

INTRODUCTION

11,000. That was the number of business books published in the United States in 2007. Placed one on top of another, the stack would stand as tall as a nine-story building. And the 880 million words in that nine-story pile would take six and a half years to read. Locked somewhere in this tower of paper is the solution to your current business problem.

In fact, a book publisher recently shared research with us that showed the number one reason people buy business books is to find solutions to problems. Sitting at the educational crossroads of “I know nothing about this” and “Let’s hire a consultant,” good business books contain a high-value proposition for twenty dollars and two hours of your attention.

But it is more than that. Business books can change you, if you let them. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* will lead you to a paradigm shift from local to global. *Now, Discover Your Strengths* quizzes you, then encourages an exploration of your talents, not your weaknesses. And *Moneyball* shows that any industry is ripe for reinvention.

It is difficult to find those gems, though. The endless stream of new books requires a filter to help discern the good and the better from the absolute best. The solution to *that* problem is this book, *The 100 Best Business Books of All Time*.

Recommending the best in business books is in our company’s DNA. In the early days of 800-CEO-READ, Jack manually compiled a new acquisitions list every week to keep customers informed of the latest releases. This weekly list evolved into a set of monthly reviews called “Jack Covert Selects.” When Todd joined the company in 2004, the recommendations were further expanded to include a daily weblog, a semiweekly podcast, and the monthly publication of essays on ChangeThis (change this.com). The latest additions are the annual 800-CEO-READ Business Book Awards and the publication *In the Books*, both of which highlight the best of the year in business books.

After sifting through “the new and the now” of business books for a

quarter-century, we decided it was time to bring together the books that are most deserving of your attention.

OF ALL TIME?

Our choices for the one hundred best business books of all time will certainly find detractors. So early on we want to make clear our criteria for selecting these books. First, the most important criterion was the quality of the idea. Recognizing that judgment of quality is subjective, we found the only route to choosing the best was to ask of each book the same set of questions: Is the author making a good argument? Is there something new to what he or she is presenting? Does the idea align or contradict with what we intrinsically know about business? Can we use this idea to make our business better? After asking these questions of thousands of books, we found ample candidates. However, a good idea was not the only consideration in selecting the *100 Best*.

The second factor in choosing these books was the applicability of the idea for someone working in business today. We dismissed books that described dated theories that have since been replaced or those containing anecdotes for success about companies that no longer exist. For example, Frederick Taylor's turn-of-the-century view that laborers were merely replaceable cogs in some organizational machine has been largely replaced by a more humanistic view that individuals bring the diversity of their strengths to the work they do. The selections in our book represent a more contemporary (and thus, more applicable) point of view and in this way diverge from other "best of" lists.

Finally, the books needed to be accessible. A good idea is indecipherable when conveyed using cryptic language, and worthwhile messages get lost when surrounded by pointless filler. For all the love we have for Adam Smith, we didn't select *The Wealth of Nations* and its nine hundred-plus pages because of the sheer magnitude of the undertaking. We suggest Geoffrey Moore's *Crossing the Chasm* as a more accessible substitute for Everett Rogers's *Diffusion of Innovations*. In this sense, we champion the reader's need for clear access to whatever idea the author is selling.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

This book contains twelve sections, organized by category. We start with the most important subject of all: you. Then, leadership, strategy, and sales and marketing follow. We include a short section on rules and score-keeping, after which you'll find sections devoted to management, biogra-

phies, and entrepreneurship. We close with narratives and books on innovation and creativity and big ideas.

We leave you with a section called Takeaways. Constructed differently from the others, this part gives you a quick look into the world of business. All of these books serve as proof that business books can provide value for even the busiest person.

In the reviews themselves, we aimed to stay true to the promise of our subtitle, “What They Say, Why They Matter, and How They Can Help You.” This was an ambitious task in the 500 to 1,000 words we allotted for each book, but the effort resulted in reviews that are an amalgamation of a summary of the book, our own stories, the context for the ideas presented by the authors, and our take on how the book might best be used. Since we divided the task of reviewing the books, we’ve identified the reviewer (Jack or Todd) at the beginning of each entry.

We were as careful with the design of this book as we were with the selection of the books included. We drew on a wide variety of inspirations to create the layout that makes it something different. The browse-friendly style of magazines inspired our use of highlighted quotes, large headings, and rich illustrations. We mimicked the Choose Your Own Adventure children’s book series by giving readers the opportunity to choose their own path through the listings. And finally, scattered throughout *The 100 Best* are sidebars that stand independent from the reviews, taking the reader beyond business books, suggesting movies, novels, and even children’s books that offer equally relevant insights.

We truly hope you enjoy the book and use it to find solutions to your business problems. We’d love to hear whether you agree or disagree with our choices, and of any successes that resulted from reading one of the recommended books. Jack is available at jack@800ceoread.com, and Todd is at todd@800ceoread.com. You can also find more material online at 100bestbiz.com.