



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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On Reading

by Kristen Walter Wright

Last year, the Management and Personal Development Section sponsored our first annual book review competition. Troy Wieck's winning review is featured on page 24 of this issue of *The Stepping Stone*.

The MPD section council has a soft spot for reading, in line with our personal development focus. You may already be familiar with our popular Management Book Review breakfasts at SOA meetings; you can revisit past presentations of featured titles at MPD sponsored meeting sessions under Resources on the MPD section website (accessed through www.soa.org). You will likely see more resources regarding the latest business leadership and management books coming to the section website in 2011.

Individual talent and experience can create opportunities and success, though personal development through reading will give you an advantage. Reading builds knowledge and expertise, while application of your learned knowledge creates value. Reading strengthens communication skills, through comprehension, listening and increased verbal proficiency. Reading also allows for self-reflection as to what you know, what you do not know, and how you relate to the world around you.

In the 1950s, motivational speaker and author Earl Nightingale suggested one hour of study per day in your chosen field. With this one hour, one should be able to read one book per week, or approximately 50 per year. Fifty books! While I have not tallied the books I've read over the last year, 50 would be an exaggeration for me. How can one prioritize reading and ensure that it is an optimal use of their already limited time?

1. **Choose relevant books.** Select the books that are most important to you for where you are in your career and life. Relevant and applicable material is exciting and interesting; if the material is irrelevant, the subject matter is more difficult to read and process.
2. **Use audiobooks.** While audiobooks do not allow the listener to stop reading and synthesize ideas as readily as visual material, they can be a

convenient method of accessing more material while you are commuting to work or even while you are exercising.

3. **Take advantage of e-readers.** E-readers are convenient to have with you on the go and can store several books at once, marking your place in each one. In addition, a few e-readers can synchronize with an app you may have on your cell phone. While it is not easy to read an entire book on a cell phone, it can certainly be convenient to read a few pages of your current book while you wait for the dentist to escort you to the exam chair. A relatively unsung feature of some e-readers allows you to preview a book (usually the first chapter or two) before you commit to your purchase.
4. **Join a book club – or start one!** Book clubs serve as an effective means of reading books you may not otherwise consider and establish a forum for discussion of shared reading experiences. Office book clubs provide members with common vocabularies and circumstantial perspectives, which may result in a more effective work environment.

Reinforce what you've read. One acquaintance of mine insists on always carrying two books: the one he is reading, and a journal to note what he has learned from what he is reading. I write notes in the margins (or highlight and type notes on my Kindle) for quick future reference. Discussion of your latest reads with your mentors, peers, spouse, and friends cements thoughts and ideas you've gleaned from your study.

While the MPD Section tends to focus on leadership and management books, consider all genres of value. Memoirs and biographies provide invaluable perspective from other people, while fiction is enjoyable and expands your horizons as well: I recently finished *Bluebeard*, by Kurt Vonnegut and was delighted to learn what was in the potato barn! Our next book review competition will be announced shortly. Consider good books you've read recently – we are very much looking forward to reading what all entrants submit. ●



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