged by your elementary teachers? Those posters on your classroom wall on which you got a star sticker for every book you completed. Since the third grade, you have been told you should read more. It's still great advice. As working adults, one reason you should read more business books is so you understand more about

business books.

Books are about context, the greater meaning. Being able to connect multiple books together improves our ability to compare and contrast approaches and philosophies.

The biggest risk in this ocean of workplace self-help is choosing a course of action that doesn't work for you. You can't know if you are headed in the right direction unless you have a key to the map and know what else is out there.

Professor Albert Madansky at the University of Chicago says, "You can only truly comprehend and evaluate a business book after you have read many of them. Fortunately, as you become better at reading them, you also become better at selecting them."

Again, we return to the importance of selection in the process of reading.

You Only Need One Idea

I've been a passionate advocate of business books for years, way before I started working for a business book retailer. And here I've argued that business books offer the solutions to your business problems. But now, I want to lower your expectations as to what business books can deliver. Even with all the precautions that we have discussed here to help you choose the right book, you are still going to read books that don't deliver on their promise, or offer prescriptions similar to numerous other books. You are going to spend some money and time that you will not be re- warded for. You are going to read deeper into some books than you should. There is nothing you can do about it.

So let's set the goal as something very modest: One good idea. That's all you need.

Let's do the math to prove it. The book is around $25 and the time you spent reading it is worth $400, so let's round it up to $500. I can guarantee that you will find at least one idea in each book you carefully choose and sit down to read that can deliver $500 worth of benefits.

So, let's summarize how to read a business book:

- Spend more time choosing books to avoid reading the wrong books.
- Search for the promise the author makes.
- The end can be a great place to start.
- Read as much for others as yourself.
- More books read means more understanding gained.
- You only need one good idea.

I hope that helps you set your expectations right from the start and spend more time reading great books.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Forty Best Business Books Since January 2009

IN MAY 2010, Bloomberg ran a list complied by James Pressley of the Top 50 Business Books published since January 2009. If you wanted to read about financial engineering, Wall Street, economic collapse, and pessimism, this is the perfect list for you. Books like Animal Spirits, Freefall, and The Greatest Trade Ever make up the bulk of the list as is to be expected from the leading media company providing data to financial services.

A better list is required though; one that provides a more well rounded, positive view of what is possible in the world of business. Without much effort, I pulled together a list of forty books that show the new ways thought leaders are giving readers to think about business.

- **The 1% Windfall** by Rafi Mohammed - The nuts and bolts of pricing.
- **The Anatomy of Buzz Revisted** by Emanuel Rosen - revision of the classic manual on word of mouth marketing.
- **The Art of Choosing** by Sheena Iyengar - if you know the jam story from Blink, you know Iyengar's research on decision-making.
- **The Back of The Napkin** (Expanded Edition) by Dan Roam - pictures solve problems.
- **Borrowing Brilliance** by David Kord Murray - great take on innovation.
- **Bursts** by Albert-László Barabási - scientist's take on how the world works
- **Business Model Generation** by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur - beautifully designed book on how to think about business models.
- **Change by Design** by Tim Brown - IDEO CEO makes case for wider use of design in business
- **The Checklist Manifesto** by Atul Gwande - New Yorker writer and practicing doctor says we should go back to making lists
- **Chief Culture Officer** by Grant McCracken - Anthropologist to corporate America says not knowing culture costs companies billions.

- **Click** by Ori Brafman and Rom Brafman - The subtitle says it all "The Magic of Instant Connections"
- **Cognitive Surplus** by Clay Shirky - This prognostication makes clear the promise of online collaborations.
- **The Design of Business** by Roger Martin -
- **Delivering Happiness** by Tony Hsieh - Zappos CEO shares his philosophy.
- **Different** by Youngme Moon - a wonderfully different take on marketing.
- **Drive** by Dan Pink - Motivation comes from autonomy, mastery, and purpose.
- **The Essential Bennis** by Warren Bennis - a wonderful collection of his best writings.
- **Fierce Leadership** by Susan Scott - refreshing take on leadership
- **Free** by Chris Anderson - overview of the price of zeros and the effects that has.
- **The Four Conversations** by Jeffrey Ford and Laurie Ford - best book I have read on management in the last five years.
- **Greater Than Yourself** by Steve Farber - a fable about mentoring and a lot more.
- **How The Mighty Fall** by Jim Collins - The opposite of Good to Great.
- **Ignore Everybody** by Hugh Macleod - To use the author's term, this is a cubicle grenade.
- **Linchpin** by Seth Godin - a book about art, gifts, and shipping.
- **The Little Big Things** by Tom Peters - classic Tom.
- **Minding The Store** edited by Robert Coles and Albert LaFarge - a great collection of fiction that takes place in the business setting.
- **The New Rules of Marketing & PR** (2nd Edition) by David Meerman Scott - The marketing manual for Web 2.0 .
- **The Power of Pull** by John Hagel, John Seely Brown, and Lang Davison - Big Idea means Networking book
- **The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work** by Alain de Botton - the title says it all.
- **The Predictioneer's Game** by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita - great book on decision-making
- **Priceless** by William Poundstone - another book on pricing, but driven by narrative and research.
- **Rework** by 37 Signals - the guys behind Basecamp share their philosophy.

- **Rules of Thumb** by Alan Webber - Founding editor of Fast Company shares what he has learned doing some amazing things.
- **Seizing The White Space** by Mark Johnson - Shows how to build entirely new business models.
- **Strengths Based Leadership** by Tom Rath and Barry Conchie - Just buy it, everyone else has.
- **Switch** by Chip Heath and Dan Heath - "How to Change When Change Is Hard."
- **Think Twice** by Michael Mauboussin - Always interesting insights into how we make decisions.
- **Trade-Off** by Kevin Maney - Convenience versus fidelity, choose only one.
- **The Wall Street Journal Guide to Information Graphics** by Dona Wong - Wonderful book on how to better present your data.
- **What Would Google Do?** by Jeff Jarvis - What makes Google different and interesting thought experiments on those applied to other industries.

Five Business Books That Defined the Decade

AUTHOR Matthew May wrote a post in January 2010 listing his five selections for "Books That Defined The Decade". He describes his list as "big idea" books [that] stand out because not only did they help us better understand the world, they gave us a new lens through which to view it."

His choices included:

- *The Lexus and The Olive Tree* by Thomas Friedman
- *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell
- *Free Agent Nation* by Daniel Pink
- *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki
- *Freakonomics* by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner

Mr. May is directionally correct, but let me offer a different list for consideration.

Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell (February 2000).

This American Life Host Ira Glass has said that we are living in the Golden Age of non-Fiction writing. I don't think *Tipping Point* marked the arrival of this Golden Age, but the publication of his first book surely heralded the work and growing popularity of many writers including Michael Lewis, Susan Orlean, Chuck Klosterman, and Michael Pollan.

Good To Great by Jim Collins (October 2001)

Jim Collins certainly had the momentum of *Built To Last*, but the book could have just as easily gotten lost in the aftermath of 9/11. Collins provides the management algorithm for the 21st century and his research hasn't been without question, but Good To Great is hands down the business book of the decade.

The World Is Flat by Tom Friedman (April 2005)

Thomas Friedman belongs on the list, but I would choose his 2005 book *The World Is Flat* as the book of note. *The Lexus and The Olive Tree* was certainly important in reporting the developments from the field, but The World Is Flat marked the arrival of a new state; the description for how the planet would operate going forward. *The World Is Flat* might also be the title of the decade (*Never Eat Alone* is a close second). Interesting that *Freakonomics* and Gladwell's second book *Blink* also arrive in 2005.

A Whole New Mind by Dan Pink (March 2005)

Dan Pink described the trend in *Free Agent Nation*, but more importantly identified the work we should be doing in *A Whole New Mind*. Design, Symphony, Story, Empathy, Play and Meaning. When Oprah says "Last spring I read a book I just couldn't put down," you have hit on something. Interestingly, *A Whole New Mind* also came out in 2005.

StrengthsFinder 2.0 by The Gallup Organization (February 2007)

The final spot I would give to the folks at Gallup. *Now, Discover Your Strengths* and *StrengthFinder 2.0* have created a cultural conversation around the need to pursue and enhance strengths while minimizing the criticism of weaknesses. The robust tools for identifying those strengths have made the meme that much more powerful. Marcus Buckingham deserves credit for driving that message as well during his time at Gallup and in his recent projects.

A couple final points...

- My list doesn't exactly overlap with May's given my emphasis on books that impacted business and his on big ideas.
- *Freakonomics* is a great read and has plenty of stories to talk about at a cocktail party, but little we can take with us into our daily lives.
- James Surowiecki certainly identified what Web 2.0 would bring and I loved the book, but *The Wisdom of Crowds* still missed creating a greater cultural wake in (again) 2005. I remember Surowiecki say at SXSW in 2006 that Gladwell's *Blink* had outsold him 10 to 1. It could be that we like reading about individuals that we can mirror ourselves in versus amorphous collectives and group phenomenon that we have a hard time identifying with.

Source: http://www.openforum.com/idea-hub/topics/the-world/article/five-books-that-defined-the-decade-matthew-e-may

Suggestions from the Twittersphere

AT the beginning of 2010, I started watching the sorts of things people were saying about business books on Twitter. Here are recommendations I retweeted in a variety of forms.

RT @MarchiREpartner Blue Ocean Strategy-if you haven't read this one it's worth the time. One of the best business books published recently
11:17 PM Aug 28th

RT @tom_peters 3 of best small biz books: Small Giants-Bo Burlingham. Retail Superstars-George Whalen. Delivering Happines-Tony Hsieh
12:24 PM Aug 15th

RT @StrategyBoxJohn Nobody writes page-turner non-fiction business books like Michael Lewis. Read "The Big Short."
10:17 AM Aug 2nd

RT @gregkureluk I've struggled to find biz books lately that really motivate me, until today. Rework. I can't put it down.
11:03 AM Jul 20th

RT @BLG One way I judge business books is how many colleagues/bosses/friends I want to give the book to. #OpenLeadership scores highly.
4:19 PM Jul 18th

RT @WuDatWuz The Art of War is one of the oldest and most successful books on military strategy, business tactics, and beyond
2:54 PM Jul 14th

RT @AnnieMosher Reading Rework and What the Dog Saw. Digging the reading words on paper thing. If you own your own biz, I highly recommend.
11:55 AM Jul 9th

RT @MelJintheUSA Love that universal principles abound in biz books. Good to Great: humility, balance, integrity, the right ppl = greatness
9:55 AM Jun 29th

Books @zappos CEO rec's: Good to Great, Tribal Leadership, Made to Stick, The Game, Comedy Writing Secrets and Happiness Hypothesis
June 25, 2010 3:55:56 PM PDT

RT @kevinac Never been a huge fan of business books other than [Pat] Lencioni but these guides are useful [5 Dysfunctions,Death by Meeting]
10:15 AM Jan 26th

One of My Favorite Business Books of 2009

Trade-off: Why Some Things Catch On, and Others Don't
by Kevin Maney

Tucked in Neal Stephenson's wonderful book Snow Crash is this comparison in a fictional future where all highways are owned by corporations:

> "CSV-5 has better throughput, but Cal-12 has better pavement. That is typical—Fairlanes roads emphasize getting you there, for Type A drivers, and Cruiseways emphasize the enjoyment of the ride for Type B drivers."

Author Kevin Maney recognized that we make comparisons and choices like this every day, sometimes taking for the fastest route while other times opting for the best ride. Maney says in his book *Trade-Off* the only path to success is for companies to concentrate on one of two those needs. Pursuing both is the path of failure.

Maney uses the words convenience and fidelity to describe the opposing needs. The wide availability and low cost creates convenience, while fidelity combines the experience of purchase with the prestige of the brand and the way it reinforces our identity. Our choice of easiest versus best is complicated, flipping back and forth based on the needs of the moment.

Think about hiring an employee. A call to Kelly Services will conveniently fill the open position tomorrow. Pick up the phone, dial Spencer Stuart, and they'll start a comprehensive search for the best candidate in the world. Both approaches fulfill the need in completely different ways and with understandably different results.

If this sounds familiar, the convenience/fidelity trade-off is another route at the well worn discussion of transactional versus relationship-driven businesses. Others have described the tension as price versus prestige. John Hagel and Marc Singer went as far as suggesting that companies should be broken up along the lines of infrastructure management (convenience), product in-

novation (fidelity), and customer relationships (fidelity) because the demands of each where so unique.

Maney addresses the challenge of trying to do both, describing it more as an impossibility. In the dual pursuit of convenience and fidelity, Maney says companies chase a mirage and over time are sucked into a place of increasing irrelevance where customers understand less and less why they need your products. 35mm film, movie theaters, and Starbucks all serve as anecdotes.

Some are going to read *Trade-Off* and say they have seen this play before. Maney is surely tapping a recognized strategic tension, but the updated vocabulary and examples are refreshing, a good reminder to the challenge that all companies face between satisfying the convenient now and the high-resolution, 700 horsepower, oceanfront, 24K gold plated image floating in their customers' heads.

THE 100 BEST

8 Interesting Things about The 100 BEST

This is the press release that we wrote for The 100 Best with a bunch of interesting facts that we were able to extract from looking at all the books we chose.

1. 11,000 Business Books, Every Year

According to RR Bowker, 11,000 business books were published in the U.S. in 2007. That's 44 new business titles every single business day. If your job was to read every one of those books, there wouldn't enough hours in the day.

The 100 Best distills 30,000 pages of the most important wisdom about work, business, and leadership to 300 pages, in 100 reviews. Each 700-word review does much more than summarize the book — it provides context for the ideas, arguments and insights, and explains who benefits from the book, and how to use its wisdom to solve problems.

What's more, the choices of **The 100 Best** and the analysis of the most valuable material to be found in them come from Jack Covert and Todd Sattersten, creators of what is undoubtedly the most-valuable business-book community, 800-CEO-READ.

2. The 100 Best Shows: Modern Management Really Exists

Of the books in **The 100 Best**, 94 were published after 1980. That's not an accident. And given the history of important books about business and management — stretching back to Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations" (first published in 1776), The 100 Best represents a remarkable set of choices. The world of business, work and management really has changed — and these books show you how and why.

1980 marked a turning point in the world of work. The rigid processes and hierarchical structures of the 1960's and 1970's were supplanted by decentralization and team-based projects.

"In Search of Excellence," published in 1981, typifies a parallel change in business books. Instead of an impenetrable academic treatment of organizational design, Peters and Waterman produced an accessible — even fun — case-study of organizational practices that widened the market for reading about business beyond the executive suite. **The 100 Best means the most**

relevant, most revealing, most useful books from the world of business. Not necessarily the classics, or the most important ones.

Michael Porter, Abraham Maslow, and Ken Blanchard are all deservedly legendary, but their books do not appear anywhere in **The 100 Best**. Instead, Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahalad, Warren Bennis and Steve Farber do. Their books are accessible and useful to the contemporary reader, and so, they made the cut.

3. The 100 Best Offers Three Distinct Perspectives on Business and Work

All of **The 100 Best** fall into three simple categories: they are the work of thinkers, doers, or observers.

- 66 authors fall into the traditional role of Thinker: these are the academics and consultants who study, research and report. Minds like Tom Peters, Jim Collins, Bob Sutton.
- 23 authors are the Doers: these are the CEOs, the entrepreneurs, those who have spent time in the trenches. Leaders like Lou Gerstner, Richard Branson, Paul Hawken.
- 11 authors are Observers: these are the reporters and writers who watch with a cool neutral eye and reveal things we can't see ourselves. Authors like Malcolm Gladwell, Michael Lewis, Richard Preston.

4. The 100 Best Takes Success Seriously, And Also Failure

Success matters; so does failure.

Formulas for success abound in the business book category. And 43 of **The 100 Best** employ this approach, including "How to Be a Star at Work," "How to Win Friends and Influence People," and "Good to Great."

But failure is often an equally effective learning tool, when properly understood. Eight of **The 100 Best** focus on failure exclusively, including "Five Dysfunctions of a Team," "The Innovator's Dilemma" and "To Engineer is Human." Sixteen more balance the good with the bad.

5. Megachange: Companies That Remade The World

Business is among the most powerful forces for societal change, and 14 of **The 100 Best** are books about companies that defined, or redefined, whole industries or the world of business at large.

These are role models — companies where the moment in history, the management, and the insight about what to produce came together in unprecedented ways: General Motors, General Electric, Toyota, Wal-Mart, Hewlett-Packard, McDonald's, Nucor, Standard Oil, Enron, Intel, Herman

Miller, The Oakland A's. It is of note and interest that these companies remain highly relevant in today's business headlines, and are gaining iconic status as companies to watch for change and direction.

6. Fiction Isn't Just for Entertainment

Fiction is a great teacher. There is a common myth that academic books, nonfiction books, provide the most direct access to knowledge. In fact, though, it is stories that really enable people to understand a problem, identify with it, and learn from the subtleties of a situation.

The 100 Best features 25 works of fiction: 4 parables, 2 fables, 5 novels, 4 children's tales, and 10 movies. And in "Questions of Character", Joseph Badaracco shows how fiction can be used to teach leadership and ethics.

7. Business books solve problems.

Sitting at the educational crossroads between "I know nothing about this" and "Let's hire a consultant," business books contain a high value proposition for the twenty dollars and two hours spent. **The 100 Best** guides readers to the books that can help everyone working in business. It puts each book in context, so that readers can quickly find solutions to the problems they face, such as how to spend "The First 90 Days" in a new job or how to take their company from "Good to Great."

8. Business Books Can Change You, If You Let Them

Reading about work, business, leadership can change you — can change the way you relate to other people, can change the way you see the world, can change the way you think about your career and the story-line of your life.

The 100 Best is filled with the kind of books that open the world.

- "The Lexus and The Olive Tree" inspires you to think global, no matter how local your work.
- "Now, Discover Your Strengths" quizzes you, and then shows you how to explore and develop your talents, instead of focusing on your weaknesses.
- "Moneyball" reveals that any industry is ripe for reinvention.

The magic of "The 100 Best" is that these books work whether you're a front-line manufacturing worker or the CEO of an accounting firm. And **The 100 Best** is organized to let you find the books that will matter to you now, and help you most.

The Five Universal Themes in Business

WHAT happens when you spend 18 months reading the best in business literature? In our case, two things happened—one expected, the other quite unexpected.

The expected was the creation of a list of the 100 best business books of all time, which led to a book by the same name.

The unexpected came as we uncovered a number of meta-themes the books share that exist beyond any predictable grouping by subject matter. For example, Michael Useem's *The Leadership Moment* has surprising connections with as Taichi Ohno's *Toyota Production System* and Gary Klein's *The Power of Intuition*.

Ultimately, we found five persistent meta-themes across our selection of the 100 best business books. Each meta-theme appears horizontally across traditional publishing categories, bridging such divisions as sales, management, narrative, and finance. Each meta-theme also scales in a vertical sense, applying to individuals, teams and organizations equally.

So profound are these meta-themes, we argue, that these five universal insights act as the foundation for a leader dealing with any aspect of business, whether starting a new job or developing the next year's corporate strategy.

1. **Clarity of Purpose**: Purpose provides direction and brings clarity to all work. For the individual in pursuit of purpose, author Po Bronson asks the ultimate question in his book, *What Should I Do with My Life?* Organizations struggle with the same kind of question when they craft their mission statements and massage their marketing slogans.
2. **Wisdom in Decision Making**: The process of making decisions is often overly deliberate or completely unconscious. In both cases, we base our decisions on past experience and judge our successes only on the outcomes. In *Influence*, Robert Cialdini alerts us to how we use unconscious routine to make even the smallest decision, while in *The Power of Intuition*, Gary Klein provides a map to some of that scripting and shows how we can improve our gut instinct.

3. **Bias for Action**: Tom Peters and Bob Waterman pointed out in *In Search of Excellence* that a quality of excellent companies was "the bias for action." This assertion that action trumps all appears in many great books, so what keeps us from taking action? Author David Allen (*Getting Things Done*) would say a person's focus is misplaced on time and priority, rather than action. Authors Jeffery Pfeffer and Bob Sutton (*The Knowing Doing Gap*) would say organizations suffer from a gap between knowing and doing.
4. **Openness to Change**: Understanding change is essential because change affects individuals and organizations constantly. Sales is about change. Marketing is about change. Corporate strategy about is about change. Lou Gerstner says it was changing IBM's entitlement culture that was his biggest challenge. In *The First 90 Days*, new job guru Michael Watkins describes the waves of change that new managers must create. In *Crossing the Chasm*, Geoffery Moore shows how products are adopted and what different constituents need to accept change.
5. **Giving and Getting Feedback**: Imagine throwing a baseball in a dark room. You would miss seeing the trajectory the ball took or where it landed. Our success depends on feedback. Did we make the right choice? Did the action have the intended effect? Are things changing? Daniel Goleman (*Emotional Intelligence*) says self-reflection is a form of feedback and an essential piece of emotional intelligence. Engineering professor Henry Petroski, author of *To Engineer is Human*, says failure is a critical part of learning. And in *Secrets of Closing the Sale*, Zig Ziglar says listening is the most important part of selling.

These five meta-themes are not only important on an individual level, but they also overlap and reinforce one another. For instance, Peter Drucker said in *The Effective Executive* that decisions are not truly made until someone is doing something different than they were the day before. And it is clear that feedback determines the success one has with any and all of the other meta-themes.

The five meta-themes feed into each other as well. Clarity of purpose provides wisdom in decision-making, which informs action, which creates change, while feedback makes everything work better. They also resonate with the stages of the "hero's journey" made famous by mythology scholar Joseph Campbell. The archetypal heros of myth and popular culture walked more or less the same path as Jack Welch.

It's painfully obvious that companies continually fail to absorb these simple lessons. The question is, hat will it take for us to internalize the insights won by our heroes?

CRITIQUES

"The Modern Era's Second Worst Promulgator of Intelligence Reduction"

In April 2008, Elizabeth Spiers wrote the following op-ed in Fast Company Magazine:

Library of the Living Dead
Embrace a business best seller at your brain's peril.

CONTRARY to what your parents and teachers told you, reading does not necessarily make you smarter. Sometimes it doesn't even require you to think. I would send you a copy of Nicole Richie's novel, The Truth About Diamonds, as demonstrable proof, but there's a clause in my contract prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment. Instead, I'll point you to the modern era's second-worst literary promulgator of intelligence reduction: your local bookstore's business section.

We're all aware of the genre's clichés. There are the tortured metaphors (usually involving cute animals with simple, vaguely ambulatory problems -- mice chasing moving cheese, penguins realizing their iceberg is melting and having nowhere to go) and the slightly less persecuted similes (business is like *The Art of War*, business is like Winnie the Pooh, business is like having your pinkie finger pulled backward until the pain is intolerable). There is the gratuitous manufacture of new jargon that sounds like English but is in fact spoken only in hotel conference rooms near the airport.

We're nearing the total 12-step-ification of the genre. Eleven of the top 15 business books at press time are how-tos. Jim Cramer's Stay *Mad for Life* tops the list, a personal-finance primer and brand extension of the CNBC personality's "Mad Money" show, wherein the ex-hedge-fund manager shouts stock recommendations seemingly under the impression that his expertise is more incisive at higher decibels. The book, which surprisingly is not written in ALL CAPS, doles out instructions in the form of mechanical dos and don'ts. This, of course, makes it exactly like almost every other business best seller.

So many books promise financial riches and personal professional growth, as long as we abide by the rules. "There is a formula," Donald Trump assures

the reader in his book, *Think Big and Kick Ass* (No. 8), "a recipe for success that the top 2% live by and that you can follow to be successful." Naturally, Trump's formula isn't the same as Suze Orman's (No. 7) or John Kotter's (No. 14). So which road leads to success?

The answer is that, sadly, none of them do. When managers buy those books in bulk for their employees, there may be some well-intentioned hope that the books will provide a useful framework for solving problems. But the real utility of 7 Habits and 12 Disciplines and 50 Ways is that they create the illusion of progress simply by adding another layer of busyness.

Business books let us amble zombielike through our careers, freeing us from responsibility for the quality of our own decision making. Better to delegate that responsibility to other people -- Jack Welch, perhaps. It's a fresh spin on the old saw that no one ever got fired for buying IBM: No one will ever get canned for leaning on something with a Ken Blanchard blurb on the front cover. The alternative, too frightening to contemplate, is to admit that problems are usually too complex to be reduced to one-size-fits-all solutions, to train ourselves to do our own analysis, and to be a little more skeptical when the shrieking man on TV tells us to buy shares of Google right this very minute. If we can't do that, let's at least reshelve business best sellers where they belong -- in the self-help section.

The following is my letter to the editors of Fast Company Magazine in response to Ms. Spiers column :

Dear Editors of Fast Company,

I write to provide a needed counterpoint to Elizabeth Spiers April 2008 Not So Fast column titled "Library of The Living Dead."

I will start where she ends, agreeing in fact with Spiers' ultimate conclusion: Business books are self-help, by their very definition. The implication that business books fall strictly into the "I'm OK, You're OK" segment of self-help is where Spiers and I diverge. A book publisher recently shared research with me that showed the number one reason people buy business books is to find a solution to a problem. Sitting at the educational crossroads between "I know nothing about this," and "Let's hire a consultant," business books contain a high value proposition for the twenty dollars and two hours spent. Not, as Spiers says, to abdicate responsibility for the choices they make. Instead, it takes a great deal of personal awareness to look for answers from those who offer experiential lessons in books.

The packaging of those lessons receives the majority of criticism in Ms.

Spiers column and I am always dismayed by the problems pundits have with this aspect of the industry. Human civilization is built upon stories and when an author chooses a fable as the delivery device, the writer is making the lessons more accessible to a wider audience.

The "12-step-ification" is a crutch that bloggers, business magazines, and book publishers certainly use alike, in the same way celebrity authors are used to garner attention and sell product. This is simply product marketing through concreteness and social proof.

The bestseller list as a guide to the "best" in the category is just another form of social proof. My optimism for the category would bring me to highlight Gallup's research-based *StrengthsFinder 2.0* or Jim Collins' insightful and wonderful written *Good to Great* as evidence that some books that make the bestseller list really deserve the title.

In the case of John Kotter, we have the benefit of choosing either his current top-selling fable, or his 1996 book *Leading Change*, which has sold over a million copies. Both books tackle the same content, but offer options for the reader to choose his method of consumption.

Ms. Spiers overall indictment of the entire business book category is an easy mark and one that could be applied to any genre of media. Her elitism about what constitutes good reading compounds the problem further. While I can appreciate her hyperbole as a method to communicate some criticism about the genre, a more subtle treatment of the subject would, I believe, be more effective.

Beyond that, Fast Company is a magazine that has always supported business ideas. A simplistic column like Spiers' goes against the very DNA of your publication. The mantra "WORK IS PERSONAL" matches well with Thoreau's or Emerson's definition of self-help. The publication of this column leaves me wondering just how that mission has been served.

Thanks for reading!

If you are going to be attending the 2010 Frankfurt Book Fair and would like the full version of *Everything I Know About Business Books*, send me message on Twitter during the fair and I will meet you with a copy.

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