



Since [2013](#), I've written an annual blog post highlighting my favorite books from the previous 12 months. This year I wanted to try something different. I wanted to share some of the lessons I learned from the list of 40+ books I read. Even though each book offered numerous insights, I captured five significant lessons that resonated the most with me. Below the lessons is the full list broken down into categories.

1. Our Networks Are Everything

Many view networks through the lens of climbing the corporate/professional ladder, however they are so much more—they are everything. In [Friend of a Friend](#), David Burkus argues that the people we surround ourselves with influence our development, our fitness, our happiness, and our overall success in life. In all the biographies I read, successful people such as [Einstein](#), [Leonardo da Vinci](#), or even [Coach Saban](#), surrounded themselves with those who could help them grow and improve their craft. McCrystal also emphasizes the importance of strong networks in [Team of Teams](#) and even more so in [Leaders: Myth and Reality](#). This lesson gave me a greater appreciation for my own networks and how I can leverage them to improve myself and others.

2. To Be Worth Following, You Have to Lead Yourself

All the great leaders I read about, had one thing in common: They led themselves. They made the most use of their time, were disciplined, and took their learning into their own hands. One of my favorite books on this topic was Robert Greene's [Mastery](#). He examines the process of mastering any skill and writes, "No one is going to help you or give you direction. The odds are against you. If you desire an apprenticeship, if you want to learn and set yourself up for mastery, you have to do it yourself, and with great energy." Marcus Aurelius who served as the Emperor of Rome for almost two decades, reflected on the importance of gaining self control in [Meditations](#) and his ideas were further expanded upon in Ryan Holiday's [The Obstacle is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials into Triumph](#). In the end, our time wants to be filled, and where there is an absence of purposeful activity, time wasters will fill the void. If we can learn to master ourselves, we will be in a better position to lead others.

3. All Advice is Autobiographical

When people try to give us career or life advice, they typically discount the role that luck, networks, individuals, their families, and personal inclinations got them from point a to

point b. I wrote about this in a [post earlier this year](#). If we follow their advice, we may find ourselves heading down a dead-end road. [Tim Ferris](#), [Ryan Holiday](#), [Jonathan Haidt](#), and [Stanley McChrystal](#) all speak to the importance of understanding how multiple factors either contribute to or detract from our success and fulfillment. For example, Doris Kearns Goodwin makes a case in [Leadership: In Turbulent Times](#) that the major setbacks of Lincoln, the Roosevelts, and Lyndon Johnson eventually gave them the tools to succeed during rough periods of their presidencies. We should seek to understand what unique gifts we bring to this world, our purpose, and then set goals that are in line with both.

4. Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast

One of my favorite quotes attributed to Peter Drucker is “Culture eats strategy for breakfast“. In other words, regardless of the strength of your plan or the number of star performers on your team, if the chemistry that holds everyone together is weak— your endeavor is bound to fail. The topic of culture came up time and time again in many of the books I read. [Culture Code](#), [Team of Teams](#), and [Radical Inclusion](#) all offer sound advice on investing in organizational culture.

5. Write it Down

Reading books isn't enough, we need to be able to absorb it and turn our knowledge into action. As Todd Henry points out in [Die Empty](#), “Intellectual growth doesn't occur from the accumulation of tidbits of information, but from considering it and integrating it.” The heroes, masters, and leaders I read about over the last year wrote notes in the margins, captured their ideas in notebooks, and made this practice routine. This better enabled them to incorporate what they learned into their lives. Terry Doyle in [The New Science of Learning](#) makes the case that by writing in the margins or taking notes on what we read, we create multi-sensory connections to what we learn, thereby increasing the likelihood it will be stored in our long-term memory.

Below is the list of books I read this past year. I hope you find something that piques your

interest and make reading a part of your daily routine.

2018 Reading List

Leadership

[48 Laws of Power](#) by Robert Greene

[The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact](#) by Chip Heath

[Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World](#) by Stanley McChrystal

[The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups](#) by Daniel Coyle

[Leadership: In Turbulent Times](#) by Doris Kearns Goodwin

[Meditations](#) by Marcus Aurelius (Gregory Hays Translation)

Productivity and Personal Growth

[Friend of a Friend: Understanding the Hidden Networks That Can Transform Your Life and Your Career](#) by David Burkus

[Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen](#) by Donald Miller

[The Obstacle is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials into Triumph](#) by Ryan Holiday

[Mastery: They Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment](#) by George Leonard

[Tribe of Mentors: Short Life Advice from the Best in the World](#) by Timothy Ferriss

[Do the Work](#) by Steven Pressfield

[The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom](#) by Jonathan Haidt

[Die Empty: Unleash Your Best Work Everyday](#) by Todd Henry

[The 4-Hour Workweek](#) by Tim Ferriss

[Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World](#) by Michael Hyatt

[The New Science of Learning: How Brain Research is Revolutionizing the Way We Learn](#) by Terry Doyle

[Mastery](#) by Robert Greene

Technology and Adaptation in War

[Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War](#) by Paul Scharre

[LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media](#) by Singer and Brookings

War and Competition

[On Grand Strategy](#) by John Lewis Gaddis

[Men at War: What Fiction Tells Us about Conflict, From the Iliad to Catch-22](#) by Christopher Coker

[The Accidental Superpower: The Next Generation of American Preeminence and the Coming Global Disorder](#) by Peter Zeihan

[The Absent Superpower: The Shale Revolution and a World Without America](#) by Peter Zeihan

[Conspiracy: Peter Thiel, Hulk Hogan, Gawker, and the Anatomy of Intrigue](#) by Ryan Holiday

[Strategy Strike Back: How Star Wars Explains Modern Military Conflict](#) by Max Brooks

[Directorate S: The CIA and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan](#) by Steve Coll

[Redefining the Modern Military: The Intersection of Profession and Ethics](#) by Finney and Mayfield

Biography

[Leonard da Vinci](#) by Walter Isaacson

[Creators: From Chaucer and Durer to Picasso and Disney](#) by Paul Johnson

[Einstein: His Life and Universe](#) by Walter Isaacson

[Steve Jobs](#) by Walter Isaacson

[Leaders: Myth and Reality](#) by Stanley McCrystal

[Saban: The Making of a Coach](#) by Monte Burke

Fiction

[Enemy in the Wire](#) by Andy Symonds

[Tides of War](#) by Steven Pressfield

[The 2020 Commission Report on the North Korean Nuclear Attacks Against the United States: A Speculative Novel](#) by Jeffrey Lewis

[The Iliad of Homer](#) by Homer

[Nexus](#) by Ramez Naam

Just Because

[The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America](#)
by Erik Larson

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