



By Joe Byerly

Recently, I spoke with the Sergeant Major of the Army about COVID-19 and the challenges and opportunities we are facing right now as an Army and a Nation. He highlighted that now is the time to [reassess our goals and set new ones](#).

One of your goals might be to read a book or two during this time. Goals are important and they are even more important now, as we all deal with the necessary restrictions to stop the spread.

We spoke again this week and he shared his reading list with me. He found that reading has helped him grow professionally and as a person. SMA Grinston also shared that reading helps him take a mental break from the day-to-day stressors of life. He even says that if he

wasn't a reader, he wouldn't be the Sergeant Major of the Army.

You will notice that most of the books on this list aren't about military battles or written by people in the Army for people in the Army. For the SMA, he likes to read about things outside the military to get new and fresh ideas. We both hope you find something on here that interests you.

The Reading List - in the SMA's words

Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness by Richard M. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein

This is a controversial book -which is one of the reasons I like it. I read it when I was the FORSCOM Sergeant Major and it's about choice architecture and how small changes to our environment can make a big difference. For example, the authors discuss an elementary school that placed food in different locations in the cafeteria to "nudge" the kids to make healthier choices...and it worked.

Since reading this book, I look at how I can make small changes to the placement of things in my personal life or in the Army to make it better.

Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Action by Simon Sinek

I read this book as a brigade or division sergeant major, and it reminded me that sometimes in the Army we jump to the end first. When we ask our soldiers to do something, we focus on the how or the what and forget to explain the why.

Our enlisted Soldiers are smart, and when you explain the why to them, it increases their commitment to the mission. Sometimes, there isn't enough time to explain why we are doing something, especially in the middle of a firefight, but most of the time we can. And as

leaders, this is where we need to start.

The Slight Edge: Turning Simple Disciplines into Massive Success and Happiness by Jeff Olson and John David Mann

After I was nominated Sergeant Major of the Army, people asked me for the keys to my professional success. I struggled to answer this question until the commander of the Old Guard recommended this book. *Slight Edge* helped me define for others how to be successful in the Army and how I got to where I'm at today.

The authors of this book look at what happens when you do something that no one else is willing to do and continue to do it over a long period of time. I've been in the Army for 32 years and every morning I wake up and do physical fitness. I read books for self-development. Doing those small things over time, year after year, made a difference in the long run. It's about developing the discipline and commitment over a long period of time to achieve your goals.

Outliers: The Story of Success by Malcolm Gladwell

I think I was a Platoon Sergeant or Sergeant First Class when I read this book. Malcolm Gladwell discusses how it's not only innate abilities that make people successful, other factors play a major role too -like timing.

One of the examples he uses in the book is Bill Gates. Growing up, Bill Gates had access to a computer early in his life which afforded him the opportunity to get 10,000 hours of practice with programming. Yes, he was born in the right place at the right time, but he also took advantage of the opportunity to make himself better.

This book has helped me focus on looking at the opportunities within assignments. I remember when I was nominated to be the brigade sergeant major of an infantry brigade. That job gave me the requisite skills and opened doors that led me down a path to where I

am today. We all have the opportunity to be an outlier if we have the right mindset.

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Carol S. Dweck

Since reading *Mindset*, there isn't a day that goes by that I don't reference or think about it. She writes about two mindsets: Growth vs. Fixed. A growth mindset says that even though I'm not good at a certain skill, I can learn and get better over time. With a fixed mindset, we don't even try because we think we can't grow beyond our current skill set. This line of thinking becomes more dangerous the higher in rank and position that leaders go in the Army.

Becoming a Resonant Leader: Develop Your Emotional Intelligence, Renew Your Relationships, Sustain Your Effectiveness by Annie McKee

I read this one as a corps sergeant major and this is probably my all-time favorite leadership book. Have you ever worked for someone and knew they weren't listening to anything you said? As leaders, our level of emotional intelligence has a major impact on the morale of our Soldiers. We have to listen to our people and be mindful and show empathy.

This book made me a better leader, sergeant major, and follower. I started paying more attention to my own mindfulness.

Winning by Jack Welch

I read this one around the time I was a sergeant first class or first sergeant and it taught me about the importance of managing talent. Welch writes that the top 5% of any organization needs to be identified and properly managed. He also writes that there is a large population of strong performers that will never be the top 5%, but are also important to the organization. He discusses how to identify, manage, and motivate both groups.

Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman

This is the hardest book to read on this list. It took me a while to get through but I found it beneficial to understand the psychology of decision-making. I gained a much greater understanding and appreciation for how the mind works.

It's difficult to read, but it helps us better understand how the mind works. If you like sociology and psychology books, this is a great starting place. The higher I go in position in the Army, the more I realize how important it is to understand human behavior. I have a greater appreciation now for how logic and emotion work together in the decision-making process and I know I'm a better leader and person for it.

Starship Troopers by Robert Heinlein

I read this one when I was a staff sergeant. I remember my battalion commander making all the officers read it and I wanted to learn something alongside them.

This was another controversial book when it was written. Heinlein uses science fiction to talk about what it means to be a citizen; he addresses the need for corrective training and several other issues that we see playing out today. This book is a fun read and makes for a great discussion between leaders in a unit.

Once an Eagle by Anton Myrer

I read this one when I was a brigade sergeant major. It's a thick one so if you decide to tackle it, it might take you awhile. I like *Once an Eagle* because it covers an entire career of an individual, his commitment to the Army, and the lessons he learns along the way. I found that when I read it, I put myself in the shoes of the main character and reflected on my own career.

Start today

During our interview, Grinston said he hopes you will want to read and take the opportunity now to start the habit of reading for professional development.

“I know life is difficult right now for a lot of people. But we will get through this.”

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