

A Millennial’s Tips for Reading Engaging Business Books

Career Development



Julie Stankiewicz is currently a 2L student and interned with Noah Webster at Zix Corporation over the summer. She wrote this article based on career development discussions they had during the internship.

Whether it comes to career development, career and life transitions, or wearing the many hats you need as in-house counsel: if you want to learn something, find the right book!

That sounds simple on the surface. In my experience, I've read several books on the same topics and sometimes it doesn't click until I find the right one. Reading on a topic that is important or interesting to you should be enjoyable — not a struggle to find the information that you want.

When a book is intriguing and flows in a way that is right for me, I find it much easier to stay focused and engaged, recall the information in the long term, and look forward to coming back to it when I need a refresher. The bonus of reading an enjoyable book is suggesting it to others.

Not every book on a topic will click or be the right book for you, so be selective and don't spend time on books that don't work for you. Move on so it doesn't slow your progress. When looking for books, consider some of these approaches.

Read the same topic from a different angle

Simply approaching the same topic from a different perspective could be the necessary step to finding a book that clicks. Preferences on what viewpoint resonates with you are a good starting point, for instance, consider whether you prefer reading something about *what to do* or *what NOT to do*.

Take for example *Winning Now, Winning Later* by David Cote and *Lights Out: Pride, Delusion, and the Fall of General Electric* by Thomas Gryta and Ted Mann. Cote approaches the topic of leadership through a discussion of Honeywell's success. On the flip side, Gryta and Mann approach the same topic by covering General Electric's failure.

Many of the lessons in both books are the same, just from different perspectives. These two books also highlight the benefit of reading each of the books having different takes on an issue — there is juicy history between Cote, Honeywell, and GE.

Find books targeted to you

Although books intended for a broad audience can get you the information you need, finding one that is specifically directed at you may be more intriguing and far more beneficial.

Take for example *What Got You Here, Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful* by Marshall Goldsmith and How Women Rise: Break the Twelve Habits Holding You Back by Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith. Both books cover the same general subject matter: breaking bad habits that get in the way of our success.

Within the first pages of the co-authored *How Women Rise,* however, Goldsmith reveals that stumbling blocks identified in his first book were different for women and more likely to affect men — thus the later collaboration with Helgesen on a book targeting at women.

Although I recommend picking the book that is directed at you, there is an added benefit of reading books intended for different audiences. In reading these two books, for example, you can gain perspective and understanding on the behaviors of coworkers and be better equipped to support them on their journey of growth and development.

> Goldsmith reveals that stumbling blocks identified in his first book were different for women and more likely to affect men.

Of course, there is not a book targeted at each and every group. But take advantage of it where you can, and perhaps take this as a challenge to write and fill a needed gap.

Consider the author's background

Approaching a book search based on the author's background may seem like the obvious direction when you need good insight on a specialized topic. Need a good book on leadership? Choose the one written by a successful CEO. Need a good book on interviewing? Choose the one written by a seasoned recruiter.

I offer an additional approach: Consider the story structure. I've read several books on using "story" in business and the one I like best is *Stories that Stick* by Kindra Hall. Unlike many other authors who write books based on their prior business experience, Hall is a storyteller first. Hall began her storytelling journey at a young age and offers a unique perspective on the topic.

Another approach is finding authors whose backgrounds resonate with or reflect your own. I have often found a considerable interest in books written by authors whom I share similarities with — including upbringing, schools attended, and professional interests — as these similarities provide me with a deeper understanding on the author's perspective. Plus, finding a relatable author can help when you're having trouble finding books specifically targeted to you as a reader.

Try library-curated books

The library is a wonderful resource for finding great books. Librarians are paid to acquire the best books through a multitude of criteria and they are often experts in their fields, so the selection is always exceptional.

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I commonly find great books at the library and through my library's audiobook app. I found *The First 90 Days* and *Acing the Interview* at the library; these are among my highest go-to recommendations to others.

Ask your mentors or colleagues for recommendations

Ask around to learn about what others are reading! Your peers are a great starting point for finding books and topics that could be the right fit for you. Book lists from luminaries are also a good source of ideas. Searching "best books for (insert topic)" produces results for a vast number of articles containing book lists on topics ranging from career growth to the in-house counsel industry.

While receiving recommendations is a good starting point, keep in mind that you can still be selective — although a book might work for others, it still might not work for you. And if your experiences change, you can always come back to it.

Consider your personal experiences

A hand full of times, I have put a book to the side because it simply did not click, but after some time I found myself coming back later because my perspective changed.

> The bonus of reading an enjoyable book is suggesting it to others.

Take for example, the “hot” book of my 1L year. *1L of a Ride* was the most highly recommended book to read by peers, mentors, and the internet.

Browsing through Amazon, the book has equally incredible reviews and a plethora of testimonials from readers describing how much this book helped them in their first year of law school.

For me, it didn’t click. For my incoming class, the consensus was about 50/50. Speaking with students on both sides of the debate, some read it forcefully hoping it would help, others enjoyed it thoroughly, and for some it simply did not resonate.

The majority of students who didn’t resonate with the book said it was because they couldn’t connect to it. None of the suggestions were applicable to their prior experiences and the topics discussed were completely foreign. I finally came around to finishing the book and learning from it, but only after my first semester. I could clearly link my experiences with the suggestions in the book and used the book to build on everything that I had already learned on my own.

Parting thoughts

These are only a few features to consider when looking for the right book. Find a direction or an intersection of topics that work for you and you will be enjoying what you read in no time. And don’t forget to suggest the great ones to your peers.

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Noah Webster



Chief Legal and Compliance Officer

Everbridge

Noah Webster is chief legal & compliance officer for Everbridge, a global software company that empowers enterprises and government organizations to anticipate, mitigate, respond to, and recover stronger from critical events. In today’s unpredictable world, resilient organizations minimize impact to people and operations, absorb stress, and return to productivity faster when deploying critical event management (CEM) technology. Everbridge digitizes organizational resilience by combining intelligent automation with the industry’s most comprehensive risk data to Keep People Safe and Organizations Running.

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