

**United States Marine Corps
Commandant's Professional Reading List
Marine Leader Discussion Guide**

The Leader's Bookshelf

by

R. Manning Ancell and Admiral James Stavridis, USN (Ret)

Introduction.

The Leader's Bookshelf is a book that describes 50 books which have served to influence the lives of more than two hundred highly successful senior U.S. military officers. It is about *leadership*. It is not centric to men or women, infantry officers, aviators, logisticians, or any other specific military occupational specialty. *The Leader's Bookshelf* is for anyone who wants to improve his or her ability to lead--whether in family life, professional endeavors, or within society and civic organizations.

Adm. James Stavridis and his co-author, R. Manning Ancell, surveyed over two hundred active and retired four-star military officers about their reading habits and favorite books, asking each of them for a list of titles that strongly influenced their leadership skills and provided them with special insights that helped propel them to success in spite of the many demanding challenges they faced. *The Leader's Bookshelf* synthesizes their responses to identify the top fifty books that may help virtually anyone to become a better leader.

Preparatory Work.

Your expectation, as the "guided discussion leader" should require all participants to read the entire book. Additionally, you may assign specific titles of the fifty books listed, as your primary discussion points. And, as the discussion leader, you may require all participants pre-read the discussion guide and respond to each question in writing before the guided discussion begins.

Overview of the Book.

The thesis of *The Leader's Bookshelf* is plain and simple: by focusing on the reading patterns of the most senior officers in the U.S. military – certainly by any

measure an organization that produces some of the best leaders in the world – we can create a set of books that makes sense for leaders in all walks of life.

To prove this thesis, the authors offer practical advice to leaders on how to develop a purposeful and personal reading program and how to build a professional leader’s library. They open their thesis with a superb summary of the value of reading to those who lead. What does reading do for leaders? To paraphrase their answer, reading provides vicarious life experiences, especially for younger and less mature leaders, from across the span of history and culture. Reading provides a foundation for self-evaluation, a tool to assess our own ideas, decisions, and choices.

Each of the works--novels, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, and management publications--are summarized and the key leadership lessons extracted and presented. Whether individuals work their way through the entire list and read each book cover to cover, or read the summaries provided to determine which appeal to them most, *The Leader's Bookshelf* provides a roadmap to better leadership.

Highlighting the value of reading in both a philosophical and a practical sense, *The Leader's Bookshelf* provides sound advice on how to build an extensive library, lists other books worth reading to improve leadership skills, and analyzes how leaders use what they read to achieve their goals. It is an efficient way to sample some of literature's greatest works and to determine which ones can help individuals climb the ladder of success.

Reading, especially history, biographies and autobiographies, allows us to develop critical insights into our own heroes, and role models. Reading helps to develop a leader’s ability to communicate and builds the practical command of language – both written and spoken – that is essential to reaching and inspiring those we are responsible for. Lastly, reading is an efficient method for leader development – books, magazines, and other products both analogue and digital are readily available, inexpensive, small, light and “always at hand.”

Guided Discussion Design.

There are no set number of questions for a specific discussion guide. The number of questions should be based on participant’s level experience and attention span. Your goal, in guiding the discussion, is to keep each the discussion

simple, relevant, and current to Marines PME responsibilities. Encouraging Marines to think and communicate their view of what the book means to them is what is important.

Guided Discussion actions and questions. Each question should be asked in an **open ended** format with the intent of generating responses based upon a Marines' perspective.

1. After reading this book, what did you take away from it?
2. Why, in your opinion, do leaders need to be readers?
(Page 13)
3. Why is a list of books an important tool to improve your own reading practices?
(Page 5-6)
4. How can reading make you a better writer?
(Writing techniques, references, ideation and comparison)
5. What was at least one reoccurring leadership theme in this book?
6. How can reading be incorporated into the daily life of a Marine?
7. What are some of the ways that you can foster reading in your subordinates?
8. Is there another book that you would recommend? Why does it belong on the list and what lessons can be gained from it?