

Reading Recommendations on Risk Management

These are the books that I review regularly regarding the discipline of Risk Management and some related issues. Each of these gives you hints on Recognition, Prioritization and Mobilization for the risks you face in your organization. I constantly scan Amazon looking for “risk management” in their search engine.

How to read a book. I had a full time Mom as a kid and also I am a victim of 12 years of Catholic school. Reading was a big part of my life for as long as I can remember. After I buy/obtain a book and start to read it, I always have a highlighter and pen alongside. I highlight items in the book that I want to remember and make note of my thoughts in the margin. I then turn back the corner on that page.

This is a little more difficult with my iPad as I am a tech idiot, but I have figured out how to “bookmark” sentences and paragraphs for easier access after the initial reading of the work.

When I finish a great book with a lot of value, I put it on a shelf I have dedicated to books I really liked. At least annually, I review these books. Now, I don't have to read the whole book, just the turned back pages and read the “yellow” areas and the notes. Just a thought for you, but this technique has worked well for me.

Also, I recommend Harvard Business Review, the MIT Sloan Journal, Foreign Affairs, Psychology Today, and the WSJ for regular reading to keep up with trends and issues of interest. So, in no particular order, here are my risk based reading recommendations for your consideration.

Meltdown: Why Our Systems Fail and What Can We Do About It. Chris Clearfield and Andras Tilcsik

Often times I will get a phone call or email asking “Gordon, if there was one book you would recommend to get people thinking about risk management what book would it be?” For years I have told people that there are a bunch of great books on my reading list and I did not have a “favorite”. Well guess what? Meltdown says it better than anything I have read on the topic of risk management. Fantastic content and writing style is excellent. The authors talk about tragedies in multiple disciplines (most of which were top news stories at the time of occurrence) and they brilliantly go “back in time” and point out all the “problems lying in wait”. More importantly though, the pose some great strategies regarding how to get your people to recognize and address these problems proactively. This is now my favorite book and I recommend it without reservation.

Loonshots: How to Nurture the Crazy Ideas That Win Wars, Cure Diseases, and Transform Industries.

Safi Bahcall

The title caught my eye for a reason. If you ever visit my home office you will see a beautiful jade sculpture – and you guessed correctly – of a loon. Mrs. G bought this for me in Lake Louise many, many years ago. Over the years I have learned (surreptitiously) that I have been referred to as “a loon”. “Gordon is a nice guy, but what a loon – he is really out there”. When I saw “Loonshots” in my search for books on risk management – I absolutely had to buy it and I was not disappointed. The author cleverly identifies “loons” in various industries who were laughed at because of their crazy ideas – and yet those “ideas” ended up being brilliant strategies for success. Some of the stories you will be familiar with – some not – but a fun read with lots of historical information that filled in a lot of blanks for me.

An Economist Walks Into a Brothel: And Other Unexpected Places to Understand Risk

Alison Schrager

The title caught my eye – but I was wondering what my fellow passengers on a plane would think if they saw me reading a book with this title. Would this get me banned by the TSA? Ms. Schrager is an economist and she has an interesting take on risk management. If you visit Amazon and read the review by Robert Merton, General Stanley McChrystal, Adam Grant and Tyler Cowen (all great writers on their own) I think you will be impressed. It is a fun read and filled with great stories and observations that will benefit you regardless of occupation.

Warnings Unheeded: Twin Tragedies at Fairchild Air Force Base – Andy Brown

If you have been to any of my live programs over the last 15 years I have been telling people at the tragedy known as CZAR – 52. This terrible tragedy involving a B-52 occurred in 1994 is chronicled in great detail in Dr. Tony Kern’s great work – Darker Shades of Blue. Recently an attendee at one of my programs told me about this book by Mr. Brown in which he again covers the CZAR-52 tragedy – but also covers a different event that occurred four days prior to the B-52 Crash that did not involve another plane – but an Airman with a long history of mental illness that went ignored by executives in the Air Force. While the stories are tragic – the book is a well written work again proving that when we ignore problems lying in wait we will ultimately have a terrible tragedy.

The Gray Rhino: How To Recognize And Act On The Obvious Dangers We Ignore – Michele Wucker

On this “recommended reading list” is a book by Nicholas Nassim Taleb – The Black Swan. This great work explains how to recognize and act to address the “unknown unknowns” that occasionally pop up and cause us great problems. In this work by Ms. Wucker – she explains very clearly how difficult it is to address these “unthinkable” events – but most of our tragedies are not “Black Swans” – but rather “Gray Rhinos”. They are very clearly running right at us but for many reasons we fail to get out of the way and our inaction results in tragedy. A great read with many practical examples.

Careful: A User’s Guide to Our Injury-Prone Minds - Steve Casner

This book is a great read – and filled with wonderful examples of how stupid we are with respect to avoiding injury and death. While we are getting so many new “toys” and “tech stuff” to help us live better – the human mind is still behind the curve and injuries and accidental deaths are on the rise. Mr Casner is obviously well versed on the “safety stuff” and shows very clearly that there is not a safety warning we won’t ignore or a foolproof device we can’t turn into a killing tool.

The Dash – Mac Anderson and Linda Ellis

I debated about putting this great book (a twenty minute read) on this list – but decided to do so because it is an essential read. While it does not deal with managing risk (my favorite topic to discuss) it is more about “the dash” that appears on every headstone between date of birth and date of death. What will your “dash” say about you. Not to digress, but I have read a lot of books about how to “live to be 100” and it gets down to “the Eight F’s”. Family, Faith, Freedom, Friends, Food, Fun, Funds and Function. The last one – “function” involves “your dash”. What have you done to make the world a better place. I hope you enjoy this as much as I did.

Blue on Blue: An Insider’s Story of Good Cops Catching Bad Cops Charles Campisi

This book should be mandatory reading for everyone in the law enforcement field. Mr. Campisi was in charge of the Internal Affairs unit of NYPD for many, many years – and gives hundreds of examples of misconduct involving NYPD cops and how he ran a very successful unit to help catch these bad cops – and send a message to all the other cops that “you will be caught” if you try to do something wrong. As I read this work, I remember an experience I had in Wales many years ago. After

two days of lecturing there, the Chief Constable said to me “I think you have lied to us for two days – you are not an American – you are a Welshman”. I told him I was an American – and his response was “how do you know so much about my organization”? My answer was “it is the same circus with different clowns. Everyone in police work needs to read this book – because what happens in NYPD can happen in your department and “forewarned is forearmed”. I think you will enjoy his writing style also – and please note how many of the cops he is arresting are living in the basement of Mom’s house.

Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town – Jon Krakauer

Like so many other great books I have read over the years, I would not have picked this one up but for the fact that I was so impressed with another book he penned (I will ask the Editor of this to see if “penned” is still a usable word and has not fallen away like “dialing” has) years prior - “Into Thin Air”. This work is as well written as it is very troubling. While the book focuses on the crime of “rape” at this University in Montana, I have learned from my campus law enforcement friends that this serious issue is ubiquitous throughout America. And while the book focuses on rapes perpetrated by college athletes, it is not just the “jocks” who are perpetrating these criminal behaviors. What is equally troubling is the response (or lack thereof) from campus and local law enforcement and the local prosecutors. Couple this with a jury pool that is filled with people who are enamored with college athletes and we have a perfect storm for ratifying inappropriate behavior thus encouraging future similar conduct. I did not enjoy reading this book but I commend it to all - particularly to those of you who have a relative or friend in or in route to college.

Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania – Erik Larson

Another book that surprised me. I thought it would be a history read – but it ended up being a “risk management” read. I was told for years that the United States got involved in WW1 after the sinking of the Lusitania. According to Mr. Larson – this is not true. The US involvement in WW1 did not occur until well after the Lusitania event – but the British thought that if they allowed the Germans to sink a ship with Americans on board that the US would then help out in WW1. A fascinating trip through history from over 100 years ago and exactly what Mr. Churchill (yes – that Mr. Churchill) knew in WW1 about German Subs and where they were and what he did with this information.

Against The Tide – Rear Admiral Dave Oliver (Ret.)

Well written by Rear Admiral Dave Oliver (Ret.) this is a fascinating book about a man who changed the course of history. In the news today are stories about the United States Secret Service and when you read the “experts” they are all saying that there needs to be a “change in culture” in that organization. I hear similar stories about Jails in trouble, and police departments in trouble, and fire departments in trouble and everyone is talking about “changing culture”. This is much easier said than done. How do you “change culture” that has existed in an organization for decades. That is what this book is all about. Our Navy diesel sub commanders in WWII were a tough bunch of hard drinking, cigar smoking warriors who did a fantastic job helping win the war for the good guys. Admiral Rickover was tasked by Presidents Truman and then Eisenhower to build a “nuclear” fleet – and the opposition he faced from the heroes of WWII was unbelievable. How did a 5’2” Jewish guy with a squeaky high voice “change this culture” so successfully? That is what this book is all about. This is a must read for everyone in leadership positions in public safety written by a fellow with some personal involvement in the story. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

“Willful Blindness” – Margaret Heffernan

If you have been to any of my lectures, you are aware of my focus on trying to address the “problems lying in wait” in your organization. Too often, people in the organization are “blind” to these problems. There are a number of reasons why this occurs, and the author of this great book identifies the problems – and provides solutions. This is a great work and should be read by all in leadership positions in any organization.

“Think Like a Freak” – Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner

A sequel to their earlier work – Freakonomics – and again well done. The authors in this work continue to challenge the thought process used by so many people and this work will help “retrain your brain” on how to look at a problem and identify a viable solution.

“The M Factor – How the Millennial Generation is Rocking the Workplace” Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman

When I look at the list of topics to be covered at various seminars around America I regularly see programs directed at how to address “the new generation” of employees that are now being hired. Many of these

programs focus on the “problems” but this book is loaded with solutions on how to integrate this new generation into the workplace.

“Bowling Alone” – Robert Putnam

Bowling is up, but organized bowling leagues are down. This simple statement sums up a lot of problems we face today. Many people are running “parallel” and not interacting with each other. I have a personal concern that we are not sharing knowledge and experience with each other – and as a result we will continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. A great book with lots of interesting data inserted throughout the work.

“Flight 232” – Laurence Gonzales

Again, Mr. Gonzales does not disappoint the reader with this fantastic in-depth look at an airline tragedy from 25 years ago. The Captain of this plane, Al Haynes, is on the lecture circuit and I have heard him several times. I liked his program, and this book fills in a lot of blanks about what really caused so many to die on that DC-10.

“Field Command” – Charles “Sid” Heal

For those of you on the law enforcement side of things – particularly those of you who are still active – this is a must read. I met “Sid” back in the 70’s when he was with LASD. He retired as the Commander of their SEB (Special Enforcement Bureau) and during his tenure there he also remained active in the USMC Reserve). This guy is a genius – and this book on “how to make things work in the field” is simply brilliant. I strongly recommend this to all supervisors and up in law enforcement – and for those of you who are trying to promote – this book will be of great help to you.

“Six Frigates – The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy” – Ian W. Toll

We all watched with great pride the actions of the Navy Seals last year in Pakistan taking out Bin Laden. And we all watched what the Seals did off the coast of Somalia when the Maersk Alabama was seized by pirates. And these were not the first exploits of this great group of Navy personnel. So my question was “what is the history of the Seals” – and then the question became “what is the history of the U.S. Navy – and I came across this book and read it – and then reread it. Frankly, it gave me the chills on both

readings – and is a fantastic read. It is all about “risk management” – but the words “risk management” do not appear in the book. On a personal note, I have visited the USS Constitution many times in Boston Harbor – but after reading this book, my next visit was an entirely different experience.

“Unaccountable: What Hospitals Won’t Tell You and How Transparency Can Revolutionize Healthcare” – Dr. Marty Markary

For those of you who have been to my live lectures, I often point out how much the public wants from law enforcement in terms of transparency and how much heat is directed at police and sheriff departments when there is the slightest hint that a “coop” has done something wrong. I wish that the public would have a similar concern about the medical profession in the U.S. – and what is really going on there in terms of murders, deaths and cover ups. You will be utterly fascinated by the breadth and depth of problems in hospitals. This book is a mandatory read if you have anyone in your family scheduled for surgery any time soon.

“Going Pro – The Deliberate Practice of Professionalism” – Dr. Tony Kern

This is the most recent work by an American treasure – Dr. Kern. We are so fortunate to have him on our side. I first became familiar with him when I read “Darker Shades of Blue” – a book about tragedies in the Air Force. I have subsequently had the honor of listening to him speak and visiting his great website. In this book, he traces the “roots” of professional behavior from centuries ago with some great research. He moves into the complex world we live in today, and how “professionalism” is absolute essential if we are going to survive. This book is a must read.

“Disastrous Decisions” - Andrew Hopkins.

Dr. Hopkins writes a great book. I read some of his earlier work, but this book focuses on the "Deep Horizon" tragedy. He is able to cut through all the "tech talk" and show all the "problems lying in wait" at British Petroleum and TransOcean and Halliburton - and the drilling industry as a whole that led to this massive tragedy that killed eleven - and did a huge amount of damage to the Gulf region. His thoughts on HRO's, confirmation bias, lessons learned, audits and tunnel vision are enlightening.

"The Power of Habit - Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business" - Charles Duhigg.

This book was recommended to me by Dale Stockton, the editor of LawOfficer.com and a long time friend. This book is filled with examples of how we (as people and as organizations) get locked into a line of thinking - a habit - and how these "habits" can help us and hurt us. How did Alcoa Aluminum lower their injury rate and simultaneously increase share value? How did the United States lower the infant mortality rate so dramatically? What "habits" do you have that are impacting your ability to perform at the highest level possible.

"Wait: The Art and Science of Delay" - Frank Partnoy.

I have not read anything else by the author - but the title caught my eye and this is a great book. If you have been to any of my lectures, you know I try to separate events into two types - "time to think" and "no time to think". Those events that give us no time to think are the ones that need the "constant and rigorous" training.

But most events give us some time to think - and my recommendation for years has been - if you have time to think - use it! So Mr. Portnoy has done a ton of research on this - and takes it a step further - if you have time to think - use every bit of it. If you have an hour - use fifty-nine minutes. If you have a year - use three hundred sixty four days. A great book with a lot of practical examples.

"Monday Mornings" – Dr. Sanjay Gupta

This is the fellow you see on the morning news – good looking guy who speaks well and packs an M.D. behind his name. I bought the book on a fluke – and now recommend it to all of you. We learn from our own mistakes – but it better to learn from the mistakes of others. In this fictional work (based on real situations I imagine) a group of doctors in a medical center have regular meetings on Monday morning to talk about the mistakes they have made – with the goal of preventing mistakes made by others in the group. You are probably familiar with one of the classes I teach – non-punitive close call reporting – and this book (in my mind) validates that line of thinking. A great read that applies to your high risk job.

"Adapt" – Tim Harford

What a fantastic read - and while not filled with "excitement" it is packed

with real life stories about individuals and organizations that fail to "adapt" to changing times and circumstances. The mistakes that Johnson and McNamara made in Vietnam cost a lot of American lives and many other problems. The President and the Secretary of Defense had no clue what was really going on in ground and air operations. Fast forward forty plus years. The mistakes Bush and Rumsfeld (and now Obama and his group) made in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused us some substantial problems - and they are almost identical to the mistakes made in Southeast Asia.

Both administrations failed to have any "feedback" loop with successful ground personnel as to how to win the war - they did not listen to the Colonels who were closest to what was really going on. Mr Harford explains this better than I can in this quick recommendation, but this book is all about the organizations that because of size and decentralization fail to "adapt" to what is really going on. An excellent read all the way around and you will learn a lot about navigation, medicine, profits, losses and many other things in this great work. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

“Thinking, Fast and Slow” – Daniel Kahneman

Most of you have heard my thinking on "NDT" and "DT" events (non-discretionary time vs. discretionary time) and how the brain works and the difference between fast and slow thinking. I have bored you with thoughts like "never make a split second decision if you don't have to", and similar type statements. So here is a question for you.

You buy a bat and a ball for \$1.10. The bat cost one dollar more than the ball. How much did the ball cost? If you are honest with yourself, many of you came up with the obvious answer - ten cents. Well the correct answer is not a dime - but rather a nickel. Many of you got the right answer, but you had to think just a bit to do that.

How about if I asked you that question while you were driving a car in the rain? How about if I asked you that question when you were tired? Does that make a difference in the way we process information. I ramble about these things, but Dr Kahneman got a Nobel Prize for his work on how the brain works.

“Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption” – Laura Hillenbrand.

Another work that I probably would not have bought – but I got it as a gift from a friend of mine – who ordered it electronically for me through

Amazon and sent it to my Kindle. Who would have ever dreamed we would have this ability.

Anyhow, here I am in Southern California – and have read quite a bit about the “Great War” – and I had never heard of the focus of this book. You will be utterly fascinated about his story of “survival, resilience and redemption” – but I put this into my “risk” section because of the detailed work that the author has on how many Military personnel were lost stateside during training – and when you read the portion about 56,000+ “accidents” in aviator training with 19 Airmen dying every day – you will be as shocked as I was. A great read.

“Blue Threat – To Err is Inhuman” – Tony Kern

Dr. Kern is one of the ten smartest people in America – and anything he writes I will read it because he is a wonderful writer. This work is simply phenomenal – and he attacks my favorite topic – how to eliminate “error”. Most of the “tragedies I have studied – in so many different disciplines – get down to good people who make honest mistakes. This can be fixed, and Dr. Kern gives some excellent ideas on how to do so. A must read for all in the “risk” business.

“Checklist Manifesto” – Atul Gawande

This is the first book I have read written by this author, but I must get the rest of them. A brilliant piece on the importance of checklists – and how they work. He uses real examples out of his profession – medicine, but gives concrete examples from the construction industry, aviation and law enforcement. Many of the “errors” we make could have been prevent if a checklist was in place and taken seriously.

“Just Culture” – Sidney Dekker

Dekker is a new author for me – but I will try to find other books he may have written. This work surrounds the importance of “reporting systems” and how they work – and why they don’t work. While the focus of the book is taking the “criminal prosecution” component out of the equation when someone makes a mistake at work – there is a lot of other valuable information about building a reporting system that works. This work was near and dear to my heart because of my involvement in www.firefighterclosecalls.com and while I do not agree with all his recommendations – I recommend the book for your consideration.

“The Outliers” – Malcolm Gladwell

Gladwell is the author of "The Tipping Point" and "Blink". Smart guy and now he has written "The Outliers". Did you know that most of the best hockey players in the world are born in January, February and March?

And why is Bill Gates so darn successful? And why to some very smart people fail while others with less talent succeed? This and many other questions are explored and answered in another interesting look at "data" analysis. Gladwell has a ton of stuff in this book that you will find interesting and thought provoking.

“The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century” – George Friedman

What a brilliant work by Mr. Friedman. It is the first book of his that I have read, but I will look for others. Well researched and chock full of data about what we can expect in the next century. And I know how difficult it is to predict the future with any accuracy, but his thinking processes are well laid out and I am confident you will enjoy this work.

“Panama Fever: The Epic Story of the Building of the Panama Canal” – Matthew Parker

As many of you may know from my live lectures, my dad was a merchant seaman during WWII. And while he did not talk about the war a lot when I was a kid, I was utterly fascinated with his tales of the Panama Canal. I guess I always just took it for granted – okay so someone built a canal between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans – but I was unaware of what a fantastic engineering feat this was – and how many people died during the build. Truly a fascinating read.

“How We Decide” - Jonah Lehrer

Another look at the processes involved in decision-making, and why we do what we do and how others can “persuade” us to do things that will benefit them. Lots of fascinating stories about the early studies of the brain – and what we thought we knew a long time ago about how the brain works. He ties this in nicely with the present – and how “modern” people (that would be you and me) think things through to make decisions.

“Why We Make Mistakes” – Joseph T. Hallinan

Former newspaper guy who saw the train coming (no more papers pretty soon) so he started writing books. And this work (of course) is all about "risk" and what can we do to prevent mistakes from happening. It is filled with a lot of interesting facts and data (quick - is San Diego east or west of Reno?) and other such stuff. BTW, that was an easy one. Everyone

knows that San Diego is west of Reno! So I will ask you a tougher one. Is Rome north of south of Philadelphia? Not so sure are you - even though you have been looking the globe all of your life. If you are into the analysis of data and reading interesting studies and reports of why people make mistakes - this is a good read. And just for your info, San Diego is east of Reno.

“The Unthinkable” – Amanda Ripley

Brilliant author (Time magazine veteran) who has developed a passion from her experience as to how people react during tragedies and disasters. From 9-11 to Katrina to plane crashes to crimes of violence – how and why do you react the way you do. And more importantly, what can you do to perform better if involved in “The Unthinkable”?

"The Impulse Factor" - Nick Tasler.

The cover caught my eye (it is a traffic signal) enough to read the summary of the book - and a great read regarding why some of us play it safe and others risk it all. Hey, I offer you a guaranteed \$1000 in an envelope right now - or a 50/50 chance for \$2000 in another envelope.

Which would you take? It seems like a no brainer to me - but about 25% of people will take the risk and go for the unknown rather than the sure thing. And I guess this is true because I watch some of the brainless decisions on "Deal or No Deal" and it makes you wonder what people are thinking about. Anyhow, this text deals with why we do some of the things we do. Also is a very clever online test in the book that allows you to find out what kind of person you are with respect to risk. A fascinating read with a lot of great examples.

"Everyday Survival" by Laurence Gonzales.

Several years ago I read another work of his - "Deep Survival" and was so impressed that when I was offered a pre-publication purchase on his next work I jumped on it. And I was not disappointed when it came in the mail this week. Why to smart people occasionally do really stupid things is a common thread throughout the book - and he provides countless examples of sheer idiocy perpetrated by people who should know better. He finishes his book with some thoughts on the future of the earth (as we know it) if we continue to waste resources.

“Darker Shades of Blue” and “Flight Discipline” – Tony Kern

This work chronicles tragedies in the USAF (and other aviation incidents) and focuses on the identification of the “Rogue” pilot and what the consequences can be in a high-risk job if these rogues are not addressed. Tony Kern is one of the smartest people in America today and I

recommend all of his works without reservation. If you are ever teaching a class on “employee discipline” to managers, this book will give you a lot of examples to use. This book was out of print for years but is now available on North Slope Productions website.

“Predictable Surprises” – Max Bazerman

Mr. Bazerman is a regular contributor to Harvard Business Review. In the first chapters of this work he lays out a good argument on why we ignore obvious clues that a disaster is in route. He moves on and gives some excellent strategies on how to recognize problems prior to occurrence.

“Normal Accidents” – Charles Perrow

Mr. Perrow is one of the serious writers on risk. This is a nice summary of his thoughts and is often cited by other experts in the field. UPDATE – There was a crash at John Wayne airport in June, 2017 and Mr. Perrow predicted this in this work from over a decade ago.

“Deep Survival” – Laurence Gonzales

The subtitle on the cover says it all and hooked me. “Who Lives, Who Dies and Why”. A lot of thoughts on how the brain functions in an emergency and what you can do up front to prevent your death. The checklist in the last chapter on what to do if you are ever in a “discretionary time” emergency is excellent.

“Inviting Disaster” – James Chiles

Brilliantly written summary of a number of high profile tragedies in the world and what really caused them. A must read for the serious planner. Also, pick up his newest work – **The God Machine**. This is a fabulous book on how the helicopter (that we know today) was developed. Every problem in the development of a machine that met the four requirements of a (helicopter) had to be addressed from an engineering and risk standpoint. The human mind is simply amazing.

“The Logic of Failure” – Dietrich Dorner

Okay – so it was originally written in German and interpreted into English. A very tough read (get out your notepad) but well thought out and shows how people make decisions and why so many decisions end up going bad. Dr. Dorner does a lot of high profile studies at a major German University.

“Beyond Fear” – Schneier

Nice book that puts things in perspective.

“Sources of Power” – Gary Klein

The fellow who came up with the RPDM theory that I discuss in my programs has written a dynamite book on how we think things through. His analysis of how our brain works and how decisions are made – particularly split second decisions – is truly fascinating. A must read for anyone in public safety or other high-risk jobs.

“Safety in the Chemical Industry” – Kharbanda

What the heck caused “Bhopal” back in the 80’? Interesting read on why things go right and wrong in the chemical business.

“The Fifth Discipline” – Peter Senge

Perhaps the most difficult book I have ever read. Get out a yellow legal pad, a dictionary and a lot of time but he is a deep thinker.

“Why Things Break” – Mark Eberhard

Early on in the book Mr. Eberhard talks about getting marbles from his parents when he was a kid. Rather than play with them, he heated them up in the oven and then dropped them in ice water to see how they would break. His behavior reminded me of a person I am very familiar with, so I had to buy it and read it. A somewhat technical book on molecules but well worth the read as it shows how the “nail” can cause the whole building to fall.

“The World is Flat” – Thomas Friedman

Mr. Friedman gives a nice overview of where this world is headed in terms of globalization and after you read it you may get some ideas of how you can modify your thinking to maximize you and your agencies performance in this changing world. This book is really an eye opener as to how the gap between the United States and other countries has narrowed considerably, including in areas where many thought we would always have a substantial lead.

“The Southwest Airlines Way” – Jody Gittel

I have never met the author but plan to. She is brilliant, and falls into one of my ten smartest people in America list. How is it that Southwest is the only airline regularly making money? How is it possible that Southwest has been flying for over 35 years without a single person dying from an

accident on one of their airplanes. Some of her thoughts can be transferred immediately to your operations.

“Against the Gods” – Peter Bernstein

A fascinating work on the history of “Risk” and how we have ended up where we are today. A lot of funny historical stuff and a great work on understanding risk.

“How Doctors Think” – Jerome Groopman

Every year we hear about data regarding how many people are killed from medical malpractice. The number of deaths hovers around 100,000 annually. Dr. Groopman posits that a lot of these problems are not caused by a lack of technical competence, but because of “cognitive bias” issues that influence how doctors think. The book is a series of case studies where MD’s made up their mind too quickly, based their decision on partial or wrong information, or did not “really listen” to what the patient (and the family) was saying. Interesting read, and the same issues face professionals in other occupations including law enforcement, fire service and EMS operations.

“Jihad Incorporated” – Steven Emerson

Read it and weep. I believe an accurate (and sad) discussion on where we are on war against the radical jihadists and how disjointed our response is to their goal to have a world under “sharia” (religious) law. As a country we have not even recognized this “risk” yet alone prioritized or commenced true mobilization to address this risk that will be present for decades to come.

“Silent Knights” – Alan Diehl

I had heard rumors that the U.S. Military has lost more soldiers, sailors and marines from accidents and illness than from combat. I did not believe the rumors. I read “Silent Knights”. I now believe the “rumors” to be true. This brilliant piece by a very brave man lays out the issue with the arrogance, cover-ups, and doublespeak coming from military leaders. The “Silent Knights” are the brave women and men who die because of the incompetence at the highest levels in each branch. As you read it though, please note the absence of tragedies in the Nuclear Navy. Perhaps Admiral Rickover had a plan that worked!

“The Black Swan” – Nassim Taleb

When Mr. Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense, he was asked by a reporter what worried him at night. He responded that he was most concerned

about the “unknown unknowns”. A lot of illiterate people got a laugh out of this phrase, but anyone associated with Risk Management knew exactly what he was talking about. Dr. Taleb lays it out in great detail and more importantly gives some thoughts on better ways of looking at things so that you can spot the “Black Swans” in advance. Truly a brilliant work!

Also, pick up his prequel – “Fooled by Randomness”. Not quite as much fun as the other, but still a good read.

“Hard Call” – John McCain

Whether you like him or don’t like him, McCain is an interesting guy. His newest book (Hard Call) talks about people throughout history who made decisions – some good and some really, really bad. It is a nice book to read that complements the detailed work of Gary Klein. Klein talks about the process in an antiseptic way. McCain shows how the process is implemented in real life throughout history.

“Managing the Unexpected” – Karl E. Weick and Kathleen M. Sutcliffe

Read the 2007 version of this book. A fantastic read on how to create the “HRO” – High Reliability Organization. These two authors have really put together a great book on how to turn your organization (private or public sector) into the HRO. A must read for anyone who is running (or will be running) an organization.

“San Francisco is Burning” – Dennis Smith

As a native San Franciscan I was eager to read the book. Dennis Smith has a long history of brilliant work writing books related to public safety operations. This text is extremely well researched and a great read. I was shocked to learn what really caused the fires that followed the earthquake – it was not what I had heard nor was it what I had been taught. This is a must read for anyone involved in planning for disaster.

“Terror at Beslan” – John Giduck

Scary stuff indeed – and hopefully not something that ever happens in our great country – but Mr. Giduck makes a powerful argument that it is not a matter of if – but rather when and where. Beslan is a small town in Russia and in September of 2004 a group of radical terrorists took over a school there and did unspeakable things to the students, faculty and anyone else who was there. The author does a good job at laying out some control measures that we need to have in place to prevent such an event from occurring here. Introduction to this book by Dave Grossman.

“The Firecracker Boys” – Dan O’Neill

I have often wondered why we are not drilling for oil at Anwar in Alaska. Why are people up there so afraid of what needs to be done? I could not believe what our government tried to do after we developed the A-Bomb in 1945. Dr. Teller (and some other people) decided that one use of nuclear power would be in major excavation and construction projects around the world. And to prove it would work, they went to Alaska to start lighting these “firecrackers” and... well, that was the birth of the environmental movement in America. Fascinating read that will open your eyes and it might explain the fear that Alaskans have about “their government trying to help them”.

“Flirting with Disaster: Why Accidents Are Rarely Accidental” – Marc Gerstein

So you think you know what happened to the unsinkable “Titanic”. How about what Chernobyl and right here at home – Katrina? Both Space Shuttle tragedies - Challenger and Columbia – should have never occurred. And how about British Petroleum (pick one of their tragedies) and the pharmaceutical tragedy known as Vioxx? Were these unavoidable misfortunes that no one could possibly have imagined? All of them were tragic disasters that could have been prevented, or whose damaging repercussions could have been mitigated if people really understood the discipline of Risk Management.

“Lies My Teacher Told Me - Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong” - James Loewen.

This book was recommended to me by Sid Heal, and when someone with his reputation recommends a book - it becomes a "must read". He and I were having a chat regarding "Cultural Ignorance" and how little many people know about the United States and the development of this great Country and this book popped up in his comments. "Lies" is a strong word - suggesting a "deliberate" act, but this book raises a compelling case that students in our educational system (and I was once in that system) have been "lied to" regarding so many aspects of the growth of our Nation. From the Revolutionary War to the treatment of Native Americans to Slavery to the World Wars and Vietnam - there has been a lot of "missing" information and "misinformation" spread about. You know my thoughts regarding "learning" from mistakes of the past" and how that knowledge can help prevent future error, and this book provides a lot of specific detail regarding our "past" and many of the mistakes we have made as a Country. Obviously the author has his biases, but I vetted several of his "facts" and I became a believer that our textbooks need some serious improvement. I hope this book fills in a couple of "blanks" for you.

“Wild Bill Donovan” – Douglas Waller

I know this is a list of books on Risk – and this is a bit of a stretch, but it is my list so I will do what I want. If you follow the news, in May of 2010 there was a story about two CIA agents (one a new grandmother and the other a musician) who were killed prior to September 11 in a bomb attack by what we now know as Al Qaeda. Their deaths could only be reported after the death of Bin Laden for some security reasons. I read about the deaths as I was finishing this book. Where did the CIA come from? Who was this Bill Donovan fellow and how did he get involved in all of this?

And why do the CIA and the FBI fail to get along - even today. Waller answers these questions and many more in this book. If you enjoy WWII intrigue and how we prevailed in that conflict - or if you just like to read the "spy" stuff and how the U.S. developed the Central Intelligence Agency - this book is for you.

Thanks for your interest in my reading recommendations regarding Risk issues. I sincerely hope this is of some benefit to you.

Gordon Graham