

Recommended Summer Reading 2002

Summer reading can take us to faraway realms. To escape, we may choose to read mysteries, sci fi, or great fiction . . . subject matter not considered “educational,” self-help, or work-related. Or we may choose to stay focused, and use the time to expand our professional knowledge base, learn more about important topics, study entirely new subjects, or reconsider the *status quo*. Whatever your pleasure this summer, we are pleased to offer a few suggestions.

*Submitted by Nigel Atkin,
communications consultant and
instructor in public relations and
ethics at the University of Victoria.*

Communicating Good Work

Ethics is the hot topic in all professions. It boils down to a matter of trust. This is true in accounting, business, stock promotion, government, law—everywhere. Specifically, do you trust the news you read in newspapers and see on TV? Do you trust what we’re hearing about biotechnology?

Is communication relevant to businesspeople? You bet. How well one communicates is probably the most important aspect of trust, in all relationships. A new book brings this concept into clarity; I recommend it for anyone interested in professional ethics.

■ **Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet**

This book was written by three psychologists: Howard Gardner of Harvard, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi of Claremont Graduate University, and William Damon of Stanford, who document a relevant inquiry into what it means to have a professional career, and what it means to do good work.

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Since 1995 they have conducted hundreds of in-depth interviews with people in numerous professions. They examine how professional realms change through such things as new tools, new ways of carrying out work, and how understanding new ways impacts professionals. They discuss how cultural values and beliefs change, and how changing social environments affect professions.

In *Good Work*, the first book to come from these studies, the authors document “two domains that, in our time, have principal responsibilities for shaping the information inside our bodies and our minds.” The two domains involve Geneticists, who are

conducting research that results in improved health and longer lives, and Journalists, who have the power to shape our culture and our minds. Values, concerns, and ethics are explored in each domain.

Linking Geneticists and Journalists, the authors contend that:

“What we learn from the news will determine how we regard the uses of biotechnology. In a sense, it is the memes (thoughts, beliefs, and values) that will control our genes.

“Thanks to technological breakthroughs and new forms of social organization, the mental representations that fill up our consciousness, and therefore determine the quality of our lives, are changing rapidly. If those involved in the transmission of information find other ways of doing their work well, we can face events forewarned; otherwise, useless news will simply confuse our picture of reality.”

Good Work explains that media transmit data, the units of information we consume and that form the way we think about things. Memes are mental constructs that encode instructions for action through imitation and learning. They differ from genes, which encode instructions chemically.

This is relevant to all professionals, because what people *think* about what we do will create that *reality* for us. Information about us will determine the way we are perceived. Ask yourself: how are you perceived in your community? Are you sharing enough information about what you do in society to ensure there is public trust in your good work?

The substantive documentation of values, beliefs, and concerns of these two domains is good summer reading in itself. More important, *Good Work* helps frame dialogue in our own professions, and points to the importance of communicating the reality of what we do. Improving public perception. In that task lies the future.

Other Recommended Titles

*Submitted by Akash Sablok,
Notary Public*

- *The Testament*, by John Grisham.

Nonfiction. A great read! Excellent story about how greedy a family can get after a rich relative passes away.



*Submitted by Tim Perrin,
Technology Author*

- *East of Eden*, by John Steinbeck. Fiction. Simply the best novel ever written. Good. Evil. Death. Life. Love. Fear. Hate. He covers it all, in a tremendously memorable, multigenerational, and interracial (before it was Politically Correct) story. The kind of book you pick up every other summer, and just enjoy reading again like it was the first time.



*Submitted by Wayne Braid, Society
Secretary/Executive Director*

- *The Fifth Mountain*, by Paulo Coelho. Fiction. In the ninth century BC, Phoenician princess Jezebel orders the execution of all prophets who refuse to worship the

pagan god Baal. Quietly moving account of the Biblical prophet Elijah, a man touched by the hand of God, who must triumph over his frustrations in a soul-shattering trial of faith. The book has a message for all of us Notaries as we face individuals, situations, and matters that question, or call upon, our ethics and our integrity.

Note: Brazilian Paulo Coelho, also author of *The Alchemist*, is one of the most popular writers in the world. His books have sold 21 million copies in 74 countries, and have been translated into 34 languages.

- *100 Ways to Improve Your Writing*, by Gary Provost. Nonfiction.

By profession, Notaries are word “drafters.” This little book contains many helpful tips and ideas for anyone who would like to improve his or her writing style and power. ▲