

How to Read a Book

By Tim Wilson

There is no better way to grow personally, and as a leader, than to read widely. I recommend that you always have some book that you are reading, and that you vary the type of material that you read.

Many people think there is only one way to read a book and that is to “plow” through it word for word. But, there are a number of ways to read – without actually reading the entire book. Let me offer you some ideas, and then you can choose how you want to proceed with your reading assignment.

The Ed Champagne Method

Ed reads about one book a week! I admire that (not only because he’s my boss, but because I’d like to do that too). Here’s how he does much of his reading. He reads the first chapter completely. The first chapters of most books set you up for what to expect and sometimes even tell you how the book is organized, which helps you decide which parts might be of benefit to you. Then he reads the first paragraph of each of the following chapters, consequently deciding if he wants to read more of that chapter. If he finds he’s interested in that chapter, he reads more. By using this method, he picks out the parts of the book that are of interest to him, and reads what’s useful.

The Doug Simpson Method

Doug is the founder of LDI, now retired, and is a person I learned much from. He also reads widely and is always reading something. Doug’s method of reading is to read with the purpose of answering predetermined questions. He identifies a specific purpose for reading a book, and reads until that purpose is fulfilled, or he looks for the parts of the book that provide the answers to his questions, or completes his purpose. By using this method, Doug will rarely read an entire book word for word.

The Tim Wilson Method

This is my favorite! But I have to confess, my method is derived from Ed’s and Doug’s methods. I combine they’re techniques into my own.

- t I start out determining a purpose for reading a particular book, and set up a number of questions that I want to “ask” the material.
- t Then I start reading as Ed does, by reading the first chapter completely (and usually the preface as well). I’ll sometimes read the second chapter too, depending upon the nature and organization of the book and what my purpose is.
- t I then begin to browse the following chapters, usually reading the first couple of paragraphs of each, but more importantly, I browse the section headings. I like books that use lots of descriptive section headings. Sometimes just reading the section headings gives me the information I’m seeking. Other times they point me to the sections that are of interest to me.
- t I make notes in the back of the book with page references. That way I can later find the sections and quotes that are important to me. I also sometimes record key learning points in a journal.

Using this method, I too avoid reading most books word for word, although there are some books that warrant that.