

## Why Leaders Must Be Readers

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*by Kelsey Meyer*

If you take only one glance at our [professional branding](#) company's leadership team, you may be surprised by our youthfulness. Our team is young (and looks even younger), but I am confident that the youthfulness of our team is helping our growth. That's not because I agree with anything stated by Cathryn Sloane in [her article](#) that declared that all social media managers should be under the age of 25 – it's because I believe that our employees' youthfulness drives their intellectual curiosity. They want to learn, and the most common way they search for new knowledge is by reading articles and books by successful business owners, marketers, and entrepreneurs.

This doesn't need to apply only to young businesspeople, though. It can be even more important for seasoned employees; leaders must be readers. Reading and learning from peers within, and outside of, your industry enables you to grow as an employee, business owner, and leader in three distinct ways.

### **Reading Reminds You**

I make it a habit to re-read specific books every year because I need constant reminders of the good things they've taught me. After my third reading of Gary Vaynerchuk's *The Thank You Economy*, I was inspired to work with our team to handwrite every one of our clients a thank-you note. Whether you re-read the same book or article to remind you of concepts, or read content on time management and organization as a constant reminder to work on these things, reading is valuable because it keeps important concepts top of mind.

### **Reading Challenges You**

A female co-worker of mine, whom I respect immensely, recently gave me a book and said, "I disagree with about 80% of this, but you should definitely read it." I loved that she was sharing a book that challenged her opinions, yet felt it was worthwhile reading for the 20% that was valuable. Reading something you disagree with can have a big impact on your ability to think, both creatively and logically.

### **Reading Gives You Opportunities to Interact with Others**

I have referenced articles and books I've read in countless conversations, not to sound intelligent or cool (some of what I read would accomplish the opposite), but to relate to those with whom I'm speaking. Here are a few ways you should be making the most of what you're reading:

Take notes and share them with your team.

- An investor in our company sends me, on average, five articles a day and I always put them in a file that says "To Read." When I have 10 minutes at the end of the day, I read an article or two, knowing that I can discuss these pieces with him later. It's a great way for us to share ideas and inspire action in each other.

Spark debates with your team.

- I also like using article topics to spark debate amongst our team members about how we should address a subject. I've heard of companies creating book clubs, where employees discuss topics in books that relate to their industry during lunch once a month. Sparking debate and sharing ideas is a wonderful way to use written content as a team-bonding tool.

Back up an idea you have or a decision you want to make.

- You can use an article/book/speech from a respected person in your field to back up a decision you want to make. I'm not saying you should make decisions based solely on what you read, but it does give you more leverage when you say, "I read in So-and-So's book that he had success with X, and I thought that we could implement this idea in our company by doing Y." It's a little more likely to stick than saying, "Who knows if this has ever worked for anyone in the past? But heck, let's be the first to see if it can work!"

If you're one of those people who claim you don't have time to read, then first, I question why you're reading my measly little article. Second, I encourage you to make time. Time never "appears" for anything; you have to make it. If nothing else, learn how to multitask. Listen to content while driving or walking to work (I suggest "This American Life" and "Intelligence Squared" on NPR – I'm obsessed with both). If you don't have time to read an entire book, read short articles online. If you're dying to read a book but honestly can't find the time, then pair up with a friend and take turns reading and sharing the ideas through short descriptions, or find excerpts of the book online.

If you are a leader, you should be striving to develop knowledge to improve yourself, your company, and the people who work for you. To do anything less is to shortchange your ability to lead.

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