



In a recent interview on the [From the Green Notebook Podcast](#), the team asked retired General Stanley McChrystal for book recommendations. He began by sharing the book that was the most influential to his military career.

[Once an Eagle](#) by Anton Myrer. He gave 50-100 copies of this book away to leaders over the years and read it about six times at various stages of his career. When he was a young leader, he drew simple comparisons from the book, strongly identifying with the character of Sam Damon. But as he read it again later in his career, he observed that in some ways Courtney Massengale was a more effective leader than Sam Damon. McChrystal commented on Massengale's ability to accomplish things within the military that remained out of Damon's reach. He said that in continually revisiting the book, he began to gain a nuanced view of leadership, seeing that both men possessed strengths worth emulating. But above all, *Once an Eagle* taught him the importance of identifying and focusing on those things which are important, and remaining true to them, otherwise you will live a life full of regret.

He said that while he will always encourage military leaders to read traditional books such as Ron Chernow's [Grant](#) (2017) for the benefits of reading about past military leaders, he

also challenges military leaders to “read eclectically” -to read outside of their profession. He said leaders should be open to choosing books that at first appear as if they have nothing in common with the subject, but in reading them, they will gain an appreciation for varied topics and enhance their perspective.

He then shared a few of titles he recently picked up:

[*Deep Thinking: Where Machine Intelligence Ends and Human Creativity Begins*](#) by Gary Kasparov (2017). He appreciated the lessons on strategy this book presents, but emphasized the relevance of this book in terms of the way it touches on the human component of leadership.

According to McChrystal, his perspective on leadership has been further influenced by reading books on political leaders. For example, reading biographies on Franklin Delano Roosevelt gave him an appreciation of the benefit of leaders building buy-in and consensus in organizations to achieve results.

[*A Promised Land*](#) by Barack Obama (2020). He said this book was phenomenal and gives readers a window into how the former President saw politics in the U.S. and his decision-making. He then encouraged military leaders to not become political, but at the same time, to recognize the need to understand politics. McChrystal said that in understanding politics, and the challenges political leaders face, military leaders can gain empathy and be more effective.

Finally, he encouraged leaders to go back and read the classics.

[*Democracy in America*](#) by [Alexis de Tocqueville](#) (2002). McChrystal commented Tocqueville's observations from the 1830s allows us to relearn lessons about democracy that are valuable today.

He closed with reminding leaders if they fail to read eclectically and become well-rounded, they will never be as effective as they could be.

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