

Read to Lead

Suggested reading to enhance your leadership skills & spirit

Within the fire-service community, there exists a plethora of thoughts, trends and ideas that people have written about. Over the years, I've been taken by many people's philosophies on leadership, and in many ways, I've used their ideas to shape my own style and direction. True leaders examine other people's ideas, adapt those that work to fit their own lives and further examine those they question. Reading exercises your mind, enlightens your soul and opens your heart to new possibilities. In short, leaders are readers.

I've dedicated this installment of Company Officer Development to introducing you to some of the best books I've found on leadership and vision. It is my hope that you'll take the time to pick some of them up and read them. Although I have my favorites, the suggestions below are in no particular order.

"Sources of Power: How people make decisions" by Gary Klein (MIT Press)

The amazing thing about this book is that the author gathered about 40-50 percent of his research by studying fireground commanders and EMS personnel. Because of this, "Sources of Power" offers great insight into what leaders must know about decision making and how to provide new members with the tools to make decisions on the fireground, around the station and in life.

"The Oz Principle: Getting results through individual & organizational accountability" by Roger Connors, Tom Smith & Craig Hickman (Prentice Hall Press)

Accountability is one of the points consistently stressed by battalion chiefs and captains. This book provides a straightforward approach to how individual and organizational accountability should work. It examines the victim cycle and offers excellent insight into why people act the way they do.

"Credibility: How people gain it & lose it, why people demand it" by James Kouzes & Barry Posner (Jossey-Bass)

This book was a little difficult to read, but credibility is a critical aspect of leadership. Too many of our "managers" who wish they were leaders simply lack credibility. Remember the equation: Trust = Credibility + Respect. Take the time to review the concepts in this book—it's well worth it.

"Leadership" by Rudolph Giuliani & Ken Kurson (Miramax Books)

In this work, the former mayor of New York City takes a global look at leadership principles that can be applied to many situations. But beware: Giuliani is, of course, a politician; therefore, he's surrounded himself with the former fire commissioner and police commissioner, who couldn't even talk to each other before or after the World Trade Center collapse regarding command—but now they're out teaching it! Personalities and whom you surround yourself with aside, it's an excellent book.

"First Break All the Rules: What the world's greatest managers do differently" by Marcus Buckingham & Curt Coffman (Simon & Schuster)

I read this and thought, "Wow." This book includes in-depth interviews with more than 80,000 managers in 400 companies, forcing you to ask, "What do I do differently that makes me great, and others not so great?" It literally breaks every rule about conventional wisdom when dealing with customers and leadership. This book is great for those who believe there are other, less conventional ways to obtain excellent results.

"Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap ... & others don't" by Jim Collins (HarperCollins)

Think you know something about success, having read about successful companies and CEOs? Well, you know nothing! You'll be surprised at who started out successful and ended up a failure. This excellent book takes a long, hard look at the people and processes required to achieve long-lasting success.

"It's Your Ship: Management techniques of the best damn ship in the Navy" by Michael Abrashoff (Warner Business Books)

This book offers up one the most amazing success stories I've ever read. You think you've got it tough with the young members we're hiring today? Try going to war on a ship with crewmembers no more than 18 or 19 years old, and none of them have ever been away from home. Screwing up on the fireground is one thing, but putting a cruise missile in the wrong location is an entirely different issue. This is a must-read for you young officers. ▶



By Chase N. Sargent

"Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell" by Oren Harai (McGraw-Hill)

Although this book isn't an autobiography, it is written by a third party who thoroughly examines General Colin Powell's leadership principles and his rationale behind them. To me, Powell is one of the brightest leaders this country has ever had, and his leadership theories and principles are so applicable to the fire service, it's scary.

"Anatomy & Physiology of Leadership" by Alan Brunacini and Nick Brunacini (in press)

Bruno was kind enough to send me an early copy of this book to review, and I can tell you this is another must-read for both old and new officers. Bruno takes his typical humorous approach to the subject matter, but his writing is marked with genius. Don't miss this one.

"Corps Business: The 30 management principles of the U.S. Marines" by David Freedman (Harper Collins)

This work should be required reading for every new officer. "Corps Business" provides a wonderful analysis of the U.S. Marine Corps that can be applied to fire and rescue decision-making processes, personnel, command and control and running the organization.

"Warfighting: The U.S. Marine Corps book of strategy" by General A.M. Gray (Currency Double Day)

This is the most important tactics and strategy book you'll ever read. Pick this up, read it in one hour and I guarantee

you'll gain such an improved understanding of the fire and rescue ground, it'll make your head spin—but most importantly, it'll keep you alive.

"Who Moved My Cheese? An amazing way to deal with change in your work & in your life" by Spencer Johnson & Kenneth Blanchard (Putnam Adult)

Although it's a little corny, this is an amazing book about change. Its content applies to managing and seeing real change within the fire service. Its interesting, yet simple concepts will help you endure the changes in your organization and your job that continue to occur today, tomorrow and until you retire.

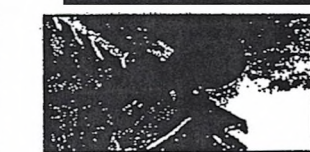
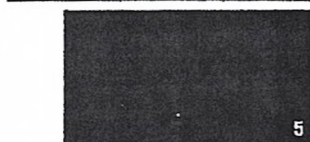
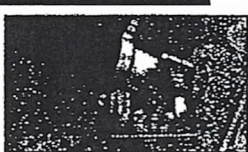
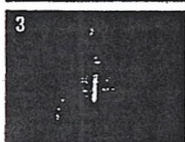
CONCLUSION

So there you have it—my list of the best leadership books on the market. I truly believe that if you're interested, you'll find the information in these books can change your leadership life for the better. ☺

Chase Sargent retired in December 2005 as a division chief/paramedic for the Virginia Beach (Va.) Fire Department after a 30-year fire-service career. He is recognized internationally as a consultant and instructor for fire, EMS and special ops teams—as well as owner/partner and president of Spec. Rescue International. A prior member of the NFPA 1670 Technical Rescue Standards Committee, he is well known for his straightforward, common-sense approach to teaching new and seasoned company officers how to become effective leaders. Chase now works as an independent contractor for the U.S. government and teaches at the bomb school in Socorro, N.M., as well as the Blackwater Lodge. He maintains his certifications and connections by riding backward as a volunteer firefighter and paramedic.

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