20 Books That Have Mattered to Me

By Daniel H. Pink
INTRODUCTION

If human beings, at least in part, are the sum of our experiences, then what we think and believe, at least in part, is the sum of what we’ve read. So as a dual act of self-reflection and sharing, I’ve compiled a list of the books that have influenced me the most over my life. They aren’t necessarily the “best” in any objective sense. They’re simply books that mattered to me. Had I not read them, I would be a different person. Here they are in alphabetical order by author.
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

The late poet’s autobiography is harrowing, studded with trauma that makes you wince. But it’s also a story of hope – with a title metaphor that is powerful and enduring.
Influence: Science and Practice

ROBERT CIALDINI

If you’re in the persuasion business – and all of us are – you need to read Cialdini.
This novel is about a man obsessed with an intricate dice baseball game he’s invented. I devoured it as a young teenager obsessed with sports, statistics, and a real game called Strat-O-Matic. Only when I read it again as an adult did I realize the book was about something else altogether.

ROBERT COOVER
The legendary psychologist describes those moments when the challenge we face is so exquisitely matched to our capabilities that we lose our sense of time, even our sense of self.
You know how in college you’re supposed to read a book that changes your life? Well, for me, this was that book.

**The Origin of Species**

CHARLES DARWIN

You know how in college you’re supposed to read a book that changes your life? Well, for me, this was that book.
The way I’d learned history early in school was stiff and sterile. But this first-person account of being a slave was vastly different – so vivid (and occasionally horrifying), it made abstractions come alive.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

The way I’d learned history early in school was stiff and sterile. But this first-person account of being a slave was vastly different – so vivid (and occasionally horrifying), it made abstractions come alive.
The works of Peter Drucker and Tom Peters

There’s no single title from these two prolific authors that mattered most. It’s their entire bodies of work, which are vast, insightful, and inspiring. Anybody who writes about business for a popular audience stands on their shoulders.
“Everyone should own this book.”
—Chip Heath & Dan Heath, authors of Made to Stick and Switch

Mindset
THE NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS
HOW WE CAN LEARN TO FULFILL OUR POTENTIAL

* parenting
* business
* school
* relationships

Mindset
CAROL DWECK

One of the most important books a parent can read. I wish Dweck’s research had been around when I was much younger.
Powers of Ten: A Flipbook

CHARLES AND RAY EAMES

This is a picture book. The image on the first page shows Earth from the edge of the universe. Then each subsequent image zooms in 10 times closer. Eventually we see the contours of the continent... then the city of Chicago...then a man asleep at a picnic...and then, zooming further, his skin cells and the carbon atoms of his DNA.
I know. A conventional choice. But I truly love this novel. I’ve read it 7 or 8 times.
Written in 2012, and describing an Iraq War soldier’s brief return to the U.S. for a Dallas Cowboys football game, this might be my generation’s Great American Novel.
Trapped in a concentration camp, Frankl somehow survives and secretly creates a landmark work in psychology and personal development.
The Righteous Mind

To make moral decisions, we don’t reason our way to conclusions. Instead, we jump to quick, emotional judgments and then use reason to justify our visceral beliefs. This book changed the way I think about politics.

JONATHAN HAIDT
Whenever I’m stuck — which is pretty much all the time — I think of this book’s core lesson. Then I take it bird by bird.
Two more books I read as a kid. They helped show me that writers could take on topics that were actually interesting – in this case, basketball and tennis! – and write about them in smart, compelling ways.

Levels of the Game
A Sense of Where You Are

JOHN MCPHEE
You might think it’s a fable about totalitarianism. But it’s really a primer on organizational behavior.
The War of Art

STEVEN PRESSFIELD

How do you overcome resistance in the quest for mastery? Pressfield has the answer.
When I read this book as a kid, I found that hearing about people’s work was exhilarating. I still do.
The Third Wave

ALVIN TOFFLER

Toffler’s ability to see trends before anyone else is stunning, his ability to synthesize vast amounts of material breathtaking.
Because this is a personal, idiosyncratic list, it reflects my own biases. You’ll notice: among the authors, men outnumber women; most of the authors are American; and only a few are not white. That’s something for me to ponder and you to consider in making your own reading choices.