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# Reviving the golden habit of reading and remembering

I've long admired Warren Buffet for his ability to take complex issues and boil them down to their core, all the while mixing in his unique down-home humor to make the explanation both informative and entertaining. As an example, while the rest of us were still trying to figure out what hit us early in the current recession, Buffet was explaining that we were in the initial stages of a severe housing bubble with basically three cures:

- Blow up a lot of houses.
- Speed up the formation of new households by encouraging teenagers to cohabitate ("A program not likely to suffer from a lack of volunteers," he quipped.)
- Dramatically reduce the number of new housing starts below demand for an extended period.

So when I recently stumbled across this Buffet gem, I both chuckled and reflected on the truthfulness of his words, "If you want to be an outlier in achievement, just sit on your ass and read most of your life."

Buffet is legendary for being an insatiable reader. But it his ability to transform reams of information into useful knowledge and then decisively



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act upon it that sets him apart. Likewise, the colleagues that I have found most inspiring, informative and fun to work with are those who can not only cite interesting passages from their readings, but they feel compelled to find a way to apply their newfound knowledge. This trait seems to have less to do with their formal education (in fact, advanced degrees almost appear to be a deterrent towards action) and more a function of their outlook on life as an adventure to be fully experienced.

Upon finishing my bachelor's degree in engineering 30 years ago, I wanted to get as far away from formal education as possible (4 1/2 years of equations will do that). But my desire to continue learning only grew stronger, especially across a wider range of topics.

Reading has become my preferred method of learning. It provides ultimate flexibility in terms of time and place. The self-directed pace allows

me time to process and, most importantly, determine how the new knowledge can be applied in the real world.

So here's a quick summary of my all-time favorite books for leaders and managers.

- "Leading Change," by John P. Kotter, takes the complex topic of organizational culture and identifies eight critical phases organizations must successfully navigate if they are to realize true and lasting change. Kotter's work is backed by extensive research, and his writing style is straightforward. I utilize his eight-stage template when working with any organization that is serious about changing its culture.

- "Results That Last," by Quint Studer, should be required reading for any manager. Studer is the founder of the Studer Group, a management consulting organization that specializes in healthcare. Studer shares lessons gleaned from decades of working with numerous organizations and effectively summarizes best practice management behaviors. Almost every page contains a nugget of wisdom or recommended practice that can be applied.

- "First Things First," by Stephen R. Covey, is the ultimate life management book. Covey is without peer in his ability to address life balance and prioritization issues all workers, and especially managers, must master if they are to be productive and happy. The book has been a life-changer for me, and I frequently refer back to my notes when I'm beginning to feel a little off-kilter.

In a time of information overload, it's easy for the main "golden" ideas of what we read to get lost amid the noise of all the other data. A habit that has served me well for the past 20 years is to quickly summarize and document the most important points of a completed book. On a weekly basis, I review the notes from one book, perhaps one that I haven't read for years. This reinforces those lessons and challenges me to apply them during the coming week.

**Rick Brimeyer** is the president of Brimeyer LLC, an independent management consulting firm located in Ames that guides organizations to higher performance by focusing on process improvement and leadership development.

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