

Covert, Jack & Sattersten, Todd – The 100 Best Business Books of All Time

Penguin Group, 2009, [Business] Grade ★★

As any newspaper publisher knows people love top lists. This entire book is a top list of business books. Jack Covert who is the founder of the business book retailer 800-CEO-READS and publisher of “Jack Covert Reads” has read and reviewed business literature for several decades. Todd Sattersten is the mechanical engineer from General Electric that turned to literature and who previously was the president of the company but now helps business experts realize their dream of writing books.

The starting point for all this is that while they help business leaders solve problems there are over 10.000 business books published per year. Obviously, there is a need for some type of screening and these are the 100 titles that according to the authors offer the best help. The books are ranked on the quality of the presented idea, the applicability of the idea to practical business issues and the accessibility of the text.

The titles are divided into a number of thematic chapters such as “You”, “Leadership”, “Sales & Marketing”, “Biographies”, “Entrepreneurship” etc. Looking at the total selection of literature it’s obvious that the authors prefer topics centered around leading people, values, inspiration etc. over for example factual texts on processes or technology. They are not number types of persons but instead see more to the - perhaps - easier digested psychological and sociological aspects of management. This is obviously a matter of personality and taste even if I find the exclusion of Michael Porter’s *Five Forces of Strategy* from the list as not being accessible enough a bit harsh – after all the readers are supposed to be CEOs.

A book review gives a critical evaluation of the text. It is a commentary and as such a dialogue with both the author and with the audience on

the book’s purpose, thesis, strengths and weaknesses etc. This is in contrast to a book report that is a summary of a text and only marginally comments on the structure and the contents. The authors are expert reviewers and Jack Covert in particular truly delivers a reader-reviewer dialogue with the book as a backdrop for an argument. It is very tempting and effortless to read one more review and then one more. The problem is that after a while I started to feel empty. In a book format I actually would have preferred say fifty book reports of 5 pages each and more thorough summaries of the contents of the books instead of a hundred 2 to 3-page book reviews. The reader never gets enough meat on the bone but instead a multitude of teasers. *The 100 Best Business Books of All Time* becomes too much of just a list.

That said, I had only read about 2/10th of the titles and while another 3/10th would hardly surprise anybody, half the titles were new hunting ground for me and I did find 5 or 6 titles that I will probably purchase in the future. The thematic chapters and the broad coverage of titles in each area gives you as a reader a good remainder of areas that you have thought about looking closer at in the future but then forgot about. This is obviously worth a lot, but spending some time browsing Amazon reviews would serve the same purpose. The thematic approach coupled with a longer description of the content of each book could instead have served to a really good introductory exposé over the business topics at hand.

I love the fact that the authors have made a living out of reviewing business literature and wish them all the luck in the future. However, a number of book reviews stacked on top of each other don’t make a very interesting narrative for a business book in itself.

Mats Larsson, February 10, 2015