

EXECUTIVE FORUM

Firm Leaders Prepare to Dig into Their Summer “To Read” Lists

Lifelong learners = lifelong readers = lifelong leaders.

You can't be a great leader without also being an eager lifelong learner, and as the warm winds of June blow away the stress of busy season, firm executives prepare for a bit of R&R—including diving into their “want-to-read” stacks that have been piling up through crunch time. This month, *PAR* asks firm executives: “What book or books have been most profound in your leadership approach? What books do you recommend or require that others in your firm read? Also, what are you currently reading or planning to read soon? What is your preferred format for reading nowadays: e-reader, paper or both?” For their answers, read on!

Eleanor Baker, managing principal, **Baker Newman Noyes/** Portland, Maine (FY13 net revenue: \$27.7 million; 29 partners, 182 total staff, four offices):



Eleanor Baker

Two influential books I recommend to those interested in leadership are “Good to Great” by Jim Collins and “Who Moved My Cheese?” by Spencer Johnson. Most recently, Sheryl Sandberg’s “Lean In” was a meaningful read to me. As a managing principal in a male-dominated profession, I feel it is important to stand up and take responsibility for empowering the next generation of female leaders. While women represent more than half of U.S. accountants today, they account for only 19% of partners in CPA firms nationwide. I enjoy reading for pleasure too—and particularly following busy season! Currently I am reading the “A Game of Thrones” series by George R.R. Martin on my Kindle and iPad.

Gregory C. Burbach, managing partner, **Honkamp Krueger & Co./**Dubuque, Iowa (FY13 net revenue: \$43.7 million; 25 partners, 366 total staff, 10 offices):

I recommend “The Go-Giver” by Bob Burg and John David Mann. The theme behind this book reflects the philosophy we try to live by every day at Honkamp Krueger, which is “when you give, you receive.” We apply this when interact-

ing with our clients, employees and community. This philosophy is also in line with a famous quote by our founding partner, Arnie Honkamp. He used to say, “There are givers and takers; be a giver.” This is a great rule of thumb to live by. When you give, you will receive tenfold. Also, “The Go-Giver” is told in storied fashion, so it’s a fast, easy read.



Gregory C. Burbach

Michael Steidl, managing partner, **Smith & Gesteland/** Madison, Wis. (FY13 net revenue: \$14.275 million; 14 equity and five salaried partners, 84 total staff):



Michael Steidl

I would say the book with the most profound impact on my leadership approach is “How to Win Friends and Influence People” by Dale Carnegie. In my opinion, this is a must-read for anyone who is in a leadership position. We have a number of books currently on the reading list here at the office, but three that have been particularly popular are “At the Crossroads: The Remarkable CPA Firm that Nearly Crashed, then Soared” by Gale Crosley [and Debbie Stover], “True Professionalism” by David Maister, and “Train Your Brain for Success” by Roger Seip. I would highly recommend these books to anyone in business. Two books I’m currently working on are “How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life” by Michael LeBoeuf, and “Who” by Geoff Smart [and Randy Street]. I’ve had both e-readers and paper, but honestly, still enjoy paper the best.

Allan Peiser, managing partner, **Goldin Peiser & Peiser/**Dallas (FY13 net revenue: \$7.9 million; eight partners, 40 total staff):

As managing partner of GPP, I am committed to exploring the advice of others as it pertains to my growth

as a professional and the growth of my firm. The books that have had the most profound impact are "The E-Myth" by Michael Gerber, "Leadership" by Rudy Giuliani, and "Straight from the Gut" by Jack Welch. I usually recommend the following books to others in the firm: "The E-Myth," "Never Eat Alone" [by Keith Ferrazzi and Tahl Raz] and "The Tipping Point" [by Malcolm Gladwell]. I am also an avid reader of *The Economist* for its domestic and international news, trends, and opinions. My preferred format is the iPad.



Allan Peiser

Harvey N. Wallace, managing partner, **Brown Smith Wallace/ St. Louis** (FY13 net revenue: \$31.4 million; 20 partners, 215 total staff, three offices):

Of the books I've read in the last six months, the one that stands out is the one I read yet again: "Good to Great." It's a book our firm leadership revisits regularly and attempts to follow in practice. [Jim] Collins discusses how strong leadership and discipline coupled with cultures that embrace entrepreneurship and technology play a key role in the success of organizations. These same factors have contributed to our exponential growth over the last decade. During this time, we've tripled our revenue and doubled our staff, all through organic growth in one metro area, St. Louis—an unusual story for a CPA firm in today's environment of ongoing mergers.



Harvey N. Wallace

Seth McDaniel, managing partner, **Frazier & Deeter/Atlanta** (FY13 net revenue: \$53 million; 34 partners, 274 total staff, three offices):

I am an advocate of servant leadership, so I cull leadership ideas from a variety of sources. I believe in the principle behind the book "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" [by Robert Fulghum]. When you think about it,



Seth McDaniel

the foundations of leadership are all there: play fair, say you are sorry when you hurt somebody, live a balanced life and be brave enough to take chances. There are also some classics that have influenced me: "Good to Great" and Stephen Covey's "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People." As our firm continues to grow, we are offering more leadership training. I think it is really critical to nurture the next generation of talent by making sure they are exposed to different aspects of leadership. At Frazier & Deeter we're using books like "The Leadership Challenge" by [Jim M.] Kouzes and [Barry Z.] Posner, "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," by [Patrick] Lencioni, and "Emotional Intelligence 2.0," by Travis Bradberry, Jean Greaves [and Lencioni] in our training. Regarding technology, I still like the feel of a book in my hands, but with the amount of travel I do, most of my reading happens on my iPad.

David Goldner, managing partner, **Gross Mendelsohn/Baltimore** (FY13 net revenue: \$14 million; 15 partners, 100 total staff):

We use "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" as a basis for the approach to building a great culture at Gross Mendelsohn. The habits are timeless, and most leadership books and articles that I read are different ways of capturing the same basis. We have all of our incoming partners take a leadership course that a significant part of is from the Covey work. I also follow the precepts of "Good to Great." The Hedgehog Concept of figuring out something you can be great at fits well with developing niches and specializations in our firm. In addition, the idea of the getting the right people on the bus and the right people off is another overriding concept we follow. Lastly, my goal is to be a Level Five leader—humble, driven and celebrating in the achievement of others. We most recently read "Getting Naked" [by Patrick Lencioni]. It is a book that lays out the approach to sales at a professional services firm. It follows approaches I preached to my staff and follows my approach of listening, not talking about yourself and helping the client solve a problem with the expectation that doing the right thing will result in work and opportunities coming your way. It focuses on what the client needs, not what you have to offer. I read with a Nook e-reader. ■



David Goldner