

Why Every Leader Should Prioritize Reading

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For some people, the idea of a summer reading list conjures up all the panic of a high schooler trying to absorb all of “A Tale of Two Cities” the night before school starts. For me, a reading list (no matter the season) is an exciting opportunity to keep becoming my best self.

If you remember being a kid who avoided summer reading until the very last minute, I invite you to rebuild your relationship with reading. It’s not about checking off a box or taking a quiz. It’s about embracing your curiosity and the continual process of development that all leaders must keep in mind.

Curating your growth mindset

Professional development can take many forms, but effective leaders know that reading is a vital part of their plans. Reading has such a high return on investment because it’s a double whammy activity: It increases your knowledge while helping your brain relax, recharge and rewire.

The first step is building a reading list aligned with your goals as a person and leader. Whatever you’re interested in, no matter how niche, there are plenty of books to explore. If you aren’t sure where to start, embrace crowdsourcing and ask for advice. I trust my network, and asking them to add to my reading list yielded more than a dozen thoughtful recommendations to guide my reading.

The first book on my summer reading list was a recommendation from a trusted colleague and franchising superstar, Mary Kennedy Thompson, CEO of BNI. *The CEO Next Door* by Elena L. Botelho and Kim R. Powell explores the four traits most commonly identified in CEOs. The trait that most resonated with me was the importance of decisiveness. I followed that theme and dove into *Decisive* by Chip and Dan Heath as my next read. Reading one book can pique your interest and lead you to the next book and the next for as long as you want to follow the thread.

Fueling creativity and innovation

Innovation requires knowledge and curiosity. Reading ignites both. A book-length exploration of a topic allows you to immerse yourself in the subject and examine it from multiple angles in a way that shorter formats don't. When leaders give their brains new information and the time to explore, assess and create connections, they create an environment primed for innovation.

In *Decisive*, the Heath brothers advise that when facing a problem, "one of the most basic ways to generate new options is to find someone else who's solved your problem." This is a great first step in problem-solving, but the guiding principle has even broader applications. When we seek out new information and a better understanding of how other people experience and influence the world, we expand our own capabilities.

Related: [3 Big Reasons Why Leaders Should Embrace the Joy of Missing Out](#)

The well-read advantage

Reading deeply doesn't just add facts to your storehouse of knowledge. It's also a study of storytelling, persuasion, and

psychology. A robust body of research shows that reading has a profound positive impact on adults.

Reading is related to high creative performance and a wider vocabulary. Reading is also closely correlated with increased emotional intelligence by strengthening empathy and theory of mind. Plus, studies suggest that reading has a protective quality for our brains as we age. Adults who read more are less likely to experience cognitive decline.

Leaders looking to take advantage of these benefits shouldn't limit their reading list to the business section. Exploring stories outside your usual realm is a must for creativity. Matthew Haller, President of the International Franchising Association, gave me one such recommendation slightly outside of my wheelhouse. Erik Larson's *Demon of Unrest* is the story of the tumultuous handful of months between the election of Abraham Lincoln and the beginning of the American Civil War. I don't plan to lead an army any time soon, but I am always looking to learn more about interpersonal dynamics and the art of navigating crises – lessons that apply to any leadership role.

Related: [How Reading Books Helps Your Brain Recharge](#)

Make reading a strategic priority

Stay flexible – read a paragraph at a time or permit yourself to start with chapters that interest you more. Embrace audiobooks during your commute, exercise routine, or errands. It's a worthwhile challenge to fit reading into your schedule. Staying up-to-date on the latest trends can be part of your job (looking at you, marketers), but consider how much value you could add to your routine by swapping 30 minutes of scrolling with 30 minutes of reading each day.

Prioritize reading just like you prioritize other essential leadership development initiatives. When employees see their

leader committed to growth, they are encouraged to adopt the same approach. By prioritizing development through reading, you cultivate your own leadership skills and contribute to a culture of continuous learning within your team.

Related: 3 Steps to Create a Leadership Development Framework

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