



by Jakob Hutter

During a [speech](#) in 1957, Dwight Eisenhower made a paradoxical statement about preparation when he told an anecdote about the maps used during military training in Leavenworth. He stated, “plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”

Just as leaders most likely have plans to conduct training, perform physical fitness, or even meal planning, planning helps you stay focused on what you want to accomplish and achieve.

However, one plan many may not have considered is a reading plan. Chances are that if you’re reading this, you understand the value of furthering your personal and professional development and are committed to a lifelong learning mindset. As for me, I have always taken pleasure in reading. It provides me the opportunity to learn something new, as well as be able to transport myself to different times and locations in history, gathering a greater sense of appreciation for the lives people experienced. In addition, I enjoy being able to analyze these lessons learned and experiences to see how they can help me understand the

present and make me a better person and leader.

As I have gotten better at being more deliberate with what I read and how I choose to read over the last few years, I want to share a reading plan that has made reading more enjoyable for me, and how you can create your own while simultaneously encouraging others.

Having a reading plan, simply, is having a process in which you determine how you would like to navigate what you want to read, when and where you can best dedicate time to read, and how you want to retain what you read. This process typically involves setting realistic reading goals for the year. I recommend using the [SMART goal method](#) to focus your efforts and increase the chances of achieving your goals.

Once you have your goals ready, it is then important to start by figuring out what you want to read. Determine by approaching what topics you are passionate about and want to explore further. For example, I am passionate about history (American or military history specifically) and leadership, and most of my books focus on these topics. In addition, I also enjoy reading books on the social sciences, those that are logistics-focused, and fiction (mostly historical or science fiction) that I can learn and grow from.

The top five books that I have enjoyed recently include: [Yes to the Mess](#), [The Box](#), [Inclusive Leadership: Global Impact](#), [The Chemist](#), and [Braddock's Defeat](#).

Once you have found the book that you want to start reading, I recommend that your reading plan includes a way to keep track of your books. This can include books you are currently reading and books to read in the future. As for me, I currently use the [BookBuddy](#) app. This app allows me to find books quickly, while also being able to share and track books in my library. I am also able to create my wish list of books, which currently sits at almost 300 as of this writing. While this is a plethora of books to pick from, it helps me capture books that are either recommended by others or found interesting myself to later see if I want to get them.

Now that you have your goals set, you have the book you want to read, and are prepared to track your progress, it is important to establish good habits that can allow you to dedicate time to reading. This is important as you try to balance other life events and responsibilities that you dedicate time towards. For me, I try to find at least 30 minutes each day to read. In addition, I try to read before going to bed to decompress and relax from the day's events. I encourage you to find ways that you can find time to read each day that fits with your schedule.

To ensure your reading plan is adding value to your personal and professional learning and growth, it is then essential to effectively retain and implement the knowledge received from your reading. For many, simply reading the material without taking the time to review the knowledge gained can mean the loss of learned information, known as the “[forgetting curve](#).”

I try and keep a notebook nearby to capture important sentences and paragraphs that I feel are useful, sometimes in my own words with the book page for reference. This allows me to take a few moments to study the material. By the time I am done with the book, I have several sections and notes that I thought were key. I can then transfer my notes to my computer, so they are available digitally. No matter your method of maintaining the lessons learned from what you read, tracking your progress over time can be very rewarding.

With your reading plan, you don't have to limit yourself to just books. More recently, I started listening to audiobooks using Amazon Audible while I commute to and from work. Dedicating this time to listening to audiobooks has allowed me to explore some more fiction and other books that I may not have otherwise wanted to read.

However, if you are thinking about trying audiobooks, be selective in what you decide. For me, these include: [Born a Crime](#), [The Good Lord Bird](#), [An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth](#), [11.23.63: A Novel](#), and [The Molecule of More](#). While I still prefer to physically hold and read books, listening to these books expanded my horizons to new ideas and stories. If you want to give your eyes a break but still want to enjoy a book, give audiobooks a listen.

While audiobooks have been introduced to part of my reading plan, I also incorporate blogs and journals. Blogs and journals provide readers a way to engage in learning something new, be entertained, and discover trends in their profession. Articles such as these take only a few minutes to digest and can provide powerful lessons that others are willing to share. Some of these include not only articles [From the Green Notebook](#), but also [3x5 Leadership](#), [Harvard Business Review](#), [Military Review](#), and [Army Sustainment](#). These resources have been great in incorporating lessons learned and enhancing my leadership growth. Just as these blogs and journals cover what I am interested in, you may find that there are similar resources available that cover topics you're interested in as well.

The last aspect of your reading plan is how you can talk about what you learn and encourage others in wanting to read. While some have been turned off from reading, whether they were required to do so in school or find it boring, it only takes one amazing book that someone is interested to change their perspective. With the above in mind, there are a few habits that I have tried to implement.

I can be typically found carrying a book with me or at least having it openly available at my desk. I do this to show people what I am currently reading and can further engage on what I am learning so far if people have any questions. Sometimes, I will ask others what they are reading. Even if the other person responds with general disinterest, I see it as an opportunity to further engage to see what they enjoy and potentially recommend a book that fits their interests. On the other hand, if they respond with their book, I might ask if they like the book and why, as well as see if they are taking anything away from the book. Engaging in this effort allows me to encourage others to try reading, or an opportunity to potentially see if there are books to add to my own reading list.

In addition, at the end of the year, I review all the books and audiobooks I have read and listened to and share them on social media, sharing my recommendations on books that I really enjoyed. It serves as an opportunity to reflect on what I have learned over the year and to take the lessons learned into the new year.

Ultimately, remember that a reading plan is a moving target. As you gain insights and lessons learned from each book, your personal and professional learning is enhanced which, in turn, will help you grow and learn as a person and leader. While I provided a few books, audiobooks, blogs, and journals that I have enjoyed in this article, your interests may differ. I recommend looking [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for other reading lists that you may enjoy.

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