

The Entrepreneur's Holiday Bookshelf

B-school profs name the one title they would make required reading for entrepreneurs. Don't worry, they didn't all pick heavy textbooks

by Jeffrey Gangemi

Back in the spring, SmallBiz asked entrepreneurs which books were most influential in helping them build their companies. The result: Our popular summer reading list (see BusinessWeek.com, Summer, 2006, "Books that Matter").

As Seth Godin, blogger, entrepreneur, author, and founder of interactive direct marketing company Yoyodyne, which Yahoo! (YHOO) acquired in late 1998, says "Where else in the world can you find a million dollars worth of advice for \$20? The power of a book to an entrepreneur is simple: It gives you a quiet place to explore what you ought to try next."

This winter, with the holidays fast approaching, we asked entrepreneurship professors at some of the country's top business schools to recommend one book that they think all entrepreneurs should read. Their choices follow.

High-Growth Primer

At some point, every entrepreneur has to wage the internal battle of growth vs. stasis. Steven Rogers, a clinical professor of management and finance at the Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management, says Blair Walker and Reginald Lewis' book *Why Should White Guys Have All of the Fun?* (John Wiley & Sons, 1995), reminds entrepreneurs of their responsibility to the economy and society to "pursue high-growth entrepreneurship that results in wealth creation vs. mom and pop entrepreneurship that generates enough income for the person to lead a nice comfortable lifestyle." The story, he says, follows an entrepreneur who became successful through acquisitions. "The greatness of the book is that it shows all entrepreneurs that the fundamentals that it takes to do a small deal are basically the same that it takes to do a much larger deal," says Rogers.

Heidi Neck, an assistant professor of entrepreneurship at Babson, has a more comprehensive offering. Neck recommends *The Portable MBA in Entrepreneurship* edited by William Bygrave and Andrew Zacharakis (John Wiley & Sons, 2004), a book that begins with a clear description of the entrepreneurship process and then provides general knowledge on entrepreneurial marketing, legal issues, debt and equity financing, intellectual property, and business planning. Though Neck says no book can be all-inclusive, "it certainly gives a holistic view on the amount of knowledge that you need to have before proceeding on the path of entrepreneurship. *The Portable MBA in Entrepreneurship* is an essential starting point for any nascent entrepreneur."

Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea by Gary Kinder (Vintage Books, 1998), the story of a search for \$1 billion worth of missing gold on the bottom of the Atlantic, inspires through its story of someone with drive and persistence. "It encompasses the need to raise money, overcome tremendous technical difficulties, and deal with a plethora of personalities clashing under the complexities of law. It's one of the best, and has great lessons," says Clifford Schorer, an adjunct professor and entrepreneur-in-residence at Columbia Business School.

Inspiration from a Classic

Scott Meadow, a clinical professor entrepreneurship at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and partner at Edgewater Funds, recommends another tale set at sea: Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Just as Schorer recommends *Ship of Gold* for its tale of success, Meadow praises *Moby Dick* for its lessons in bad management. "It's the story of an entrepreneur who violates the trust of all the constituencies that support him...financial backers, employees, and customers. It's the original story of how not to do it," Meadow says.

Improving communication is one big step to succeeding as an entrepreneur, says Irv Grousbeck, consulting professor of management and director of the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. He suggests *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott (The Berkeley Publishing Group, 2002) for its lucid description of how to be genuine and achieve "authentic" interactions with others. "My observation is that many people aspiring to get into their own business take on personas that aren't real. In so doing, they fail to realize that experienced investors and other potential stakeholders can see right through the masks," says Grousbeck.

Above all else, entrepreneurs need to be able to execute. Howard Anderson, a professor of entrepreneurship at the MIT Sloan School of Management recommends *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan (Crown Business, 2002) for the get-up-and-get-things-done approach that it preaches. "The business world is filled with attackers and defenders. Defenders have customers, products that work, and financial resources. Attackers have none of these, but they do have the ability to move quickly, to find the soft underbelly of the defenders, to survive. What separates the winners from the wannabes? Execution, execution, execution," says Anderson.

Even if a book can't do the job for you, it can provide some insights from people who have been in the trenches before. *Crossing the Chasm* (HarperCollins, 2002), by Silicon Valley consultant Geoffrey Moore, is one such book that gives a detailed battle plan for how to go from "beta customers to real customers giving you real business," says Tom Kinnear, professor of entrepreneurship and executive director of Zell Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. Adds Kinnear about the entrepreneurial benefits of a good book: "When you tackle the real world, it's always good to have a theory of how it works."

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