



ze magazine

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Almanac of intellectual
and geographical travelling
by Zest Leaders

“When I write these entries”, states Taleb in his last book *Antifragile*, “I try to avoid the tyranny of strict and clear plan, leaning on something inside me, on some kind of a source which keeps up surprising me”. In Zest we have come to a conclusion that, on the one hand, each of us has such a source of surprises, and, on the other hand, we can serve as such to others. In the first issue of Ze Magazine we have gathered several texts which are important to us both right now and beyond time. They are for the most part about a human being. About how he behaves, tries to develop, how he fails and what can be done about it. Certain texts claim to be only quickly passed by the attention camera, others deserve a more steadfast research. In any case we would like to attain two goals: to start talking about our thinking process and not to get bored during the story telling. Just as Taleb, to continue the quote, we note that “a bored author will have a bored reader.”

MAXIM POLIAKOV,
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GROUP INFLUENCE:

WHAT IS EASIER TO DO TOGETHER, AND WHAT IS HARDER TO DO APART

We are mostly interested to understand why people live exactly this way and not the other way around. Why do they demonstrate leadership, what for do they work inefficiently, where is the good of looking for new frontiers. But it is also not possible to exist without "how?" Victoria Misyutina tried to research fundamental features of behavior of human surrounded by his peers.



Photo by P. Kiryukhantsev

A human being is unconditionally and definitively a social creature. A “default system” of our brain which was discovered rather recently presents another proof of it. In the “natural environment”, i.e. on its own, a human brain naturally engages itself in reflections on the social relations of its owner. It is not surprising that the size of primates’ cerebral cortex, including the one of a human being, is directly proportional to the size of social groups typical for this species. Nearly all the time we are surrounded by other people. How, in sober fact, does a presence of other people impact a human being and the efficiency of his actions?

For the first time an experimental attempt to answer this question was made by the psychologist Norman Triplett in the distant 1898: testees, who were given a simple task to wind up a fishing line on a fishing rod spool as fast as possible, coped with this job faster in the presence of joint participants than alone. Further research demonstrated that in the presence of other people testees were able to solve simple multiplication problems faster and better managed movements-related assignments. This effect called **social facilitation** is also observed with animals: in the presence of other representatives of their species ants dig sand faster, chickens eat more seeds and mating rats are more sexually active in the presence of other sexually active pairs. But, on the other hand, certain researches demonstrated absolutely opposite pieces of evidence: in the presence of other representatives of their species cockroaches, parakeets and green chaffinch passed through labyrinths slower. As to people, they needed more time to memorize senseless syllables, pass through labyrinths and execute multiplication.

**IN A GROUP RUNNERS RUN FASTER,
SPECTATORS LAUGH LOUDER AND
PATRONS OF ART BECOME MORE
GENEROUS.**

**IN PERFORMING COMPLICATED OR CREATIVE
ASSIGNMENTS PRESENCE OF OTHERS
INCREASE A PROBABILITY OF INCORRECT
DECISION.**

How to consolidate these contradictory data? The matter is that a presence of another excites. This excitement is related to the fact that with the emergence of another person (or a cockroach) the situation becomes more complicated or unpredictable for the first person (or the cockroach). With people the excitement is also a result of expectation of an assessment to be made by the other person happened to be present. In its turn, excitement always intensifies the dominating reaction, i.e. it facilitates the solution of simple problems for which the correct solution is the most probable dominating reaction. Speaking about execution of complicated or creative tasks where the correct answer is not obvious, and, thus, does not represent the dominating reaction, the excessive excitement increases a probability of incorrect solution. For instance, within the framework of the experiment it turned out that good billiard players demonstrated even better performance and bad players started playing even worse when strangers appeared at their billiard tables. As a rule social facilitation is demonstrated when people work in order to reach individual goals and when their personal efforts – no matter whether it is winding up a fishing line on a spool or solving arithmetic problems – can be assessed individually. In situations when people work together for attaining a joint goal, and each one individually is not responsible for the applied efforts, **social laziness** emerges. For instance, it was experimentally established that the noise generated by six people

EXISTENCE OF A COMMON GOAL AND ABSENCE OF A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY ARE THE CONDITIONS FOR THE EMERSON OF SOCIAL LAZINESS.

shouting and applauding “with a mighty heave” was not 6 but only 3 times stronger than the noise generated by one person. And the participants of another study – workers at a conveyor – increased the efficiency of their work by 16% without any financial benefit when an opportunity to assess the contribution of each one was provided. Social laziness manifests itself when people working in groups don’t bear any personal responsibility for the common result. The exception is presented by groups which execute an extremely complicated, attractive or interesting work or consolidate people bound by friendly relations. Together we do things which we would not do alone. Groups are capable to generate a feeling of excitement or involvement in something greater than an individual is capable to accomplish on his own, and a phenomenon called **“deindividuation”** emerges.

PRESENCE OF OTHERS INCREASES THE EFFICIENCY OF EXECUTION OF SIMPLE ROUTINE TASKS.

Having analyzed 21 episodes when a crowd was present at the time when someone was threatening to jump down a roof or a bridge Leon Mann came to the following conclusion: when the crowd was small and the episode took place during the daytime people usually did not try to wind up the potential self-killer. However, if a multiplicity or darkness warranted anonymity, the crowd, as a rule wound a person up and mocked him. Since “everybody acts like this”, participants of the event may explain their behavior rather by situation than by their own choice. Philip Zimbardo believes that the very immensity of megapolises creates anonymity and, hence, the norms

which allow vandalism. He bought two second-hand cars and left them with hoods up. One car was left in Bronx, the other – in a small town of Palo Alto. In New York during three days there were 23 cases of theft and vandalism. In Palo Alto within a week the car was touched only by one person and for the only purpose – to close the hood, because a rain started. In another Zimbardo’s experiment women from the University of New York took part. He dressed them in similar hooded white loose overalls which reminded the ones worn by the Klansmen. When Zimbardo asked his testees to inflict an electric shock upon a certain woman they kept pressing the shocker button twice longer than the women who had large signs with their names hanging on their chest. Thus, in the presence of others we are more excited, suffer higher stress, are tenser and more inclined to make mistakes while performing complicated tasks. Having disappeared in a crowd we become anonymous, inclined to social laziness, and deindividuation promotes the manifestation of our worst instincts. But staying among other people can strengthen our good features: in a group runners run faster, spectators laugh louder and patrons of art become more generous. Depending on the kind of tendencies which a group strengthens or suppresses it could be either very bad or very good. Due to the above we should exercise a wise and conscious approach to the selection of a group and situation in which this group will influence us.

VICTORIA MISYUTINA

TOGETHER WE DO THINGS
WHICH WE WOULD NOT DO ALONE.



8 quotes. Nassim Nicolas Taleb

Taleb is our intellectual hero. We consider him to be a contemporary Darwin. Any of his books could be “dismantled” into quotes. We have selected 8 of those which he formulated right in his Twitter obeying the strict limit of 140 symbols.

- 1 Education makes the wise slightly wiser; but it makes the fool vastly more dangerous.
- 2 You exist if and only if you are free to do things without a visible objective, with no justification and, above all, outside the dictatorship of someone else’s narrative.
- 3 In a crowd of a hundred 50 percent of the wealth, 90 percent of the imagination, and 100 percent of the intellectual courage will reside in a single person - not necessarily the same one.
- 4 Writers are remembered by their best books, politicians by their worst mistakes, and businessmen are never remembered for anything.
- 5 We unwittingly amplify commonalities with friends, dissimilarities with strangers, and contrasts with enemies.
- 6 If you find any reason why you and someone are friends you are not friends.
- 7 Avoid calling heroes those who had no other choice.
- 8 A good maxim allows you to have the last word without even starting a conversation.

On Robustness and Fragility, Deeper Philosophical and Empirical Reflections.
Postscript essay to the book *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*.



Photo by M. Poliakov



8:2

SHORT INTERVIEW WITH THE RUSSIAN AND WORLD LEADERS: **BORIS VAINZIKHER**

BY PAVEL KIRYUKHANTSEV

We work a lot with those who work at some other heights, at different speeds. However, one poet used to say in such cases that at such level there is already no hierarchy at all. We will publish a series of discussions with those whom we inwardly call “the great ones”. For the first issue of our magazine **Pavel Kiryukhantsev talked to Boris Vainzikher, General Director of KES Holding, the largest private energy company in Russia, a dramatic actor.** There is never enough time for a long talk, so just **8** questions from Pavel and **2** from Boris.

ANSWERS:

BORIS VAIZNIKHER

QUESTIONS:

PAVEL KIRYUKHANTSEV

1:0 — What is the weight of accidental in the life of a person who ascended a peak and attained a success comparable to yours?

— It is high. Maybe fifty-fifty. Fortune was often favorable to me. It was possible that I would not have attained what I have. I mean rather not the amount of the obtained but where I am and who I am. For instance, I could have not become a manager. Before I reached 35 I considered myself very weak, was not self-confident. By the way, sometimes I have doubts in myself even now. I am afraid of nearly nothing already, but I often happen not to be self-confident.

2:0 — How do you build a team, how does it become a resource of company's efficiency improvement?

— I don't know. Although... I try to find those who don't need to be hindered and remove those who obstruct.

3:0 — Wherein is the burden of leadership?

— It is not possible to stop. It's a pure bicycle: you either ride it or you fall down. If you started, there is no way back. It will not be possible to be a leader taking breaks from time to time.

What else? It's a commonplace, but you are simply responsible for other people, for their actions and decisions. At first you are afraid of it, but then you get used. I think that it can be and should be coached, but I learned it myself from my own experience. You know, as early as yesterday I could name myself a "young manager". And today I already have to say a "mature manager".

4:0 — What type of leadership is unacceptable to you?

— Leadership based on enforcement and fear. I would not act like this myself, I would not accept it towards myself and I would not tolerate it around.

5:0 — When you are completely drained where do you find energy?

— When I sleep. This is the most important. Sleep is everything. Once 10 years ago I was under tremendous stress at work, I felt intolerably bad – I did not have any sleep during four of five days. And then I came home, took a bottle of white wine, drank it all straight from the bottle and fell asleep. When I woke up I found out that I had both energy and solutions. The crisis was overcome.

6:0 — What is for you a business victory?

— I had my greatest victory which cannot be compared to anything. It was 10 years ago when I was a director of TPP in Kirishi. There was a large residential building in that town which had been under construction for about 10 years but they could not complete it. And there was no money for it. I decided that I would find money, complete the construction and give people an opportunity to move in it. I did not believe it at all, it seemed impossible to me. But I passionately wished to implement that project. I even said that I would get drunk when the first window in that building would light up, when the first resident would move in. I missed that moment and did not get drunk. To me implemented projects, practical deeds are extremely important. Even very small ones. And victories happen when you achieve something which you did not believe in, thought it to be impossible.

7:0 — Who were your mentors?

— I had four mentors. Till this day I am grateful to all of them. Each of them gave me something which remains with me now. Vladimir Latyshonok was my first mentor. He was head of production and technical department at TPP-15

PK ABOUT TALEB:

BUT IF EVEN I BEAT HIS FACE, I WOULD DO IT WITH SOMETHING SOFT, JUST FOR FUN.

of Lenenergo where I came to work after graduation from the institute. Everything I know about machinery, technology and electricity is from him. He did not teach much, but rather directed and forwarded: do that, do this. I was working with him just one year, but it provided a foundation of my knowledge.

The second was Leonid Seleznev – director of the same TPP. On the day when we first met he described my whole future career, even that I will manage Lenenergo. He had an amazing intuition. Later, when I was managing other people, it happened to me twice – I saw a remote significant perspective of concrete people which could be hardly explained. Very soon Mr. Seleznev appointed me, yesterday student, to the position of the head of production and technical department.

Vadim Somov, director of Kirishinefteorgsintez, was the third. He accepted me as the lead manager, supported both in word and deed. Leadership in me came primarily from him.

Mr. Chubais was the fourth. When he picked me we were not even acquainted. He was not scared by the fact that I had no experience of managing something similar in size. He saw something in me at the time and promoted over several managerial steps. Besides, he taught me many fundamental things. In particular, that promises should be kept unconditionally. If he promises something – that's the lot. He demonstrated interaction principles and how it is possible to manage global companies efficiently, how to organize working process, etc.

BV: I TRY TO FIND THOSE WHO DON'T NEED TO BE HINDERED AND REMOVE THOSE WHO OBSTRUCT.

8:0 — What will you always keep learning?

— I would like to answer that I will keep learning everything. But it is not possible. I devote little time to learning. I don't know much and cannot do much. I think I will always learn how to be useful and more useful. And I want to understand management better, and I intend to purposefully devote time to it this year.

ANSWERS:
PAVEL KIRYUKHANTSEV

QUESTIONS:
BORIS VAINZIKHER

8:1 — How do you teach those who have reached a high level in business and who don't seem to need to learn anything?

— What I do with these people could be hardly described by the word "teaching". I rather support them in what is called "development". There are no people who have nothing to learn among them, that's for sure. This is the essence of human being, especially of those who have a well-developed reflection, i.e. of my main clients. Actually, most of them, if not all, have reached the material and social peaks only to the opinion of those who stand below them. In their own perception they are only on a successive step. Besides, each of them does not perceive development only within the logic of efficiency improvement. Most of them aspire a more meaningful, qualitative, enriched existence. Like you do, for instance.

8:2 — Would you like to beat somebody's face?

— I have done this before. Although it was long ago. Now those whose face I would like to beat rather evoke in me absolutely different feelings: I feel sorry for them – everybody has only one life, and, in my view, these people have failed in theirs. Maybe there are exceptions, but I have not come across them yet. I think I would beat Taleb's face, because on the one hand he has an outstanding mind, more powerful than anybody has had during the last decades, which has transformed human science, but at the same time he writes silly things all the time and manipulates facts. But even if I beat his face, I would do it with something soft, just for fun.



VIETNAM TODAY

ADVANCE ANOUNCEMENT

The next issue will be international, not to say foreign. For instance, Pavel Simonov, head of the Saigon office of Zest, will tell about the most important in the South-Eastern Asia.

In today's Vietnam most of large business owners, serious businessmen and managers are people who studied in the Soviet Union. And it is not a result of a course of circumstances. The first reason was that the best ones – straight-A students capable to compete and achieve results – were sent to the USSR. They could be called the intellectual elite of Vietnam at the time. The second reason is that they came back from the Russian reality of 1990s. This meant that those were people ready to constant changes, capable to act skillfully in the environment of uncertainty and work fruitfully with limited resources.

In short they represented a type of people who, despite severe conditions, were ready to fight. At that time not only “Russian” Vietnamese lived in Vietnam. There were also people who studied in Europe and even in America. And initially

Western or American graduates were tougher. But gradually stereotypes changed and the “Russians” survived.

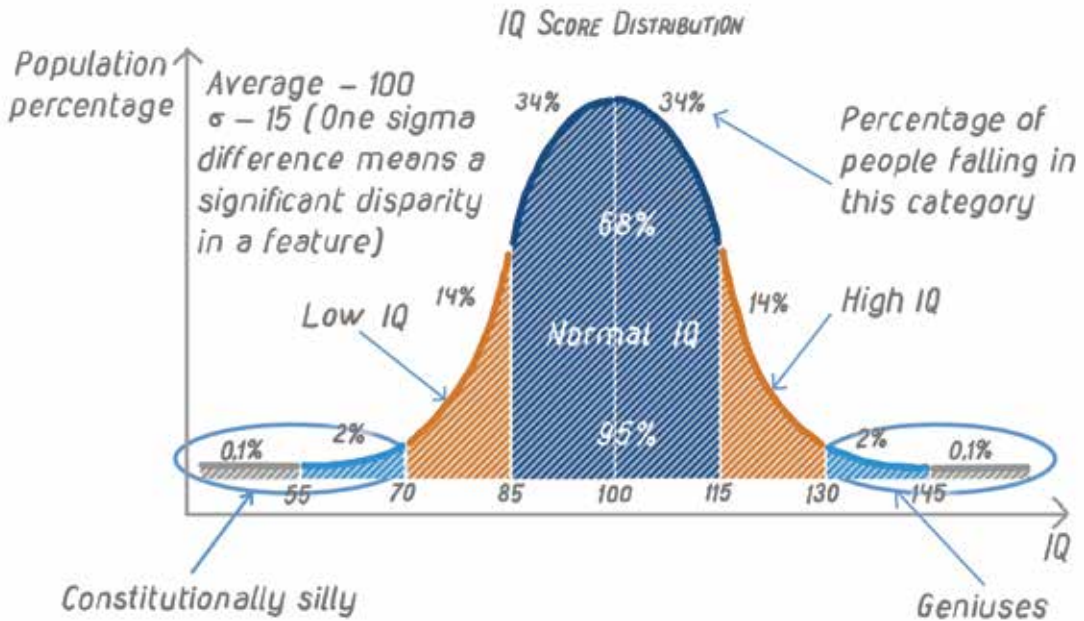
Today the picture is gradually changing. Russian education has devalued, and Vietnamese kids study in America and Europe. And right from there they will come back to occupy important positions in the life of future Vietnam. The country will change and obtain the western direction. But now, as long as wise elders are still sitting out their last years in the positions of party leaders, and business will be run by the “Russian” Vietnamese for the nearest 5-10 years, business climate in the country will be tuned on Russia as in no other country in the world. But it is a pity that by the time it becomes clear in Moscow the situation in Vietnam will have changed already.

LEADERSHIP AND FORTUNE

So far Pavel Kiryukhantsev has published only several books: one about either Myanma or Burma, and a few about joyful adventures of a small boy. Others are work in progress. In this issue - a fragment about not so funny adventures of adults on a steep hill of Gaussian distribution and in the desert of unknown.



Photo by P. Kiryukhantsev



The nature of leadership cannot be discussed out of the context of accidental. Primarily, from the point of view of the attribution mechanisms. There are two extreme points of view on this subject: victories and leadership are regular and are given by right, and, vice versa, they are accidental and unfair. The former point of view is typical for prominent managers, people who have made good money, MBA students, people writing about leadership, significant part of coaches, representatives of human species who are intellectually positioned one or two sigmas from the norm in the "better direction", charismatics. Misanthropes, intellectuals positioned three and more sigmas from the norm, the whole left part of normal intellectual and cultural distribution, pathological losers, strategic consultants, investment bankers, chief accountants and lawyers tend to share the latter one. Among the noticeable thinkers and vivid personalities Lee Iacocca, Jack Welch, Mourinho, Richard Branson could be included, with certain reservations, to the first and more numerous group. The second group is lead by Nassim Nicolas Taleb, Leo

Tolstoi, George Soros. Probably it would be possible to suppose that the acceptance of the full-blooded leadership case is more typical for the American nation and less characteristic for Russians. But all this looks more like a philosophizing. After all, many of us reconsidered his or her attitude to this matter time and time again in the process of socialization and maturing.

Active game of chance is particularly well observed in the cases of succession of power. Tsars, even quite incapable, unprepossessing, sometimes obviously insane, don't look piteous and unfleshly, but seem somebody and something significant to the ordinary mass consciousness. It attributes them the right, the power and the sense. Even complicated reflective consciousness **in the system** acts in a similar way – it retouches, paints, photoshops, raises on a pedestal. Particularly if it is interested, involved, ideologized. A nobleman and a serf have two dissimilar loves and hopes related to the tsar, two mechanisms of being cheated by his leadership and the fact of his being chosen by God. However, the attempts of the modern novelist Akunin seem overdone, arrogant and far

TSARS, EVEN QUITE INCAPABLE, UNPREPOSSESSING AND SOMETIMES OBVIOUSLY INSANE, DON'T LOOK PITEOUS AND UNFLESHLY, BUT SEEM TO BE SOMEBODY AND SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT TO THE ORDINARY MASS CONSCIOUSNESS.

FORTUNE IS A DYNAMIC CHARACTERISTIC. IT CAN BE OBSERVED EVEN IN RELATION TO TSARS. ANOTHER ASPIRANT FOR THE THRONE WOULD ALWAYS APPEAR IN THE PICTURE.

from the substance of the matter when he relegates to nothingness Nicolas II or Catherine the Great. Who they were in reality, those Nicolases I and II, Annas, Elizabeths, Pauls and Alexanders? What did they manage to accomplish personally, what did the system do or tell on their behalf and what did the crowd invent? It is also interesting to know what was happening to these people along the way of their evolution and transformation into tsars. How exactly they compensated deficit of intellect, experience, emotions, familiarity with certain ignoble sides of reality. By which means did “clever” and “silly” find out the truth about themselves and other people or by what did they compensate its deficit? Consequently, how did they manage to proceed themselves and, at the same time, lead their people and country? Who among them became a leader and who just simulated? A fortune in the succession of power made you become a marshal, a headman, a leader. It was necessary to comply or at least to appear complying, particularly at difficult historic moments. In general newly encrowned tsars, being ordinary homo sapiens by nature, did not possess any particular features which theoretically could transform them into marshals and leaders, such as charisma, high intellect, foresight, achievement motivation, etc. And if among 15 Russian tsars one can find at least two outstanding intellectuals, it can be assessed as an unlikely event from the point of direct interpretation of the normal Gaussian distribution. Then how come that there is hardly any regal person whom we have not attributed with some kind of outstanding abilities, even if he or she ruled for a short period of time?

Fortune is a dynamic characteristic. It can be observed even in relation to tsars. Another aspirant for the throne would always appear in the picture.

Sometimes such aspirant could be quite active. In this case one’s personal characteristics start playing a role as well, or, to put it differently, it is more probable that a victory will come to the aspirants from the right segment of normal distribution who possess better capabilities for leadership under initial circumstances. Peter the Great would outplay his sister, loony brother and clericals. Catherine the Great would do the same to her husband Peter III, Alexander I would outplay his father Paul I, etc. Whereby this battle would be truly uncompromising — with imprisonment, confinement and killing of blood relatives. Thus, it is obvious that the subjects of action, i.e. aspirants for leadership, actively **“read the case”**. It is easy to miss, misunderstand, lose one’s fortune. In the case of “tsars” it works according to the principle “all or nothing”, “non-tsars” have certain advantages: their palette is richer. Only part of fortune case can be taken, one may read it not to the very end, not to understand everything, but the fate would suddenly start brightening. Tsars and non-tsars form a certain continuum of fate in relation to leadership. In essence it implies initial distribution of resources and preparation of certain advantages for leadership aspirants, but here again there are many inverted regularities when a human being who does not possess external resources becomes a leader applying the mechanisms of super-compensation, the energy of deficit transforming into super-motivation, cast-iron will and sequence of actions. Napoleon, Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, Yeltsin, Putin not only **read the fortune** but invested in it being focused and objective-oriented.

PAVEL KIRYUKHANTSEV



8

management quotes

We often talk to managers of various levels. Many things they say shed light on today's state of managerial mind. And the whole human nature in general. Please don't assume that we agree with everything paraphrased below.

- 1** The main shaggy dog story is the collegiate decision making. It promotes frank pledge.
- 2** The system of investment projects coordination is unnatural, it is based on the fact that everybody knowingly plays the same game. Or, to use a metaphor, as in the "Mafia" game when it seems that everybody has red, but in reality there always are blacks who will intentionally sink (kill) those projects which contradict their personal interests.
- 3** Management is a fight between a physician, a sick person and an illness.
- 4** All in all I would let people play "Mafia", so that those who play for reds would finally understand how it is important to reds to take a consolidated position and uncover blacks.
- 5** We have managers and viceroys. Viceroys have no incentive to get involved in human resources issues. It is necessary to battle with it and put viceroys under pressure.
- 6** We will perform any ritual dances: team formation, falling in friend's arms, etc.
- 7** Top manager has to know where is the light at the end of the tunnel (given that at the same time it would not turn out to be a headlight of a train approaching from the opposite direction).
- 8** A comfort of working in a team is in the fact that you can move forward without turning back. In its turn it allows you not to trip and not to meet obstacles while maintaining your pace and rhythm.



LEADERATURE.

The important thing is not which books, which experiences, a man is to have, but what he puts into them of his own.

HENRY MILLER

BOOKS ABOUT
LEADERS
AND LEADERS
ABOUT BOOKS

Prior to leaving for his summer vacations this year a second-grader son of one of the authors of this article and his classmates received a list of books to be read during the three coming months. There were 26 books on the list, 10 of which were intended for mandatory reading. In other words, 3-4 books a month (willing or not) plus 5-6 books a month (according to the wishes of a pupil vacationing from school). Altogether 8-10 books a month.

Prior to the beginning of studies with one of the groups in a corporate university at one of relatively large Russian companies we, as lecturers, guide the participants of the future program that they will have to read (mandatory!) three books and write an essay on each one. Certainly, we also have a list of recommended literature – about 10 books, but we don't have serious expectations that they will be read. Reading books is not easily incorporated in the picture of the world of today's manager, even if he is included in the list of preliminary selected "talents". The number of books which a CEO of a company or another representative of top management is able to read in a month surely does not exceed the summer norm of a grammar school pupil. It's another pair of shoes that usually it does not exceed 5-10% of this "school norm" (one book a month or less). But should it exceed? Maybe even one book is an overabundance which not only does not help a modern leader to keep himself in intellectual shape but even harms him consuming a precious resource of time which he could have devoted to holding a meeting or visiting a new industrial facility?

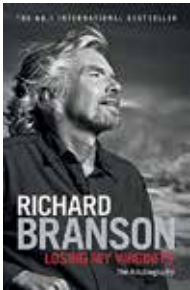
We have selected several books which undoubtedly belong to fundamental business literature and, in addition, have become real bestsellers during their shelf life in the bookstores all over the world. Being armed with a list of these books we talked to people deeply involved in the business theme – with those who have achieved a lot and could be considered a role model in the issues of leadership,

entrepreneurship, development of others and self-evolution.

Comprehending all the relativity of comparison between this collection of books and the mandatory "school program" of a modern manager, nevertheless, we decided in the discussion with our vis-à-vis to present these books as "mandatory for reading". We have to state that the label of "obligation" reduced the number of people who wished to talk to us. Not nearly everybody is pleased to accept that he has not accomplished something obvious, more than that – as we presented it – something with a shade of ought. But who can oblige a mature adult to do anything, especially in such a soft category as self-education? Nevertheless, even among those who surely established themselves as a professional leaders and can share a story of their success, there are plenty of people who hold their breath when it is necessary to tell what they have read and what (oh, it's terrible and shameful) they have not read. Due to this we are particularly grateful to each participant of the conversation for the openness. Despite the provocative character of the question itself our interlocutors were as informative as they were emotional.

In this discussion we, as researchers, were interested in many things – from the inside rating of stellar authors of best-selling business books among our interlocutors (are these authors and their books really known? To what extent they are stars in the real business environment?) to the attitude of the best practical businessmen known to us to reading literature (are books really perceived as development tools?).

Zest talked to an entrepreneur, a top manager, an HR director and a strategist about their thoughts related to these seemingly well-known business books. Each of them is a bright and successful leader in his or her field and each represents a company outstanding in its magnitude or development rate. The books which we discussed with them we placed under the self-explanatory category invented by us. We named it "leaDerature".



**Losing My Virginity:
How I Survived,
Had Fun, and Made a Fortune**
Author: Richard Branson

There are books containing important theories and deep observations. There are books with practical advice and step-by-step instructions. And there are such books which address not the intellectual component but the very heart of successful activity – motivation. Life story of the great British entrepreneur evokes a very concrete emotion: “It is necessary to set hands and do it!” In this book it is told about how one should respond to luck, take advantage of the moment, do things which others consider to be insane.

TOP MANAGER: I have not read it. (*What can this book be about?*)?) I don’t know about what it is. Apparently in this book some kind of guy free-and-easy preaches his truths which he has discovered in the process of his company building.

HR DIRECTOR: I have read it. (*Would I advise somebody to read?*) Yes. In general I memorize only something outstanding (or something absolutely new, or something which confirms my own investigations). I cannot recollect particular quotes, but I was amazed by the fact that a severe illness did not prevent that person from attaining outstanding results.

STRATEGIST: I haven’t read it. (*What do you think this book is about?*) Most probably this book is about a situation that when you act not like everybody is used to act you achieve success and advance. In this case “loss of virginity” means that sooner or later everyone has to take difficult unpopular decisions. And they should be based not on public opinion, but to a larger extent on a personal wish.

ENTREPRENEUR: I have not read it. (*And is the title of the book itself attractive?*) It is a complicated question. I know how titles are created and who Branson is. I would not pay much attention to the title.



Effective Executive
Author: Peter Drucker

Peter Drucker moved to America in the middle of the 20th century and all his life wrote about management as if he managed to peep in the future and see how it is necessary to deal with any matter to succeed. Drucker is Leo Tolstoy, Socrates and Montaigne of theory and practice of management.

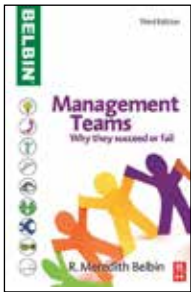
This book is about values which are related to everybody who has anything to do with business and management and even self-management. It surprisingly does not become outdated and is written in a language of a person who is capable to make the most complicated and fundamental matters clear.

TOP MANAGER: When I studied in a business school I received this book as a gift. Drucker is a cool guy. I have read many of his books and probably this one too. (*Will you recommend others to read it?*) Certainly. Drucker is a genius, he writes super literature. Either he is translated very well, or he is like that by himself. It is interesting to read him.

HR DIRECTOR: I read it long ago. I recommend it to others, he is a very well-known author. I wouldn’t say anything bad.

STRATEGIST: Very primitive... No, I have not read it. Although, maybe I have read — there are so many such books that I cannot say anything based on the title and the author’s name.

ENTREPRENEUR: Normally – I should have read. Something by Drucker I have read for sure. Drucker is that sort of Drucker. I don’t understand why everybody is so excited about him.



**Management Teams:
Why they Succeed or Fail**

Author:

R. Meredith Belbin

One person cannot become an ideal manager, because in order to do it he will have to demonstrate mutually exclusive qualities. The solution is to build an ideally orchestrated team of managers. Now perhaps everybody knows it. But based on what principle such team is built? How to forecast the result of work performed by a particular group? One of the most notable experts in the field of management gives answers to this and many other questions.

In 1961 a “trial academic experiment” began: in Henley School of Management, the oldest management college in Europe, they started to conduct a business game for its students. A famous theory of peoples’ role behavior and their interaction with a team was the result of this multiyear game and accompanying research. R. Meredith Belbin was the author of this theory.

TOP MANAGER: I have not read it, too specific literature.

HR DIRECTOR: No, I even have not heard about it. Probably I might read it. It is shameful to confess that you would not read if people wrote.

STRATEGIST: From the same group as the previous one. I have not read it.

ENTREPRENEUR: I have not read it. Based on the title it is a little duller than the previous ones.



**Good to Great:
Why Some Companies
Make the Leap...**

Author: Jim Collins

A book written by the author of the bestseller *Built to Last* tells not about the history and reasons for success of great companies which have been around since immemorial times but gives the answer to the question how to transform an organization which follows the market pace into a super successful company. As a result of laborious research of several dozens of public companies Collins’ team found out that all the factors of influence which seemed obvious were really such. The resulting model unexpectedly destroys several myths about how a manager should behave, how to build efficient teams and how to perform strategic planning.

Even if you don’t become a general director after having read this book, you will obtain necessary skills to transform any working team (from a family to a plant) into the instrument for creation of superiority.

TOP MANAGER: I think I saw this book. It greatly reminds all the remaining faceless business literature thrown on the market. So, I might have seen the cover and have not got excited.

HR DIRECTOR: I have certainly read it. (*Would I recommend it?*) Certainly, it is valued so highly. If a presentation was attached to pass eyes over (as a table of contents) it would have been even a greater success.

STRATEGIST: This one I have read, you bet. (*Would you recommend it to a future leader?*) Yes, for sure. This book is interesting and apprehensible.

ENTREPRENEUR: I have read it. A well-known book. It is often recommended. (*So, would you recommend it, too?*) Well, it’s worth reading.



Steve Jobs

Author: Walter Isaacson

Since the moment of its publishing the biography of Steve Jobs entered the list of the best books about business and will hardly leave it within the nearest decade. The history of creation and development of Apple, one of the greatest brands of all times, is given by the author by means of his look at Steve Jobs, its founder, as a personality with a full set of his qualities, both heroic and common to all of us. What could come up if you have a dream, a sense of purpose, and you like the taste of “world cognition apple”? That’s why you should plough through this solid tome.

TOP MANAGER: I am a little nauseated of it. This book is everywhere in crazy quantities! It is a pure speculation. They say there is something interesting in it, but mostly about the fact that young Jobs rarely took shower, did not cut fingernails and did not take care of himself. I am not so much charmed by his personality to read this book. Even without it I hear about him way too much.

HR DIRECTOR: No, I have not read it for sure. No doubt, Steve Jobs is a funky dude, but I can’t say that he is my idol. Well, he is a controversial personality, maybe I would read (but not the part about the strategy).

STRATEGIST: Yes, I have read this one! A very interesting book, and everything which is written there is interesting. Many unique observations, starting with how Steve Jobs came to life, with whom he lived as a foster child. A decent book.

ENTREPRENEUR: I have heard about this book. Maybe I would have an interested look at it, because this person himself is interesting. But it is thick... most probably I will not find time to read it.

— Which book, out of the ones you’ve read, propelled you? What would you recommend a future leader to read?

TOP MANAGER: There is a very funny book written by the author of *The Godfather*, it is titled *Fools Die*. It is an absolute fiction, but in my opinion, it might propel those who can read between the lines.

Also, there is a book by Karen Horney titled *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. It describes in a conversation language person’s emotional life. For people who have grown up in the post-Soviet environment it could be very useful. Let it be these two books: both of them are in orange jackets.

HR DIRECTOR: Certainly Jack Welch. But sometimes you get tired reading it. I would include in the list for a “reflecting person” not only books. For instance, it is a must to watch *Kung Fu Panda* cartoon about leadership and *Pay It Forward* about client-orientation. As to fiction I would recommend books written by Gaidar: about honor, conscience, kindness: this is what life lacks! In order to talk about business it is not a bad idea to recollect those values which we sometimes forget about in business.

STRATEGIST: I don’t know the author, and the book is titled *The Boss*. It is about how to transform not a very successful organization into a very successful. In a certain way it reminds *Good to Great*, but principles are a bit different there.

ENTREPRENEUR: Probably I am not a very good source: I am not a big fan of all these books about management, personal growth and so on. I would rather recommend something satirical, for example a book by Lucy Kellaway, Financial Times columnist, titled *Martin Lukes: Who Moved My BlackBerry?* Mostly it is a compilation of her columns published in that magazine in which she ridicules corporate practices very diabolically. This book gives a very good understanding of how not to do things. And a reasonable person is capable to understand himself how to do.

LET IT BE A CONCLUSION

Well, based on the results of our express research one can state that a book as a means of self-development and impact on other people still persists, at least in leaders' environment. Leaders do read, even though a little less than it is required by the scope of the "school program" (let's take into account the age-related corrective factor).

At the same time a shift in the virtual rating of demand for a certain type of business literature is outlined. Classicists gradually surrender their positions. It happens approximately due to the same reasons that apply when contemporary readers learn about the Russian historical context of the second half of the 19th century from the books of Akunin rather than from the novels of Dostoevsky. Some of today's leaders are still ready to accept the magnitude of Peter Drucker who, by the way, has bred the whole writing diaspora of business consultants, from Peters to Collins who thrive today. But the inner resource is already not enough to read equally fundamental authors (for instance, Belbin, the originator of the practice of team efficiency). Mastodons leaving for nothingness are being replaced by "new radicals", such as Nassim Taleb. Overturning the picture of the world in our minds their rather capacious intellectually works shift us from the zone of emotional comfort and make us move. Do we understand everything about the organization of a human being, business and the world around them? Not everything or nearly nothing. Is it possible to find ready solutions and workable recipes as an answer to painful challenges of time? Unlikely. Are we, on our own, capable to create tools for the solution of our problems? Yes. How to do it? By better understanding how we, our business and the world around us are organized.

Whether it will be a motion in a circle or in a spiral depends on us. Right books look exactly like those "metal shears" which can cut a circle rim and transform it into an unwinding spiral. Although, is it necessary? Indeed, any circle is a circle of ready solutions, and this way we find ourselves in a kind of outer space where everything is incorrect,

and classicists are already unable to give us any advice. Probably there is a kind of golden mean in the scope of reading which is necessary and adequate for today's leader. Or maybe it does not exist?

Henry Miller, the American writer whose words are used in this article as an epigraph, believed that the most important was to read not as much, but as less as possible. The truth is that he understood it at the end of his life while writing a sort of reader's confession titled *The Books in My Life* which, according to his intention, was supposed to end up with a list containing 5000 of his favorite books "of all times and nations". And finally, since in this article we discuss nearly exclusively other persons' books and thoughts, one more quote about a complex relationship between a human being and a book. Pierre Bayard, a provocative French philosopher, believes that "it is impossible not to read" taboo highly encouraged by the society lives in us. From this taboo our habit to dissemble speaking about which books one has actually read is derived. "I know few areas of private life, with the exception of finance and sex, in which it's as difficult to obtain accurate information from people as about the books they have read", writes Bayard. He writes it in his new book *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read*. It is obvious that this book should have been added to the lists if leaDerature. Its main merit is not its helping us to discuss the unread. It is more important that our "inner library", i.e. the number of books which are fundamental to us, should not necessarily include only the ones we have read. There are also unread, forgotten and even invented by us books or their individual fragments.

Probably one of the distinctive features of a leader is his inner library comprising not only "obligatory" titles, but mainly his own selection from the virtual shelves of leaDerature. Its composition can say a lot about you not only to other people but to yourself as well. So, do you have one?

ANDREI MIKHAILENKO
AND OLMIRA BELANKOVA

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



PAVEL KIRYUKHANTSEV

Thinker, artist, fish-dependent, managing partner

— What do you do in Zest and what are you proud of?

— I live in Zest. And I am proud of it.

— What are you doing right now?

— I am riding in a taxi around Riga being in a pleasant muse.



VICTORIA MISYUTINA

Clinical psychologist, advertiser, moved from the capital to Petersburg, consultant

— What do you do in Zest and what are you proud of?

— I am a consultant in Zest. I think, write and talk to people. I fight my pride. I can say that a little bit more and tonight I will be satisfied by what we have accomplished during the day.

— What are you doing right now?

— Right now I am inventing an aphorism saying that game and feast are more important than seriousness.



ANDREI MIKHAILENKO

Songster, serial international entrepreneur, artistic manager, partner

— What do you do in Zest and what are you proud of?

— I am a partner in Zest. Thus I am a partner to everybody who creates something of his or her own which does not yet exist in this world. I like tying things together. For example, ideas with people. It can set an interesting startup. Or certain words with other words. It can set an interesting text.

I am proud of the fact that I have realized that in the universe everything is interconnected with everything.

— What are you doing right now?

— I am working on a Code of Conduct for one of our clients which contains such words: “life flows faster than ink in a printer cartridge”.



MAXIM POLIAKOV

Musician, restaurant reviewer, boxer, consultant

— What do you do in Zest and what are you proud of?

— I work in Zest as a consultant. This job is rather complicated, but there are more complicated ones. I am busy coordinating and holding various developing programs for people. Sometimes for teams, sometimes for personalities. More often for both at a time.

I am proud that we have started making a magazine.

— What are you doing right now?

— I am getting prepared to the first strategic top management session of our new client. I'm selecting the color of paper.



PAVEL SIMONOV

Citizen of the world, digital entrepreneur, constructive activist, director for development

— What do you do in Zest and what are you proud of?

— In Zest I work to make it face the world. Including the use of modern technologies.

— What are you doing right now?

— Right now I learn to ride a scooter in a Vietnamese district called Phu My Hoang and then I'm going to show the locals how to swim crawl stroke properly.

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