

## My 10 “Quake” Books

“Quake” books are the books that have an enormous impact on you. They make you see the world differently. You’re never the same after reading them. So this is my little list of books that made my head spin and made me seriously re-evaluate long held beliefs.

With each one I’ll give a very quick explanation of what it’s about and why it was meaningful to me. Your mileage may vary, of course, but I kept the list short so that I wasn’t picking anything too idiosyncratic. (Okay, um, actually two of them are pretty idiosyncratic. Sorry.) Now I’m not objectively saying these are *The Greatest Books Ever Written*. I’m just subjectively saying that they had a big impact on little ol’ me. (And please re-read the prior sentence before sending me an email taking me to task for liking book X or not including book Y. Thanks in advance on that one.)

There’s only one thing for certain with this booklist: I’m *definitely* going to forget something. You know when you discover the perfect comeback 20 minutes after the argument is over? I just know I’m going to send this off and then BAM -- I’m going to realize I forgot to include the single greatest book I’ve ever read. (I don’t know where you are at in the world right now, but you’ll probably be able to hear me screaming in regret if you really listen hard enough.)

No, they’re not in any particular order. (This is hard enough for me as is. Seriously.) And you can click the link in any title to check out the book on Amazon.

Okay, enough with the throat clearing. Let’s get to it...

- [“The Effective Executive”](#) by Peter Drucker

This book ought to be called “How To Get Your Act Together.” It will change the way you look at being productive. It’s not a collection of lifehacks, tricks or tools. It teaches you how to *think* about your personal efficacy and efficiency. But don’t take that as meaning it’s all vague theory. Drucker is direct and to the point. The guy doesn’t mess around. I’ve given this as a gift a number of times. Now that I think about it, if I bought this for you it, um, wasn’t exactly a *compliment*... But if you read it, it really would have helped you get focused on what’s important.

- [“Sapiens”](#) by Yuval Noah Harari

A lot of people were just waiting for this one to pop up on my list, I’m sure. Fine. I’m predictable. But as anyone who has read it knows -- this book is mind-blowing. The guy basically sums up most of human history in a few hundred pages. And it’s not boring. At all. And his theories on what made the human race so successful will turn

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your brain to taffy. You’ll be thinking about this book for weeks or months after you finish it.

- **[“How To Stubbornly Refuse To Make Yourself Miserable About Anything-yes, Anything”](#) and [“A Guide To Rational Living”](#) by **Albert Ellis**.**

Albert Ellis borrowed ideas from Stoicism and Buddhism and (along with others) helped create the foundation of what is now Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. CBT is the dominant form of therapy these days -- and it works. Problem is, Ellis is just not that great a writer. He’s accessible and has a great voice; in fact, he’s quite a character. But his books are redundantly redundant and loaded with examples that obfuscate more than illustrate. But his ideas are life changing. And, yeah, I cheated on this one and listed two books. Combined, they are quite powerful and show how you can really make great strides in terms of improving problems from depression to anxiety to anger – just by changing the way you think. It takes repeated reading for this stuff to really sink in, but that’s true of most anything that actually makes a difference. His ideas have completely changed how I look at my brain, behavior and moods. (Maybe that’s why a survey of psychologists ranked Ellis the #2 psychotherapist ever – ahead of Sigmund Freud.) He gives you simple techniques to reduce almost any type of negative feeling. Must-have tools for your noggin.

- **[“The Dictator’s Handbook”](#) by **Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith****

Warning: I told you “quake” books were books that had a huge effect on me. I didn’t say they made me “happy” or were “nice.” This book is fascinating – and incredibly depressing. It basically makes the argument that all politics is like “House of Cards.” And the authors provide heaping gobs of data to back their points up, which only rubs salt in the wound. If you think the world is fair and that politicians are motivated to do the right thing, and you would like to keep on believing that, then for Pete’s sake do not go within 50 feet of this book. It will not make you smile, but you’ll have a hard time arguing with its conclusions. (And if you’re a total cynic about politics, this will be like a warm bath with rose petals.)

- **[“Dinosaur Brains”](#) by **Albert Bernstein****

I picked “Dinosaur Brains” but the truth is, as with Albert Ellis, you’re better off reading a few of Bernstein’s books. Unlike Ellis, Bernstein is a very clear, entertaining and accessible writer who turns his decades of clinical psychology work toward explaining how people (especially *difficult* people) operate, what’s going on in their heads, and how to best deal with them. He’s primarily focused on

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office environments but these lessons can be applied anywhere. Before I read Bernstein, the behavior of people in corporate cultures made no sense whatsoever to me. (Okay, maybe I should say *people* made no sense to me.) But after tearing through his books in quick succession, I had a better understanding of what makes folks tick and why they do what they do... even if it still makes no sense to me.

- **[“Influence”](#) by Robert Cialdini**

There’s a reason why this is a required textbook in most negotiation classes and why Cialdini is numero uno in the field of persuasion. Decades ago he went undercover with many different shady types to try and see what they did to influence people. He distilled the results down to 6 fundamental principles. And once you know them, you’ll start to see them everywhere. Even if you have no interest in being more persuasive, this book is still a must-read mental self-defense manual. No, after reading it you’re not going to be able to wave your Jedi hand and say, “*These aren’t the droids you’re looking for*” -- but you will have deep insight into what it takes to influence others and how you can resist manipulation.

- **[“Guns, Germs, and Steel”](#) by Jared Diamond**

It’s similar to “Sapiens” in that it’s another history of the human race, but Diamond addresses the fascinating question of “*Why have some societies thrived and others barely made any progress in centuries?*” Many of the answers will surprise you and he brings boatloads of good scientific evidence. This book truly blew me away. This is a fascinating lens with which to look at the development of human society over the centuries.

- **[“Creativity”](#) by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**

Csikszentmihalyi surveyed a group of some of the most creative people on the planet. Nobel Prize winners, National Book Award winners, top shelf artists and writers, etc. He then analyzed the data and created a fascinating portrait of what very creative people are really like and what they have in common. It dispels a lot of myths, and shows you how world-class creative people really live and work. (And, no, according to Csikszentmihalyi you don’t have to be a crazy person to be a creative artist.)

- **[“Psychopath Free”](#) by Jackson MacKenzie**

This is not a great book. It’s not backed by solid research. At times it’s even corny and sappy. But Jackson MacKenzie pulled together all the learnings from an online

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forum dedicated to helping people get over relationships with truly awful, manipulative people. Despite its obvious flaws, I believe this book can be a great resource to anyone trying to get over being involved with a Very Bad Person. It's quite good at presenting the common patterns seen in relationships with narcissists and sociopaths and does it in the most accessible and human of ways. Personally, I've dealt with some really awful people. Luckily, I've never been close enough to any of them to suffer through what many of the people on that forum dealt with. But all the same, the people around you affect you. This book helped me realize that I was dealing with a very bad, supremely manipulative human being – and right when I needed that information most. Not a world-class book at all, and not one that everyone needs or would find useful, but a quake book for me because it opened my eyes when I didn't realize how closed they were.

- **[“A Humument”](#) by Tom Phillips**

Okay, this one is a little out of left field. Totally a quake book for me but not in remotely the same way the previous ones are. “A Humument” just blew my mind with its ingenuity and creativity. It made me say, “Holy crap! If this guy can do this, what other awesome things can we do that nobody has tried yet?!?” Tom Phillips took an old Victorian novel and painted a picture on every page. But he left some words from the original book visible as he did each painting. And, with those words left visible, he fashioned a new novel inside the old novel. Mind-blowing. You can leave it on your coffee table as a pretty art book to flip through, or read it as an odd story chiseled out from a 19<sup>th</sup> century novel. The sheer brilliance of it just makes me want to challenge myself to do more interesting work. I have given this as a gift more than any other book. (And how people react to it is very telling as well...)