

30 MUST-READ BOOKS

Selection by *Nishant Saxena*



They say, "A Reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only once!" Here is my personal selection of 30 must-read books across different genres, with a short introduction of each. These have been especially chosen to be both Life Changing *and* Fun.

- 1. Life-changing:** They will make us wiser. We are neither looking for technical, specialized knowledge, nor for a simple fiction. But reading that can bring fundamental changes in our thinking and attitude.
- 2. Engaging and Fun:** We want to grow, but also enjoy the journey. We may not have the patience (yet!) to go through deep but boring books. We want the answer to the big Why questions in a way that make us want to come back for more.



Caution:

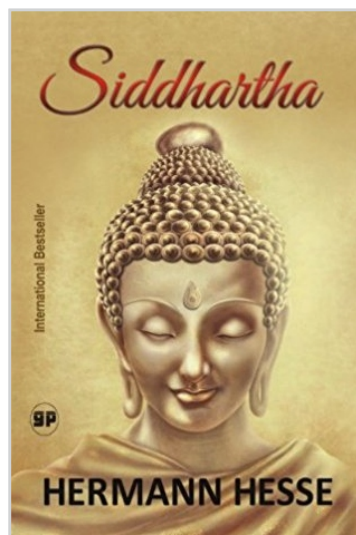
My daughters pointed out that this recommendation runs much longer than the patience of an average human. I admit and apologize in advance. As partial redemption, would encourage readers to take it in parts. Zero in on a single genre, relish the books there for some time, and, if the experience is good, come back for more.

Some motivation before we start. We enter life with the confidence that we can conquer the world. Unfortunately, the challenges of mere existence – finding a good job, keeping up with a fragile relationship, the heavy load of expectations from our parents and ourselves, identifying what we want to do in life, the rat race and constant comparison with our peers – overpower us. And the grand idea of being the very best we can gets quietly put aside. Hopefully, these books will serve as our guide and teacher as we navigate through career and life.





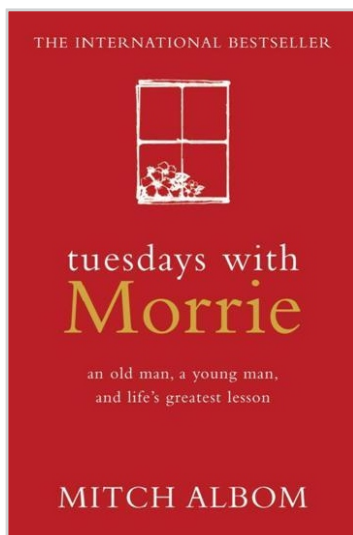
I. Let's start with **PHILOSOPHY** for we are often high on energy and ideals, but low on clarity of thought. Philosophy teaches us the mother of all skills, curiosity.



Option A. Siddhartha (Herman Hesse)

Siddhartha, Siddhi + Arth means 'he who has found the meaning (of life)', is just the book a 'seeker' could ask for: a young, intelligent man's quest for fulfilment and peace. Nobel Laureate Hesse at his best.

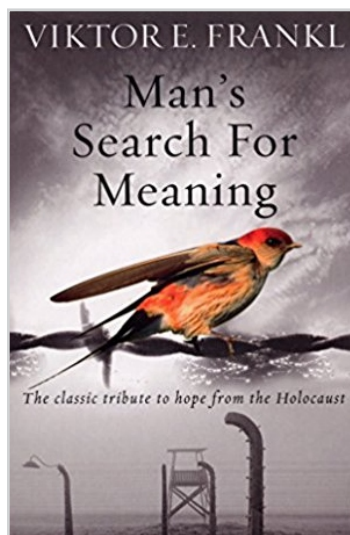
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Option B. Tuesdays With Morrie (Mitch Albom)

A dying professor teaches his young student many deep lessons on life. They meet for 14 Tuesdays, each with a new theme like the world, emotions, love, forgiveness, money, regrets etc.

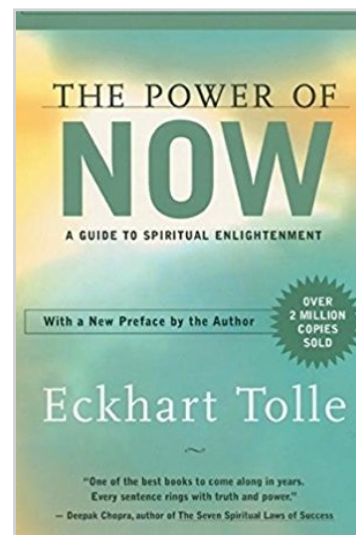
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Option C. Man's Search For Meaning (Viktor Frankl)

This 'classic tribute to hope' says that we are happy when we find a meaning, a contribution, a calling in our life. Life without purpose, even with all comfort, will be hollow and aimless.

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Option D. The Power Of Now (Eckhart Tolle)

Those who seek the calmness of a still mind, a no-mind, no-thinking time, will find the path to the Here & Now in this book. For all the things that truly matter – beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace – arise from beyond the mind and exist only in this moment.

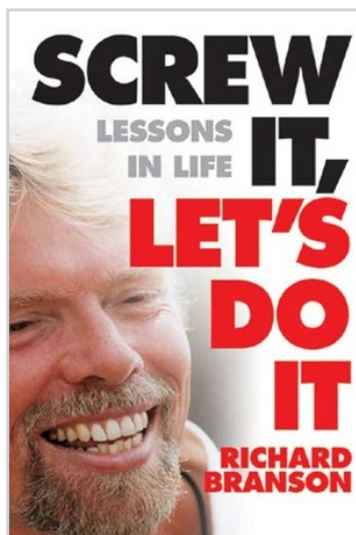
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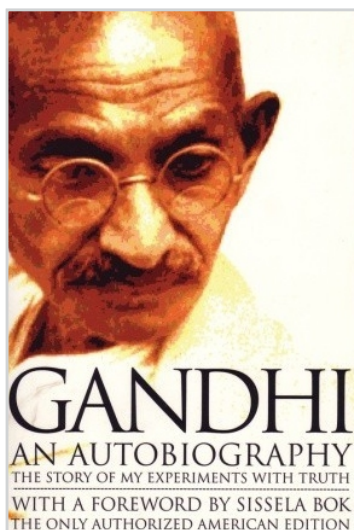
II. And then, an **(AUTO) BIOGRAPHY** to get inspired, since all of us need role-models, who live the qualities that we ourselves aspire to.



Option A. Screw It, Let's Do It (Richard Branson)

Take a bow to the sheer magnitude of Sir Branson's vast, multi-dimensional successes (billionaire entrepreneur, adventurer, bestselling author, social leader, maverick). And imbibe his Lessons on Life and Business.

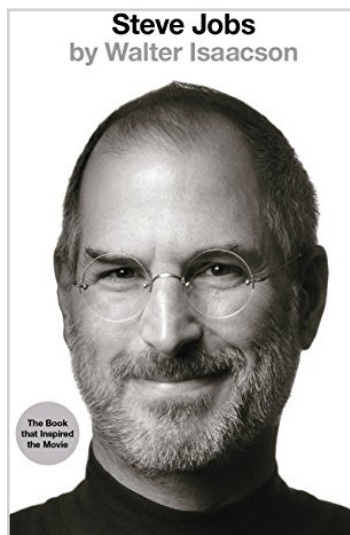
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Option B. My Experiments with Truth (Mahatma Gandhi)

The saint who walked is not fully understood by our modern generation. And yet there is so much to learn from him on how to build character and honesty.

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Option C. Steve Jobs (Walter Isaacson)

One of the best modern biographies of one of the most interesting men in our times. Steve Job changed the world of not just personal computing (Apple), but also Music (iTunes), mobile phones (iPhones) and animation (Pixar).

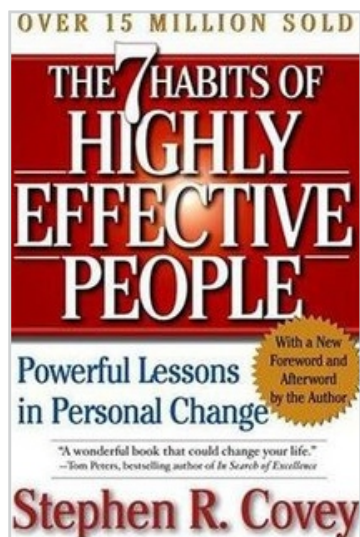
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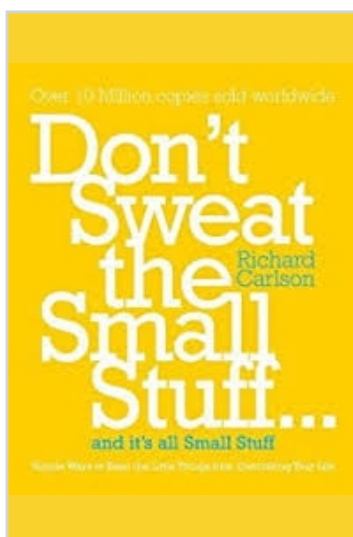
III. SELF-HELP, to keep becoming better. Life can be difficult and chaotic, and a little effectiveness advice is always welcome.



Option A. The 7 Habits Of Highly Effective People (Stephen Covey)

When people ask me the one business book that has influenced me most, 7 Habits comes out as a clear winner. It has sold a whopping 25 million copies (top 5 selling business book of all time), all because it answers What is it that makes some people more effective than others? My wife says our married life has become richer since I read this book. What bigger endorsement do we need?

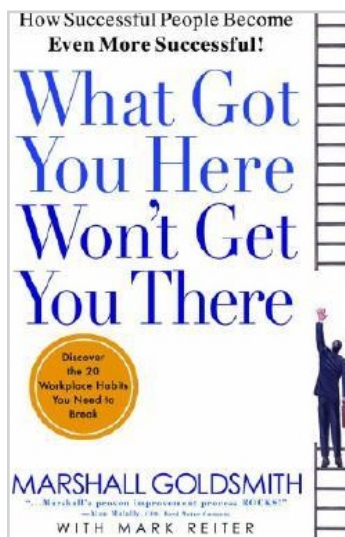
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Option B. Don't Sweat The Small Stuff (Richard Carlson)

Much of our daily stress is actually the "small stuff" – traffic problems, urgent deadlines, boring meetings, bureaucracy, rude emails, demanding bosses, an assumed rat race, etc. The real problems – job layoffs, theft or violence – are really few and far in between. This book will keep you from letting the little, stressful things in life drive you insane and help you find peace and calm in a chaotic world.

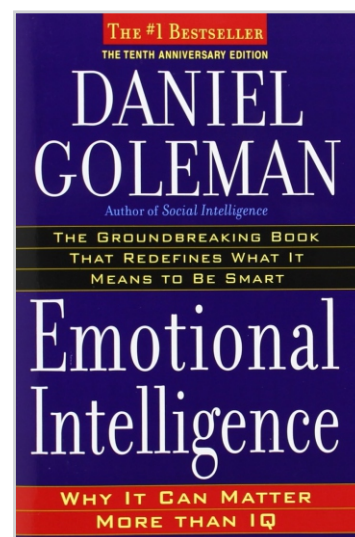
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Option C. What Got You Here Won't Get You There (Marshall Goldsmith)

People become successful because of certain good habits and in spite of some bad habits. The latter, if left uncorrected, can put serious brakes in our career. Marshall highlights 21 of these fatal flaws that separate the good from the truly great. Read it to improve ourselves and our teams. And to understand what could be holding us back and honestly assess our blind spots.

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Option D. Emotional Intelligence (Daniel Goleman)

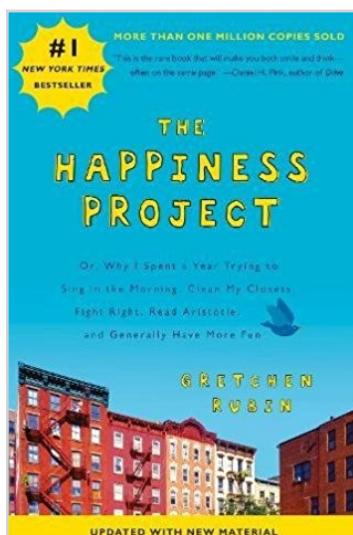
Why are some people more successful than others? Prof. Goleman tested university graduates and then went back to test them after 20 years. Most had led ordinary lives but few were extremely successful in their chosen fields. He comes up with 5 success factors - Self understanding, Self discipline, Passion, Empathy and Social Networking - which he together calls EQ.

[read more](#)



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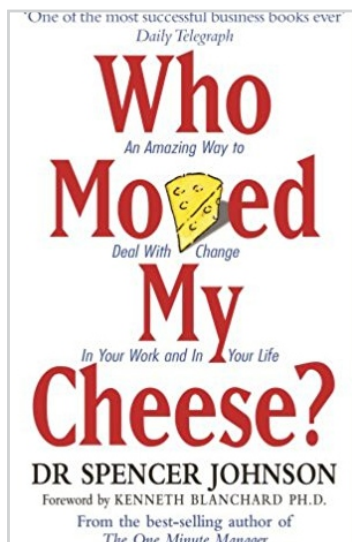
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Option E. The Happiness Project (Gretchen Rubin)

We don't need to be in a state of misery to start thinking about happiness. Even with a blessed, fortunate life, there can still be a feeling of emptiness, a feeling of boredom. Gretchen identifies 12 themes that could add to the happiness in our lives. Read the book also to learn how to write a simple yet fact and research based memoir.

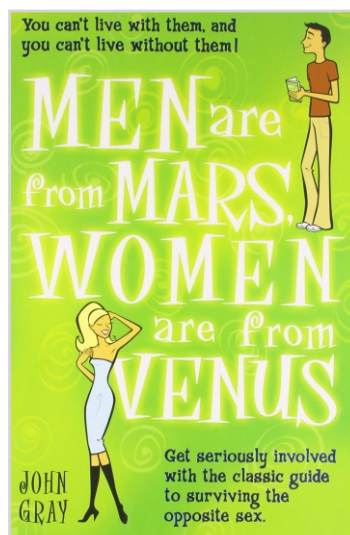
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Option F. Who Moved My Cheese (Spencer Johnson)

The classic on dealing with change in our work and lives. Uses the parable of a mouse and of cheese (metaphor for what we want in our lives) to offer profound lessons, which can benefit literally anyone, young or old, rich or poor, looking for less stress and more success.

[read more](#)



Option G. Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus (John Gray)

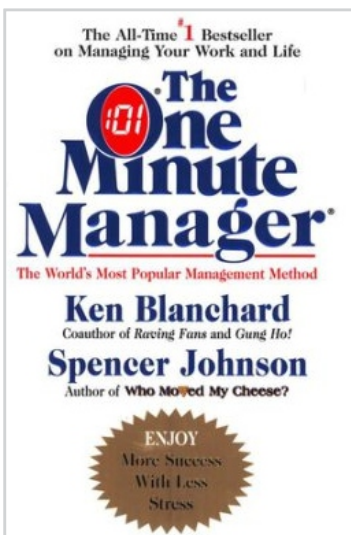
One reason we fight in relationships is because men and women are fundamentally different. A man's sense of self is through achievement, motivated when he feels needed. A woman's through feelings, motivated when she feels cherished.

[read more](#)





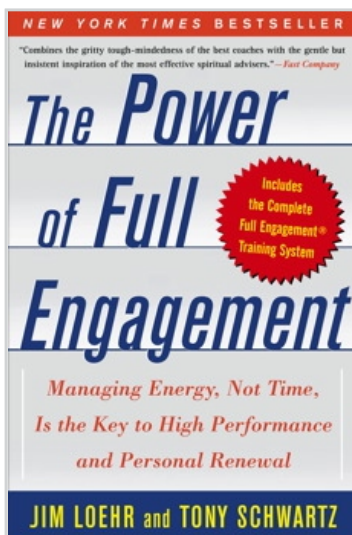
IV. How can we forget **MANAGEMENT**, for a good business book can be a mini MBA. Why wait to do expensive mistakes, when we can get distilled gyan from masters?



Option A. The One Minute Manager (Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson)

3 simple tools of an effective manager: one who is not just "tough" (whose superiors think they are good, but their subordinates think otherwise) or "nice" (whose people seem to like them but their business results are lacklustre). The core concept – of setting clear goals, catching people doing the right things and praising them, and transparently giving feedback on what needs to improve – is amazing in its ingenuity and simplicity.

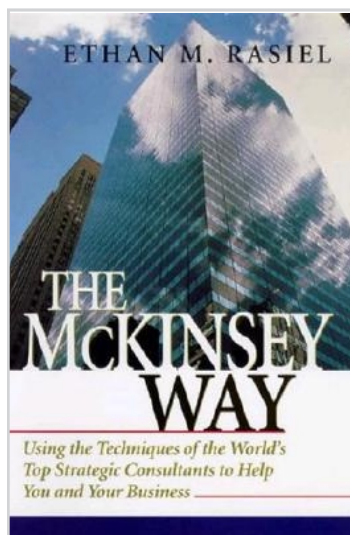
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Option B. The Power of Full Engagement (Jim Loehr, Tony Schwartz)

In a world full of stress and crushing workload, managing energy, not time, is the key to high performance. A psychologist offers a step-by-step guide: Manage 4 sources of energy; balance energy spend with renewal; increase capacity like athletes and maintain positivity.

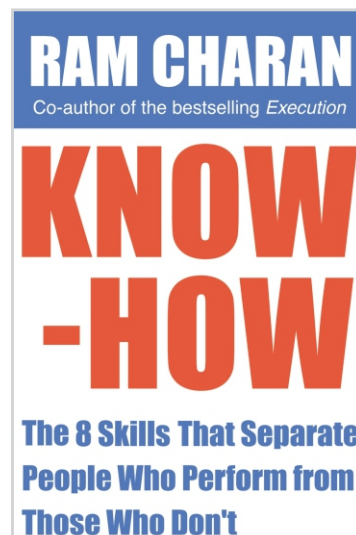
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Option C. The McKinsey Way (Ethan M. Rasiel)

Condensed wisdom of one of the most admired consulting firms and a toolkit of problem-solving techniques and clear and impactful communication, read it to become an even better manager.

[read more](#)



Option D. Know-How: The 8 Skills That Separate People Who Perform from Those Who Don't (Ram Charan)

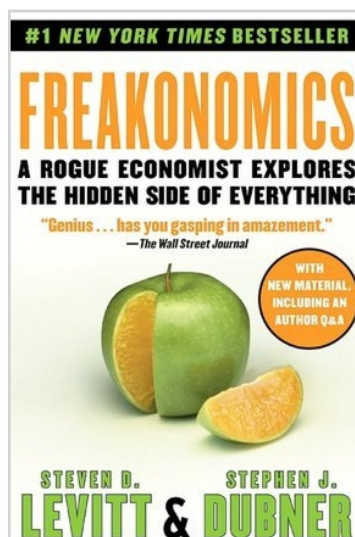
8 skills separate people who perform from those who don't: Clear positioning, detecting patterns, managing social systems, a knack for people, ensuring team spirit, setting the right goals and priorities and being responsive to external stakeholders.

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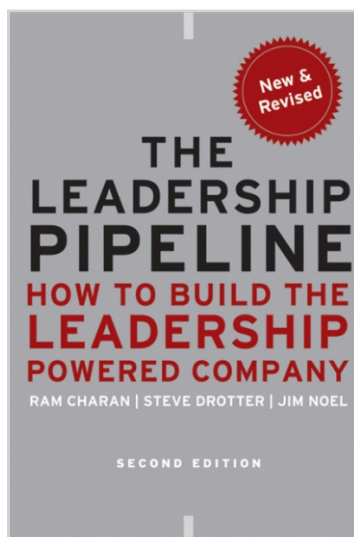
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**Option E. Freakonomics
(Steven D Levitt (Economist)
and Stephen Dubner
(Journalist))**

Levitt is a bright young economist (Harvard, MIT, recognized as one of the most influential economists under 40), who tries to solve every day riddles as a curious explorer wanting to know how the world really works. Instead of making economics a 'dismal', boring science with only theory and numbers, he brings alive the central tenet of this discipline: If morality is about how humans should behave, economics tells how they actually behave.

[read more](#)



**Option F. The Leadership
Pipeline (Ram Charan,
Steve Drotter, Jim Noel)**

So many bright careers hit a glass ceiling because we fail to master the incremental skills needed for the next level. Charan et al brilliantly catalogue the key soft and hard skills needed at every level of an organization, from an individual performer to a Group CEO.

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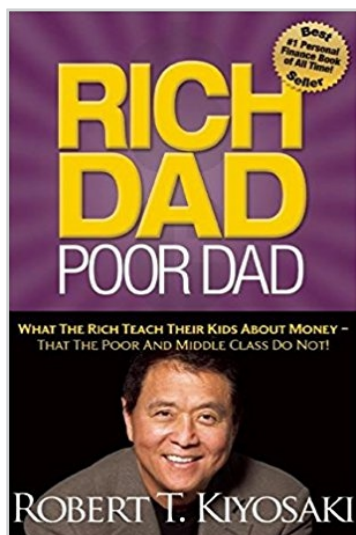


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V. And then on **ENTREPRENEURSHIP** and understanding money, for who doesn't want to be rich!



Option A. Rich Dad, Poor Dad (Robert Kiyosaki)

The largest selling personal finance book in history, telling us what the rich teach about money that the poor and middle class don't. It changes our perspective and attitude on money.

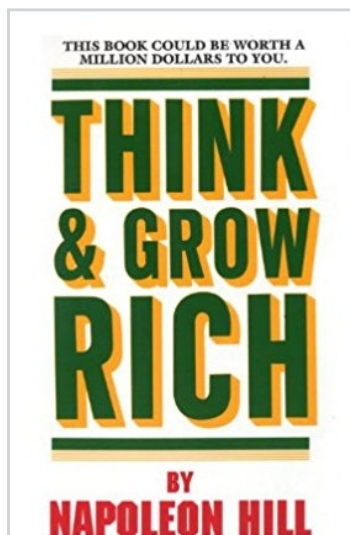
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Option B. The Millionaire Next Door (T Stanley, W Danko)

The authors interview many millionaires to be surprised with what made them wealthy. It's not about the wealth you flaunt but what you accumulate. And how you allocate your time.

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Option C. Think and Grow Rich (Napoleon Hill)

The largest selling non-fiction of all time. Hill studied hundreds of rich and successful people and then tried to condense the secrets of their success.

[read more](#)

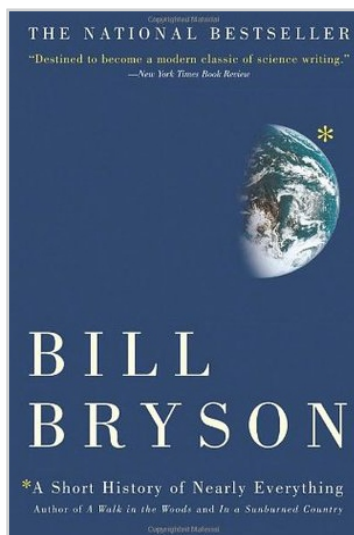


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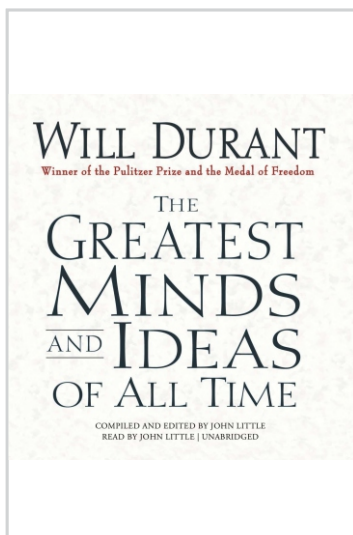
VI. Let's start ending with **KNOWLEDGE**. *Ipsa scientia potestas est* said Bacon, for knowledge itself is power.



Option A. A Short History Of Nearly Everything (Bill Bryson)

Science can be so interesting and yet the way it is taught makes it so drab. Not any more. Bryson covers a vast canvas and keeps us thoroughly engaged.

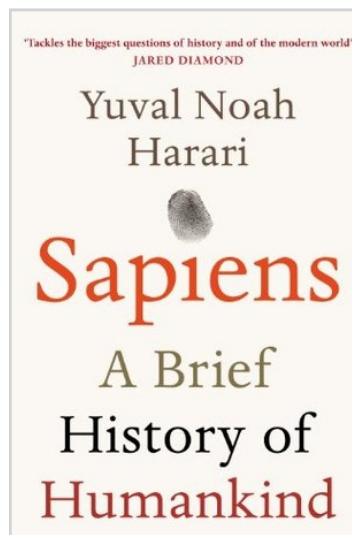
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Option B. The Greatest Mind and Ideas of All Times (Will Durant)

Be spell-bound as the greatest teacher on earth, Durant, combines deep cerebral knowledge with a poetry like prose, and tops it with a contagious passion to teach. The ten peaks of human progress would make us think.

[read more](#)



Option C. Homo Sapiens (Yuval Noah Harari)

From the origin of universe and fundamental forces (physics) 13.5bn years ago, to atoms (chemistry) and then to living organisms 3.8bn years ago (biology), we Homo Sapiens evolved only 70,000 years ago. Read this beautiful and gripping story of our species.

[read more](#)

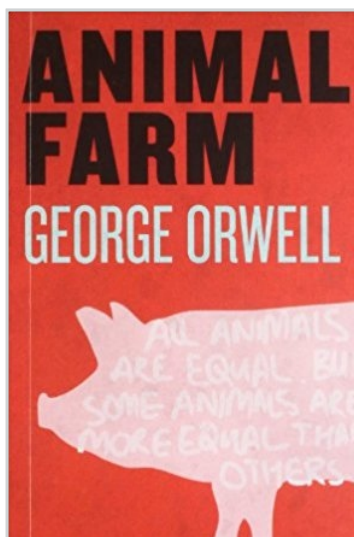


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VII. One last on **FICTION**, for good literature is just a narrative of our life. It teaches us about emotions, empathy, creativity and communication, all easily fungible in the corporate world and in life.



Option A. Animal Farm (George Orwell)

Through powerful use of allegory, the story details how in any revolution, original high ideals degenerate to tyranny and totalitarianism as the new leaders get corrupted. And how the masses, in their ignorance and naivety, allow false leaders to be formed.

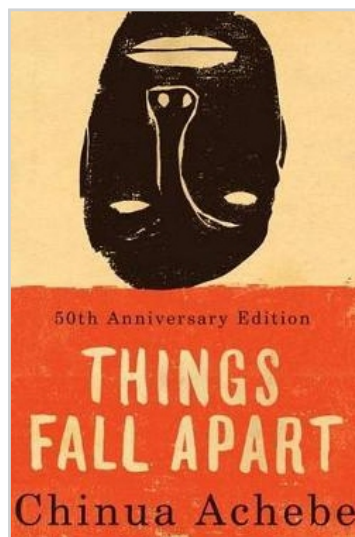
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Option B. The Kite Runner (Khaled Hosseini)

Will make you cry and cringe and, if you are from that larger region, feel nostalgic. Interspersed with anecdotes from Afghan society, the subplots carry deeply emotive themes of violence, rape, guilt, father-son relationship and redemption.

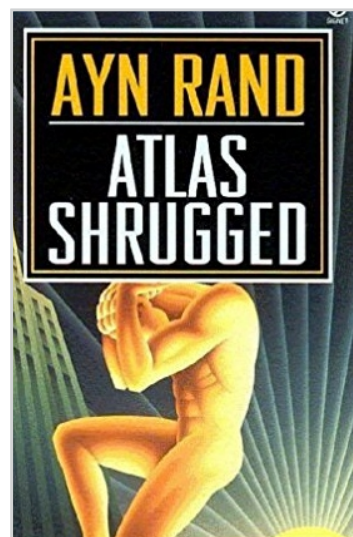
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Option C. Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe)

Listen to this beautiful, moving tale of what happens when the Developed White meets Traditional Africa. Is no one wrong or are both wrong? One of the most balanced, objective portrayals of the confusion and conflict. Many wonder how Achebe never won the Nobel prize.

[read more](#)



Option D. Atlas Shrugged (Ayn Rand)

Rand's magnum opus, and one of the most brilliant paean for capitalism and individualism. When the government tries to be coercive, all productive people go on a strike, led by the mysterious John Galt.

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Caveat: There can hardly be a universal set of 30 must reads, since part of what makes a book memorable is our own life experiences that can relate to it. The list is already long. So let's stop here and wish you well on your journey of self-discovery!

Let's remember: *"Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live."* Let these books revive the spark of greatness inside us, of doing more and being more.

In our collective pursuit of wisdom...

- NISHANT SAXENA

Global Chief Strategy Officer

Cipla

www.nishantsaxena.in

