



The 15 best books I read in 2020

By Jon S.

With a limited menu of activities for much of the year, I found myself with more time to read. Here are the Top 15 books I read in 2020 categorized by topic.

Leadership:

- [The Ride of a Lifetime](#) - Written by [Bob Iger](#), former CEO of the Walt Disney Companies, this book is a masterclass on business leadership. Iger talks about the highs and lows of his time running Disney, explains his ten principles for leaders, and goes into detail about some of Disney's acquisitions during his tenure. Just an all-around excellent business and leadership book.
- [Good Leaders Ask Great Questions](#) - Written by [John Maxwell](#), the author of many books on leadership and one of the foremost experts on the subject. Maxwell states that "the future belongs to the curious," and the best way to find answers is to ask great questions. He also makes the case that "good leaders listen, learn, and then lead." If you've read a Maxwell book before, you know what to expect. If not, check this one out.
- [Leaders Eat Last](#) - You might know Simon Sinek from his TED Talk, "[How great leaders inspire action](#)," or the resulting book [Start With Why](#). In *Leaders Eat Last*, Sinek breaks down the military's culture before translating it into business and life. Humans are social animals, more adept at cooperation than most other species. Sinek explains why it's essential to have a sense of purpose in the work we do and how helping others leads to more inspired and motivated workers. He also draws some interesting conclusions about abundance and hardship.
- [Legacy](#) by James Kerr - If you know anything about rugby, you know about [New Zealand's All Blacks](#). And if you know anything about the All Blacks, you know about the [haka](#). So, what makes this organization one of the most successful in sports history? Kerr dissects the All Blacks culture and outlines the principles on which they stand. Balance pride with humility; character triumphs over talent; leave the jersey in a better place, and "Success is modest improvement, consistently done." There are so many useful nuggets in this book.

Biographies:

- [Einstein: His Life and Universe](#) - [Walter Isaacson](#) delves into Einstein's early struggles and later triumphs. He was slow in learning how to talk, was rebellious toward authority, and graduated near the bottom of his class. It took him nine years to earn a junior professorship, a full four years after discovering relativity. This book is a fascinating look at one of the most accomplished humans in history. Isaacson does a marvelous job of weaving in historical significance throughout the book. For example, in 1933, the German government passed a law that forbade Jews from holding official office, leading ultimately to the Allies developing the atomic bomb rather than the Nazis.
- [Leonardo da Vinci](#) is another Isaacson biography and equally captivating as his book on Einstein. Perhaps no one in history was more talented at drawing connections between and across disciplines than Leonardo. He was a creative genius and a procrastinator, which allowed time for his ideas to marinate. He began working on the [Mona Lisa](#) in 1503. Fourteen years later, he was still adding tiny strokes. The painting would be in his studio when he died in 1519 at the age of 67. Isaacson authors a remarkable book about an extraordinary person.

Finance:

- [Satisfied: Discovering Contentment in a World of Consumption](#) by [Jeff Manion](#) - Manion is the senior pastor of Ada Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This book takes a biblical look at American's

propensity to accumulate and consume stuff. Solomon described this as "wind chasing." As Manion points out, "we live in a consumer-driven, debt-ridden, advertisement-saturated culture." Generosity is at the heart of a satisfying life; sharing and serving are the counterbalances to spending and accumulating. A lot of great reminders in this book, and for that reason, I highly recommend it.

- [The Psychology of Money](#) - Simply put, one of the best personal finance and investing books I've ever read. [Morgan Housel](#) is a magician when it comes to weaving stories about money and life. You're doing yourself a disservice if you don't check this one out. [Read our full book review here](#).

Relationships & Communication:

- [The Power of the Other](#) - I almost included this book under the Leadership section above or the Parenting section below. In other words, the knowledge in this book has a wide application. You might recognize the author, Dr. Henry Cloud, from his book [Boundaries](#). In *The Power of the Other*, Cloud makes the case that we are impacted by those around us in everything we do, either positively or negatively. Connections come in four types: none, bad, pseudo good, and true. Corner Four represents the true connections, where both parties are fully engaged and mutually invested. More importantly, Corner Four relationships give us autonomy and responsibility/accountability. Yet another great read.
- [Talking to Strangers](#) - Malcolm Gladwell (author of [Outliers](#), [The Tipping Point](#), and [Blink](#), among others) writes about several interesting human psychological traits and their unintended consequences. First, we have a "default to truth." We are predisposed to believe someone until there is overwhelming evidence they aren't telling the truth. Then there's "asymmetric insight," the misconception that we know others better than they know us. And why is it that we jump at the chance to judge a stranger, but we rarely hold ourselves to the same standards? Gladwell is a master storyteller, and this book doesn't disappoint.

Parenting:

- [Boys Adrift](#) - As the father of a five-year-old son, I wanted to understand better the dynamic in our country of girls achieving at a higher level in school than boys. [Leonard Sax](#) is a clinical psychologist, but this book isn't a psychology textbook. It's a straightforward look at what motivates children, both boys and girls, to learn. If you're the father of a son, check this book out. If you have daughters, the author has a book called [Girls on Edge](#), which I also intend to read.

History & Culture:

- [21 Lessons for the 21st Century](#) - [Yuval Noah Harari](#) first came onto my radar screen with his book [Sapiens](#), a fantastic read about the origins of human life. In *21 Lessons*, Harari projects the current into the future but focuses mainly on the technological and biotech advances that will change everything. Whoever owns the data owns the future. Artificial intelligence and machine learning won't merely impact the job market but may lead to alternative political systems. Harari also delves into religion, secularism, truth, education, justice, immigration, and terrorism. *21 Lessons* is a wide-ranging book that made Bill Gates' "[5 books I loved](#)" list for 2018.
- [The Splendid and the Vile](#) - While not [Erik Larson](#)'s best work (see [Dead Wake](#) or [In the Garden of Beasts](#) or [Thunderstruck](#)), his story of Winston Churchill leading Great Britain through the German bombing blitz is nonetheless riveting. Churchill not only had to rally his countrymen and women but also convince FDR that Britain would fight to the end, prompting the U.S. to enter the way and ultimately turn the tide against the Nazis. This book was an insightful read during a pandemic and brought some much-needed perspective. The sacrifices made, especially by Londoners, far outweigh the minor inconveniences we're dealing with in 2020.

The final two:

- [Atomic Habits](#) - Written by James Clear, this is the best book about habits I've read, better than Charles Duhigg's [The Power of Habit](#) (which was excellent in its own right). What made Clear's book stand out for me was the language he used to make his points. "Habits are the compound interest of self-

improvement." "Your outcomes are a lagging measure of your habits." "Forget about goals; focus on systems instead." "If successful and unsuccessful people share the same goals, then the goal cannot be what differentiates the winners from the losers." A lot of habit formation is common sense, but that doesn't mean it's common practice. I plan to incorporate much of what I read in this book in my daily life and already have. Just an excellent read!

- [Range](#) - Last but not least, *Range* makes the case that being a generalist is more critical today than being a specialist. That's an interesting theory, but David Epstein backs it up. [Click here to read our full book review of Range.](#)

Thanks for the interest in this book list. Hopefully, there was one here that sparked an interest. Either way, happy reading to you in 2021!

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