



LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

GEORGIA COLLEGE & STATE UNIVERSITY



OUR MUST-READS OF 2025

Our goal with this list is to offer you twelve recommendations for our unique historical moment. While many of these books have been published in recent years and reflect the times in which we live, we have also chosen venerable classics that will provide insight and lend interpretive depth to your leadership—in 2025 and beyond.

Opportunities and Events

We have a range of exciting opportunities and events related to *Our Must-Reads of 2025*. We hope you'll join us for an enriching discussion or our virtual book club. Together, we'll explore thought-provoking works on leadership and creating positive change in our communities. Each session features guided conversation and shared insights in a welcoming space where we'll connect with fellow leaders while deepening our understanding of how to serve the public good. Learn more and register at leadcreatively.org

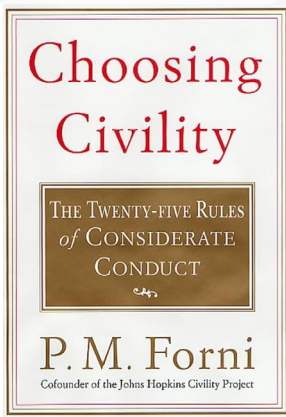
OUR MISSION

Georgia College's Office of Leadership Programs provides teaching, research, and public service related to leadership, citizenship, democracy, and public affairs. With the support of a distinguished faculty and practitioners, we educate the next generation of Georgia's leaders for the public good. Our programs bring together scholars and students, as well as business leaders, non-profit executives, journalists, and public officials, and offer a trusted forum on citizen-leadership and pressing issues of the day.



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To learn more about our research and public service and how your organization can stay up to date with the latest research and expert analysis at Georgia College, please visit leadcreatively.org.



Choosing Civility: The Twenty-Five Rules of Considerate Conduct

P.M. FORNI

SUMMARY: Kindness, respect, and mindfulness in everyday interactions are essential for fostering a more compassionate and harmonious society.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: P. M. Forni was an Italian-born professor, author, and advocate for civility. He co-founded the Civility Initiative at Johns Hopkins University, focusing on promoting respectful behavior and interpersonal kindness in modern society. Forni wrote *Choosing Civility* in 2002 as a response to his observations of declining

social conduct while founding the Johns Hopkins Civility Project, seeking to revive courtesy as a crucial social virtue rather than mere etiquette.

WHY WE CHOSE: Think of Forni's book as a fresh take on an age-old challenge: how do we bring people together when it feels like everything is pulling us apart? At a time when social media arguments and political divisions dominate headlines, this practical guide shows us how simple acts of courtesy can actually be powerful leadership tools. The book's twenty-five rules offer leaders a clear path to building the kind of environment where people feel heard and valued—exactly what we need in 2025 when bringing diverse teams together to solve complex problems is more important than ever.

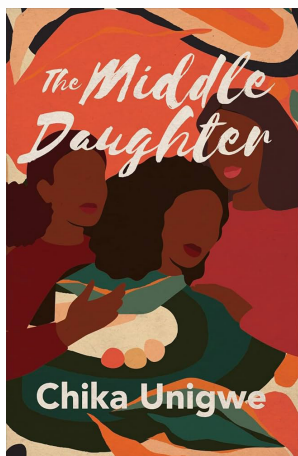
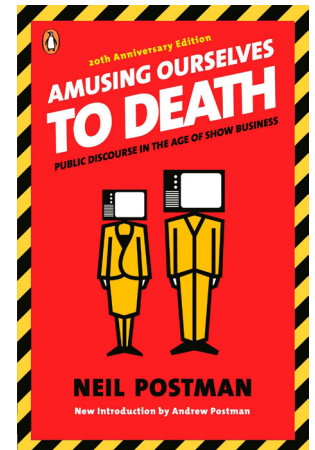
Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business

NEIL POSTMAN

SUMMARY: The dominance of entertainment values in media has transformed public discourse, prioritizing spectacle over substance and undermining critical thinking and meaningful communication.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Postman authored *Amusing Ourselves to Death* in 1985 during the rise of the 24-hour news cycle and television culture, drawing inspiration from both Huxley's and Orwell's dystopian visions to warn about entertainment undermining serious public discourse.

WHY WE CHOSE: Even though Postman wrote this in the 1980s, his insights about how entertainment reshapes our thinking feel almost prophetic in 2025, as we navigate a world of TikTok and viral soundbites. This book challenges leaders to think deeply about how our constant stream of quick-hit digital content might be affecting our ability to engage with complex ideas and have meaningful public conversations. For anyone trying to lead in today's world, Postman's work raises crucial questions about how to capture attention and communicate substance in an age when entertainment often trumps enlightenment.



The Middle Daughter

CHIKA UNIGWE

SUMMARY: When seventeen-year-old Nani loses her older sister and then her father in quick succession, her world spins off its axis. This modern reimagining of the myth of Hades and Persephone within a Nigerian family, charts Nani's journey to freedom and homecoming.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Chika Unigwe is a Nigerian-born author and poet, known for her exploration of themes such as identity, migration, and the complexities of African women's lives, often drawing on her own experiences of living in multiple cultures. *The Middle Daughter* emerged from Unigwe's personal experiences and observations of African immigrant families in Belgium, exploring themes of identity and belonging in contemporary Europe.

WHY WE CHOSE: Set against the backdrop of family dynamics and cultural expectations, Unigwe's novel offers leaders in 2025 a rich lens for understanding how personal identity and duty intersect with broader societal changes. Through the story of a middle daughter navigating family relationships and societal pressures, the book speaks to leaders about how individual choices ripple through communities, and how cultural heritage shapes both challenges and opportunities in our interconnected world. At a time when leaders must understand and bridge diverse perspectives, this intimate narrative illuminates how personal stories and cultural backgrounds influence how people approach decisions, handle conflicts, and build relationships in both professional and community settings.

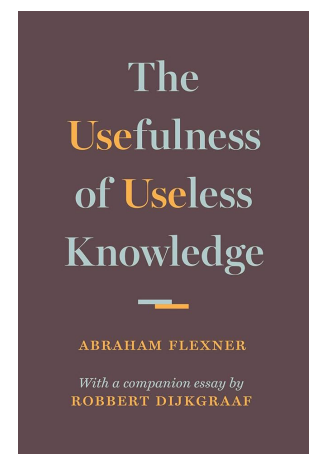
The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge

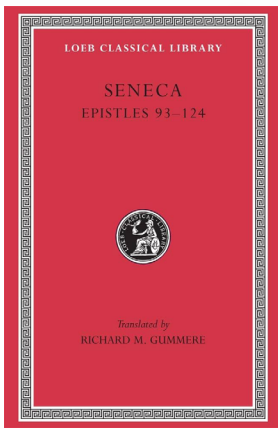
ABRAHAM FLEXNER

SUMMARY: Pursuing seemingly impractical knowledge fosters creativity and innovation, often leading to profound scientific and cultural advancements.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Abraham Flexner was an American educator, known particularly for his role in shaping modern medical education. He served as one of the founders of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. Flexner penned *The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge* in 1939 to defend pure scientific research and theoretical inquiry at a time when there was increasing pressure for practical, immediately applicable research outcomes.

WHY WE CHOSE: At a moment when leaders face intense pressure to organizations chase quick wins and produce immediate ROI, Flexner makes a compelling case for protecting space for curiosity, exploration, and seemingly "useless" pursuits. His powerful argument—that many of humanity's greatest breakthroughs came from research that had no obvious practical purpose—speaks to leaders in 2025 who need to balance short-term demands with creating environments where innovation and discovery can flourish. For today's leaders wrestling with AI, climate change, and other complex challenges, this book reminds us that solving big problems often requires giving people freedom to explore questions just because they're interesting, not because they promise instant results.





Letters from a Stoic

SENECA

SUMMARY: Living a virtuous life, embracing reason, and cultivating inner resilience are essential for achieving tranquility and enduring life's challenges.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Seneca was a Roman philosopher, statesman, and playwright, known for his writings on ethics and the philosophy of Stoicism, advocating for rational thought, virtue, and self-discipline in the face of adversity. Seneca composed *Letters from a Stoic* as personal correspondence with his friend Lucilius while in exile under Emperor Nero, using the letters to develop and explain Stoic philosophy in practical terms.

WHY WE CHOSE: While ancient wisdom might seem outdated, Seneca's letters offer something modern leaders desperately need in 2025: a practical philosophy for staying steady under pressure. His approach to Stoicism—which teaches us to focus on what we can control, accept what we can't, and maintain our principles regardless of circumstances—provides a powerful framework for leaders facing tough decisions and high-stakes situations. For anyone feeling buffeted by constant change or struggling to maintain their equilibrium, these letters show how to cultivate the kind of inner strength and clear thinking that helps leaders navigate challenges while staying true to their values.

Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration

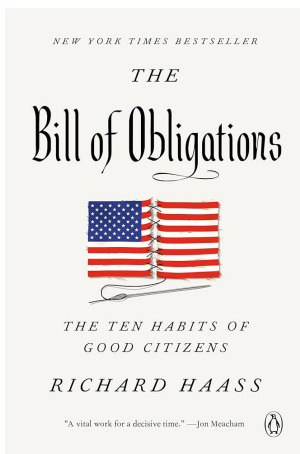
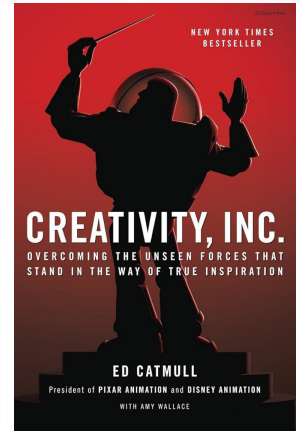
ED CATMULL

SUMMARY: Fostering a culture of trust, collaboration, and candid feedback is essential for unleashing creativity and overcoming obstacles to innovation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ed Catmull is an American computer scientist, co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios, and former president of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios. Catmull wrote *Creativity, Inc.* after decades at Pixar to share the management principles

and creative culture that enabled the studio's success, drawing from both triumphs and failures in building an innovative organization.

WHY WE CHOSE: Drawing from his experience building Pixar, Catmull offers timeless insights about fostering creativity that feel especially relevant for leaders navigating rapid change and uncertainty in 2025. His practical wisdom about building organizational cultures where people feel safe to take risks, share half-baked ideas, and learn from failures speaks directly to leaders trying to keep their teams innovative and adaptable in challenging times. For anyone leading creative teams or trying to build more innovative organizations, the story of Pixar offers both inspiration and concrete practices for creating environments where new ideas can flourish, even when facing intense pressure to play it safe.



The Bill of Obligations: The Ten Habits of Good Citizens

RICHARD HAASS

SUMMARY: Active engagement, mutual respect, and a commitment to shared responsibilities are vital for sustaining a healthy and functional democracy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Richard N. Haass is an American diplomat, author, and foreign policy expert who served as the president of the Council on Foreign Relations from 2003 to 2023, contributing extensively on international affairs and U.S. foreign policy. Haass developed *Bill of Obligations* in response to growing political polarization in America, aiming to reframe citizenship around duties rather than just rights.

WHY WE CHOSE: In a time when we hear endless talk about rights but less about responsibilities, Haass offers a timely reminder of what it actually takes to keep a democracy healthy and strong. His straightforward breakdown of ten key citizen obligations—from staying informed to rejecting violence—speaks directly to leaders in 2025 who are trying to strengthen civic engagement and build more resilient communities. This practical guide helps leaders understand not just their own civic duties, but also how to foster a deeper sense of civic responsibility in their organizations and communities at a moment when democracy needs active citizens more than ever.

Resilience that Works: Eight Practices for Leadership and Life

MARIAN N. RUDERMAN, CATHLEEN CLERKIN, AND KATYA C. FERNANDEZ

SUMMARY: Developing resilience through self-awareness, adaptability, and intentional practices enhances leadership effectiveness and overall well-being.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: Marian N. Ruderman is a senior fellow and former director of research at the Center for Creative Leadership, specializing in leadership development, diversity, and career strategies. Cathleen Clerkin is an organizational psychologist and researcher focused on leadership, diversity, and inclusion, and previously served as the director of applied research at the Center for Creative Leadership. Katya C. Fernandez

is a leadership researcher and consultant known for her work on cross-cultural leadership, inclusion, and team effectiveness. *Resilience that Works* emerged from the authors' extensive research at the Center for Creative Leadership, responding to increasing workplace stress and burnout in modern organizations.

WHY WE CHOSE: Written by leadership researchers who understand both the science and the real-world challenges, this book comes at the perfect time for leaders feeling stretched thin by constant change and mounting pressures in 2025. Instead of just telling us to "bounce back" from setbacks, the authors offer eight concrete practices that help leaders build genuine resilience—the kind that sustains both themselves and their teams through challenging times. For anyone leading through uncertainty (and isn't that all of us these days?), this practical guide shows how resilience isn't just about individual grit, but about creating the conditions where both people and organizations can thrive under pressure.

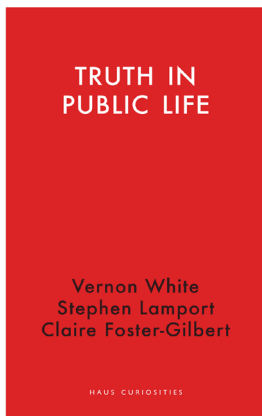
Resilience That Works



EIGHT PRACTICES
for LEADERSHIP
and LIFE

MARIAN N. RUDERMAN
CATHLEEN CLERKIN
KATYA C. FERNANDEZ

Center for Creative Leadership



Truth in Public Life

VERNON WHITE, STEPHEN LAMPOR,
AND CLAIRE FOSTER-GILBERT

SUMMARY: Upholding truth in public life is essential for building trust, fostering ethical leadership, and sustaining the integrity of societal institutions.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: Vernon White is a theologian, Anglican priest, and former Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey, known for his work in Christian ethics and philosophical theology. Stephen Lamport is a former diplomat and Receiver General of Westminster Abbey, with extensive experience in public service and institutional governance. Claire Foster-Gilbert is an ethicist and author, and the founding director of the Westminster Abbey Institute, focusing on ethics in public

life and leadership. *Truth in Public Life* was written in response to growing concerns about declining trust in public institutions and the erosion of truth in political discourse.

WHY WE CHOSE: In a world where “fake news,” deepfakes, and AI-generated content are challenging our grasp on the truth, this book tackles one of the most crucial questions for leaders in 2025: how do we maintain integrity and truthfulness in public spaces? Through thoughtful exploration from different perspectives, the authors offer practical wisdom for leaders wrestling with when to maintain confidentiality, how to be transparent without compromising security, and ways to build trust when skepticism runs high. For anyone leading in government, business, or community organizations, this book provides valuable guidance on navigating the complex balance between openness, accountability, and responsible leadership in an age of information overload.

Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time

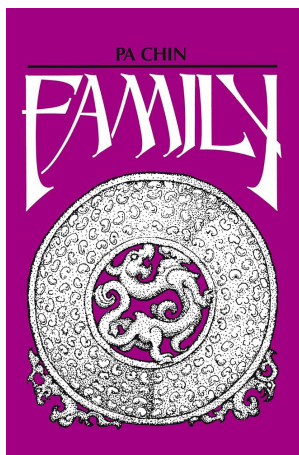
SUSAN SCOTT

SUMMARY: Engaging in honest, meaningful, and courageous conversations is crucial for fostering trust, resolving conflicts, and driving personal and professional growth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Susan Scott is an American author and leadership consultant known for her work in communication and organizational development and is the founder of Fierce, Inc. Scott wrote *Fierce Conversations* based on her years of corporate

consulting, addressing the tendency of leaders to avoid difficult but necessary conversations in both professional and personal contexts.

WHY WE CHOSE: Even as AI and digital tools transform how we work, Scott’s insights about the power of real, honest conversations feel more relevant than ever for leaders in 2025. Her practical approach to having tough but necessary discussions—whether about performance, change, or challenging decisions—shows leaders how to cut through the noise and build the kind of authentic relationships that drive both results and personal growth. At a time when many people feel disconnected despite being more digitally connected than ever, this book reminds leaders that their most powerful tool might just be their ability to have meaningful, “fierce” conversations that get to the heart of what matters.



Family

PA CHIN

SUMMARY: A young man in early twentieth-century China struggles against his traditional, patriarchal household while juggling filial obligations and revolutionary ideals during a time of profound social change.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Pa Chin was a Chinese author and prominent figure in modern Chinese literature, best known for his works that critique traditional Chinese society and explore themes on individualism, rebellion, and generational conflict. Pa Chin wrote *Family* in 1931 during China’s tumultuous transition from traditional to modern society, drawing from his own experiences to portray generational conflict and social change.

WHY WE CHOSE: Though written about China in the early twentieth century, Pa Chin’s powerful story about generational conflict and social transformation speaks directly to leaders navigating rapid cultural change in 2025. Through the lens of one family’s struggle between tradition and modernity, the novel offers profound insights into how people cope with disruption, resist or embrace change, and seek to preserve what matters most while adapting to new realities. For today’s leaders working across generational divides and managing through major social transitions, this book illuminates the very human experiences of grappling with change—from the youngest employees embracing new ways of working to veteran team members concerned about preserving valuable institutional knowledge.

The World in 2050: How to Think About the Future

HAMISH MCRAE

SUMMARY: A comprehensive analysis examines key global trends and makes evidence-backed predictions about technological advancement, demographic shifts, economic power redistribution, and environmental challenges that will shape society over the coming decades.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Hamish McRae is a British economist and journalist known for his expertise in global economic trends and future forecasting, particularly focusing on how emerging markets and technological advancements will shape the world in the

coming decades. McRae composed *The World in 2050* drawing from his decades of experience as an economic journalist to help readers understand and prepare for long-term global trends and transformations.

WHY WE CHOSE: When so much about our world feels uncertain and in flux, McRae offers a practical framework for how leaders can better anticipate and prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. His analysis of long-term trends in technology, demographics, and geopolitics helps us understand not just where we might be heading by 2050, but also how to make smarter decisions today in 2025 that will shape that future. For leaders wrestling with both immediate pressures and long-term planning, this book offers a valuable perspective on balancing the urgent with the important.

