

## **Books Can Save Us**

### **By Mark Sanborn**

I've always believed that books could save me. Regardless of the problem or difficulty I faced in life, I felt confident of finding a book to help me through. Truly, books have transformed my life. I can look back in time and point to specific books that have profoundly influenced my thinking and shaped my attitude.

#### **Cruising the Bookstore**

This eternal optimism of mine about books may explain my love of loitering in bookstores. Sometimes I spend more time *searching* for books to read than I do *reading* them. This isn't all bad, as it saves me from wasting time on books that aren't worthy of my attention.

Think of the investment of life that goes into reading a book. Consider the hours you spend, and, after you finish a book, ask yourself if the exchange was satisfying. I've quit reading a book after a hundred pages after it wandered off topic, lost credibility, or because the quality of writing deteriorated. Why would I want to waste any more of my life on it than I already had?

When I browse through a bookstore, I am reminded of how much I still have yet to learn about leadership and life. The books I encounter can expose me to ideas that I didn't even know existed. Acquainting myself with new knowledge often creates a desire to learn more. My mind expands as I uncover new perspectives and insights that challenge my previous assumptions.

As a bibliophile, I like spending time in public libraries, too. However, I prefer bookstores. That's because I subscribe to theory, "If a book is worth reading, it's worth owning." I like marking my books up with a highlighter, and I have discovered that most librarians frown upon this practice. Owning a book gives me the luxury of referring to it at any time without making the trek back to the library.

#### **Escaping the Trap of the Bestseller**

Aside from stimulating thought, bookstores serve another, more subtle purpose: they tell us what has captured the attention of our fellow human beings. Bookstores are billboards of our preoccupations. Consequently, I make it a point to peruse the bestseller sections to identify the zeitgeist of our times. I must confess, it can be alarming to consider the popular titles most people are reading.

Bestselling books seldom make it to my personal reading list. The reason for this is rooted in a theory I formulated early in life: if you do what everybody else is doing, you'll end up like everyone else. Going with the crowd makes you average. Much of what ends up on the bestseller list is popular but not profound. Unfortunately, most people prefer to avoid an intellectual challenge in favor of mindless entertainment. Reading at the lowest level can be done very passively, and that is the preferred manner of our time.

#### **Exercising the Right to Choose**

Amazon.com, the online incarnation of the bookstore, has a nifty software program directing you to books similar to your expressed interests. The "what other people who have bought this book

are buying" feature directs you to similar and/or complementary works. The software also tracks your purchases and tailors future recommendations to match your preferences.

Long before the advent of such software, I used a similar but superior technique. I asked the people I knew and admired which books they would recommend. The best reads of my life have come as a result of a friend's recommendation. In fact, that is how I became interested in Wallace Stegner and his book *Crossing to Safety*, one of my all-time favorite novels.

Online book sales have eroded the sales of storefront bookstores. However, bad news for traditional booksellers may be good news for readers. For readers, choice proliferates. With more ways to peruse and purchase books than ever before, I would hope that technological advances like online shopping encourage more people to read.

### **The Final Word**

I believe that the cumulative IQ of our society will increase as more people make time to read. Reading is central to self-education and lifelong learning, and if books have the power to save an individual, maybe they have the power to save a society as well.

### **About the Author**

Mark Sanborn, CSP, CPAE is president of Sanborn & Associates, Inc., an idea studio for leadership development and remarkable performance. He is an award-winning speaker and the author of two recent bestselling books, *The Fred Factor: How Passion In Your Work, Life Can Turn the Ordinary Into the Extraordinary*, and *You Don't Need a Title to be a Leader: How Anyone Anywhere Can Make a Positive Difference* are bestsellers. His newest book *The Encore Effect: How to Give a Remarkable Performance in Anything You Do* released in September 2008. To obtain additional information for growing yourself, your people and your business (including free articles), visit [www.marksanborn.com](http://www.marksanborn.com), [www.fredfactor.com](http://www.fredfactor.com) and [www.youdontneedatitle.com](http://www.youdontneedatitle.com). For information about having Mark speak for your group, call 303.683.0714.

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