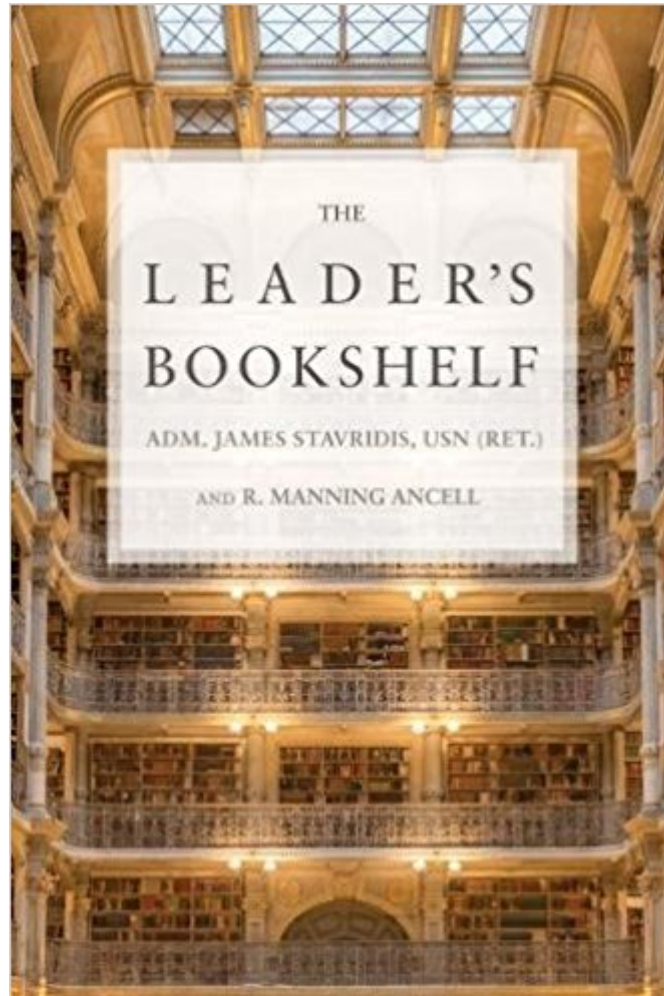




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The Leader's Bookshelf



Synopsis

For the last several years Adm. James Stavridis and his co-author, R. Manning Ancell, have surveyed over two hundred active and retired four-star military officers about their reading habits and favorite books, asking each for a list of titles that strongly influenced their leadership skills and provided them with special insights that helped propel them to success in spite of the many demanding challenges they faced. The Leader's Bookshelf synthesizes their responses to identify the top fifty books that can help virtually anyone become a better leader. Each of the works—novels, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, management publications—are summarized and the key leadership lessons extracted and presented. Whether individuals work their way through the entire list and read each book cover to cover, or read the summaries provided to determine which appeal to them most, The Leader's Bookshelf will provide a roadmap to better leadership. Highlighting the value of reading in both a philosophical and a practical sense, The Leader's Bookshelf provides sound advice on how to build an extensive library, lists other books worth reading to improve leadership skills, and analyzes how leaders use what they read to achieve their goals. An efficient way to sample some of literature's greatest works and to determine which ones can help individuals climb the ladder of success, The Leader's Bookshelf is for anyone who wants to improve his or her ability to lead—whether in family life, professional endeavors, or within society and civic organizations.

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Customer Reviews

~ ~ A very comprehensive list of books that should move, inspire, inform and educate both existing and prospective leaders. Inspiring stuff. ~ ~ Ausmarine "The Leaders Bookshelf is therefore something of a continuation of Stavridis' (and Ancell's) quest for critical thinkers and new knowledge. But it is more so, for it provides useful signposts and direction - as much for reading the past, as understanding the present, and scoping our futures." - The NAVY Magazine of the Navy League of Australia

A 1976 distinguished graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, ADM. JAMES STAVRIDIS spent over thirty-five years on active service in the U.S. Navy. He commanded destroyers and a carrier strike group in combat, and served for seven years as a four-star admiral, culminating with four years as the sixteenth Supreme Allied Commander at NATO. He holds a PhD in international relations, and is currently Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Admiral Stavridis has written six books and hundreds of articles on global security issues and leadership. A former lieutenant commander in the Navy Reserve with periods of active duty, R. MANNING ANCELL has worked in media for decades. The author of more than 200 articles in magazines, newspapers and journals, he has authored or co-authored six books, including Four-Star Leadership for Leaders and Who Will Lead? Senior Leadership in the United States Army. He lives in Norfolk, Virginia, with his wife.

Some years ago I met Admiral Jim Stavridis. The conversation, while short, turned to books. If I recall, it was in Stuttgart, Germany, sometime around 2010 or 2011. Because he was the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and the U.S. European Commander (EUCOM), he had to divide his time between two locations: his NATO headquarters located near Mons, Belgium and his EUCOM headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. At the time, I worked in the intelligence directorate at EUCOM when we heard he was coming by to meet the staff. It was a gray, overcast afternoon when he arrived. He promptly made his way down a long line of officers and enlisted, each of them posed to shake his hand and say a few words. I had only a few seconds to make a connection ~ ~ to say something interesting or ask him a question. But this I knew: I loved books; he loved books; and while standing there, I thought of something he wrote that might prove that I, like him, believed that books are essential to our profession, if not our lives. Months prior, he had written one of his regular blog posts. In it, he said that his wife noticed that his love of books and his growing library had evolved into a ~ ~ "gentle madness. ~ ~ That phrase ~ ~ a ~ ~ gentle

madness [refers](#) to a wonderful book by author Nicholas Basbanes. Basbanes [book](#) [A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books](#) is a long, discursive work: one part discussion of historic book culture in America and Britain, the other full of profiles of quirky and dedicated book lovers and collectors. When the admiral finally reached me, I mentioned the blog post and the book. His eyes lit up and he said something about few people knowing the reference. He then told me he owned 4,000 books. Surprised, I said something about wanting a library that large. He then simply said, [“You’ll get there.”](#) The conviction in his voice floored me. I believed him. And he was right. I [am](#) getting there (the featured image of this post is a picture of my library; today I have around 2,000 titles, give or take). Fast forward a few years and, no surprise, the admiral [’s](#) library has grown. Stavridis, in the introduction to the entertaining [The Leader’s Bookshelf](#), says that he has in his [“house today](#) [|](#) more than four thousand books.” His wife, Laura, [“has spent far too much of her life packing and unpacking them in postings all around the world.”](#) Stavridis and his co-author, R. Manning Ancell, have written a book that is somewhat similar to Richard Puryear [’s](#) fine book [now](#) unfortunately out of print [American Admiralship: The Moral Imperatives of Command](#). Puryear interviewed 150 four star admirals on a variety of topics. One of those topics was the importance of reading. And like Puryear, Stavridis and Ancell take a similar path. In [The Leader’s Bookshelf](#), they interviewed 200 four-star generals and flag officers, and from those discussions, they determined the 50 books that [“stood out most](#) [|](#) with top military readers.” Using no particular scientific method, they rank ordered the books in descending order by the number of mentions. Thus, the first book on the list, Michael Shaara [’s](#) [The Killer Angels](#) (1974), was mentioned most often. While the last on the list, [How: Why HOW We Anything Means Everything](#) by Dov Seidman, was mentioned least frequently. For each title, there is a short essay by a senior officer as to why they choose the book, followed by a quote from the book, a biography of the author, then a summary of the book by either Stavridis or Ancell, concluding with a few sentences about why the book is important for leaders today. For folks that regularly follow the reading lists that are published by the Chief of Naval Operations or the other services, there are, unfortunately, few surprises. The regularly cited titles appear: Anton Myer [’s](#) [Once an Eagle](#), Sun Tzu [’s](#) [The Art of War](#), Clausewitz [’s](#) [On War](#), John Keegan [’s](#) [The Face of Battle](#), E.B. Potter [’s](#) [Nimitz](#), and the always

popular Steven Pressfield with his *Gates of Fire*. They all made the cut. While there is nothing wrong with the oldies but goodies, it was refreshing to see some unusual outliers find a place in the top 50. Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* makes a showing as does Norman Mclean's *A River Runs Through It*. In fact, General Stan McChrystal is the senior officer that recommended Twain's satirical novel about a man from the 19th century, Hank Morgan, traveling back in time to King Arthur's court. The *Leader's Bookshelf*, I confess, would be ho-hum if not for the additional essays that Stavridis and Ancell add to the book. It is these essays on publishing, reading lists, and building a personal library, that raise this book from mediocrity to must have. And here, Robert Ancell pulls his weight, adding a nice cherry on top with an interview with General Mattis. Mattis beats Stavridis in the book department. With some 7,000 titles on his shelves, he probably is the best read military leader—retired or active—out there. In the interview, Mattis mentions books that apply to each level of war. Of note, he recommends Lucas Phillips' book *The Greatest Raid of All*. A book about a British raid that shattered the Nazi dry docks at Saint-Nazaire, France during World War II, preventing the Germans from using the docks for large battleships for the duration of the war. The raid resulted in no less than five Victoria Crosses. I had never heard of neither the book nor the raid. It is these little-known reading recommendations that make books like this exciting. You simply do not know what you might find. Ironically, the only criticism—or rather, observation—I have about the book is that senior officers still do not carve out enough time to read. And this in a book in which one of the early essays is about "Making Time for Reading." In one essay, a senior officer admits that while working in the Joint Staff that he only read one book in a year. One book! While another, in her recommendation, wrote only two sentences to praise the work—and even then those two sentences were footnoted. Sigh. Nonetheless, The *Leader's Bookshelf* will appeal to all types: The newbie looking for a good book to read and the bibliomaniac who may have read all 49 on the list and owns each first edition, but unaware, or didn't realize there was just one more interesting title out there.

I cannot recommend this book enough. Users are no doubt aware of the proliferation of books about leadership. What makes the *Leader's Bookshelf* different is it provides a rich how-to guide for using books to your advantage and developing nuanced leadership skills. On its surface, the *Leader's Bookshelf* appears just to be a book about great books. But it

is far more than just a mere listicle in hard binding. Each book overview includes quotes from one of its four-star recommenders, providing a window into their thought processes, and a brief synopsis of the book's main lessons for the time-starved. Many reviewers, and even the book's authors, remark on the inclusion of books which are not part of the traditional leadership canon, including Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and Isaac Asimov's wonderful *Foundation* series. Finding these hidden gems is another great value of this book because it doesn't shy away from finding value in unlikely places. The diversity of fiction and non-fiction titles on the list provides variety to the reader, a much-needed quality for those tired of trawling through the rote talking points of conventional leadership books. Beyond the books themselves, the *Leader's Bookshelf* provides advice on curating your own library, writing, publishing, and managing your intellectual development in the rigor of our busy lives. These bits of wisdom remind the reader that writing, reflection, and thought leadership are just as important as successfully managing daily work activities. Five stars for utility, originality, and good writing.

This work is extraordinary. It should be required reading for anyone in a potential leadership position as well as for those already in such positions.

Comprehensive

very useful

Brilliant author. One of the greatest diplomatic minds of our age.

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