

Mission Ready

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Does Your Company Have a Suggested Reading List?

Whenever a Marine enters the “PX”—the military’s equivalent of a department store—he or she will find most things needed to make life a little more pleasant, in the Spartan environment of a Marine Corps base. Every PX has a book section, looking just like any drug store display, except for one vitally important distinction. On a separate table, or in a special section of the shelves, are books identified as being on the Commandant’s Reading List. These are books, quite simply, that the “CEO” of the Marine Corps thinks he or she ought to read—books on leadership, management, motivation, history, and dozens of subjects that would increase the professional capacity of Marines at all levels of the hierarchy.

Of course, this is a “suggested” reading list; there is no monitoring of participation. But, it is amazing how frequently a Marine may hear his or her superior comment on one of these books, and then look expectantly for a response. Suddenly, “I haven’t read that one, sir,” sounds inadequate. The Marine, wanting to be conversant, will go buy that book, or check it out, and, later, make a point of raising one of its topics to that officer. Before long, an on-going dialogue will be established, with the both sharing ideas out of the books on the Commandant’s list.

It should be noted that the officer is also subject to informal queries from his/her superiors. So, even though this is a voluntary program, a great many Marines read

a great many books. All of this comes as no surprise to the Commandant.

We think this program has great applicability to the modern company. Most organizations have a lunchroom, or employee lounge. Is there any reason why there couldn’t be a simple display of books, as suggested reading by the CEO? There may be some initial wisecracks by some, but the informal peer pressure would begin to encourage a good part of the workforce to read more. And, good things happen when the workforce reads. For one thing, they *talk*—about the ideas presented in the books—and they *think*—about some of the provocative solutions offered in the readings. Soon, more creative thinking on their part becomes evident. When more totally voluntary reading is encouraged by managers at all levels, the entire organization benefits.

The CEO, when considering what books to place on the suggested reading table, is under no obligation to include opposing views—just as the Marine Corps Commandant does not, in the interests of academic fair play, include *Mein Kampf*. As the chief executive of the company, he or she is entitled to suggest books that tend to reinforce—not question—corporate core values. A suggested reading list is just another way to establish and strengthen those values—and a very cost effective way, at that.