

Read 40 Books a Year

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We all need to keep learning and growing. People who know me know that I love to read and learn. That’s just who I am. Years ago, I set a goal to read over 40 books each year and I intentionally plan time in my week to achieve this goal. I also find creative ways to consume books that align with my schedule and work style.

At the same time that I initially set this goal, I had become totally frustrated with the commercial talk radio I was listening to in the car as I traveled between client meetings and on road trips. Perhaps part of the radio host’s goal was to irk me because it increased their listening audience. But the time I spent listening to them wasn’t making me a better person. I wasn’t thinking, acting or being any better because of it. I decided I wanted to replace this time with something that helped me meet a goal. That was the day I decided to listen to books in my car. Since I spend a significant amount of time in my car, this was the perfect way to get my reading done.



These days, if you see me driving, I’m most likely listening to a book. It’s very easy for me to listen to 40 books a year – just in my car. It’s a satisfying way to accomplish my goal and fulfill my need to read and learn. I have a variety of books that I read and they all address different aspects of some bigger goals: development, learning and enjoyment.

Maybe you love to be engrossed in a mystery as much as I do. I tend to listen to mysteries in sequence by a single author because I get caught up with a character in a series for a year and want to know the next part of the story. They’re also quick, easy and entertaining and I don’t have to pay very close attention when I’m listening to them. One advantage of being older is that I can listen to the same mystery again because I don’t remember how it ends! (Or maybe that’s a result of not paying close attention the first time I listen...) Once I’ve run through all of the available books by that author, I’ll find the next author to dig into.

You can also listen to some of the best business books in the world. In the work that I do as an executive coach, often times people will tell me what they’re reading. I discovered some of my favorite books last year through recommendations from my clients. You can also find apps that include recommendations and evaluations on leadership books and sort lists by topics as specific as time management or delegation.

It's great to hear new business ideas and think about how to apply those principles to my work. And with business books, I gain insights on the type of work my coaching clients do too. I love discussing books with colleagues and clients, hearing their perspectives and finding ways to practice what I read.

It's easy to get recommendations on biographies too. If someone shares a common interest, like the Civil War, and you know they have a voracious interest, ask what they're reading. I often end up liking specific authors, like Steve Ambrose. He wrote *Undaunted Courage* about Lewis and Clark, and I love his style of writing so I'll never hesitate to read another book by him.

Over the course of a year I might listen to eight or 10 biographies, a couple of history books, 10 to 12 leadership books, 10 to 12 novels or mysteries, and 10 books that fit into unique categories. If I'm planning a trip to Italy, I might listen to the history of Venice; if I'm planning a trip to Ireland, I would choose either a fiction or nonfiction book to get some background; and if I'm going to a National Park, I might pick a book about John Muir to learn more about him and his influence on the park I'm going to.

There are so many categories you can customize to meet your reading goals. The point of this is that we have different times in our week that we could use better to accomplish our goals. If we just stop and **think about all the possible ways we could accomplish our goals, we can usually find the time.** I would encourage everybody to figure out how they might be able to accomplish a goal in some of the spaces in their life that they may not be using to their full extent.