

## David Martin's Recommended Biography Reading List – 2017

Forget about theory. How about learning the stories of real people who have achieved great things?

Here's what you'll see across these amazing people:

- **They were geniuses.** They were also highly flawed, sometimes confused, often behaving contrary to or inconsistently with their espoused values.
- **They leveraged daily habits and practices** that shaped the future person they became. The payoff might not have showed up until years later, but they kept doing them anyway.
- **The setbacks they faced were enormous**, not just once, but over and over and over. And when their face was in the mud, that's when they found it in themselves to keep going, when most would have stopped.
- **They had a commitment** to a cause or a belief that was far bigger than themselves.

Never mind being the perfect leader. Go make something happen. These people will inspire you to do so.

1. **Wild by Cheryl Strayed.** Dang, what an awesome story. This is the quickest and easiest read of all the books in this category. And it's a really well told story. You'll be drawn in. You'll see yourself in this character in a thousand ways. She's so human and so raw and honest. Yet, the book is incredibly poignant. It's a true story that reads like a novel. And just for the record, I liked Cheryl Strayed even before Oprah made her cool.
2. **Elon Musk by Ashlee Vance.** If you want a more business focused biography, this is my first choice. Elon Musk has overcome so many challenges already. He will probably have a greater impact on our lives than Steve Jobs, by many magnitudes. It's just fascinating to read his story. Stay tuned. This guy gets written off or ridiculed regularly, but he ain't done yet.
3. **Hamilton by Ron Chernow.** Simply an epic story of the life of Alexander Hamilton. It's a story of genius and of overcoming obstacles. Especially because of when he lived, his decisions and actions had mammoth historical and political impact that still touch our lives, today. Not an easy read because of its length, but a well told story. This also shows the power of a strong partnership. Much of what Hamilton was able to achieve was made possible because of his long-lasting relationship with George Washington who saw his genius and opened doors that would have never been accessible for Hamilton on his own. Who are the powerful people opening doors for you?
4. **Washington by Ron Chernow.** I only knew the basics of George Washington's life before reading this book. Man, what I didn't know! Talk about one powerful and complex human being. Now, I have even more respect for what he accomplished. He threaded the needle of history. He had so many brushes with death, but he still was the ONE leader in the new US of A who people believed could lead the new nation. Fascinating. And also, he surrounded himself with great people who he could lean on like Alexander Hamilton. He couldn't have done all of this alone. Who are you leaning on?

5. **Life by Keith Richards.** Yes, THAT Keith Richards. What an odyssey. What a life! I appreciate the Rolling Stones' music even more now after knowing more of their stories. He had one goal: to make great music. And he's committed every resource to accomplish it. Even his well-known drug use was in service of his music making. Also, just a hilarious look into the world of rock 'n' roll.
6. **Bearing the Cross by David Garrow.** Talk about a complex and powerful man. There is much about Martin Luther King's life the public never knew. Even though the book reveals his frailties as well as his strengths, my respect and gratitude for this man exploded while reading this book. And it took me almost a year to get through it, which is the only reason it's not the first book I recommend. It's not written like a typical biography. It's more of a piecing together of stories based on the author's research.
7. **Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson.** This book needs little introduction or explanation. Steve Jobs changed the world several times in his lifetime. And he was not an easy guy to know or to understand.

### **Mastery & High Performance**

Since this blog post was about high performance, I'm including one high value, easy-to-read book about the elements of great practices. It's not restricted to habits.

**Little Book of Talent by Daniel Coyle.** This book is a fantastic reference. In short one or two page chapters, he articulates 50 or so qualities of talent hotbeds. They're presented in a way that you can apply them with your work team, sports team, students, and families. It's the same great ideas from a book by the same author called *The Talent Code* organized without the stories. It's a great handbook for coaches. Easy to read in short bursts, also. I suggest you focus on applying one habit at a time instead of devouring the book in a few hours.