

Great Summer Reading

Here are four terrific books that you might enjoy this summer. One is an enduring classic of nature writing. Two are great management books that are not technically about management. And the fourth is a very interesting brief overview of the history of mankind.

***The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod*, by Henry Beston.**

In 1927, Henry Beston spent a year living in a one-room house on the beach at Cape Cod. He wrote this wonderful book in longhand at his kitchen table. In it, he describes his observations about the changing moods of the beach and water, and the joy of living in solitude in a little room overlooking the North Atlantic and dunes. Beston originally planned to spend just two weeks in the house, but was drawn to stay for a whole year. Some great chapters: “Autumn, Ocean, and Birds”, “Night on the Great Beach”, and “Orion Rises on the Dunes”. How good is this book? First published in 1928, it is still on the shelves of most bookstores.

***The Accidental Billionaires: The Founding of Facebook*, by Ben Mezrich.**

This terrific book tells the story of Mark Zuckerberg’s founding of Facebook. Ben Mezrich’s fast-paced book narrates the engaging story of how Zuckerberg translated a relatively simple idea into one of the world’s most popular websites – carving out a dominant competitive position in less than a year. Look for the essential elements of Facebook’s positioning success: focusing on something everyone does all the time, offering a slightly more efficient solution, and network effects that spread like wildfire. Something to think about for the inner entrepreneur in all of us. This book is very well written, and much better than the movie.

***Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime*, by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin.**

This fascinating history of the 2008 U.S. Presidential election is both a great read and an insightful management study of one of the most incredible turnaround electoral victories in U.S. history. The book tells the inside story of how Barack Obama vaulted from relative obscurity to beat the clear frontrunner, Hillary Clinton. This is a story of his relentless, thoughtful management, juxtaposed against Hillary Clinton’s dithering approach. It is a study in the critical importance of management style and process. Also compelling – the story of John Edwards’s implosion, and of John McCain’s selection of Sarah Palin to be his running mate. Although *Game Change* is not technically a management book, it is one of the best management books written in recent years.

***The Origin of Humankind*, by Richard Leakey.**

In this short volume, renowned paleontologist Richard Leakey systematically answers the question, “What made humans human?” Leakey surveys our knowledge of the prehistory of humankind over the past three million years. This story is fascinating. But more importantly, the book is a wonderful example of concise, insightful analytical writing: in 157 pages, Leakey frames the essential arguments over humankind’s prehistory, impartially weighs the evidence,

and offers well-synthesized conclusions. It is a great example to managers of how one can systematically investigate and deeply understand a complex field. Besides, think about this: modern humans only emerged 35,000 years ago, and began to settle in villages only 10,000 years ago. Look at the technological progress all around us – it's truly astonishing.

A Short Bonus

Check out David Brooks's recent *New York Times* op-ed column, "[The Unexamined Society](#)". It is a great explanation of the importance of clear thinking about things that managers and policy makers all too often take for granted. Here is his lead-in: "Over the past 50 years, we've seen a number of gigantic policies produce disappointing results — policies to reduce poverty, homelessness, dropout rates, single-parenting and drug addiction. Many of these policies failed because they were based on an overly simplistic view of human nature."

Marsha joins me in sending our best wishes to you and yours for an enjoyable, relaxing summer.