

Reading Recommendations on Risk Management

These are the books that I review regularly regarding the discipline of risk management and some related issues. Each of these gives you hints on Recognition, Prioritization and Mobilization for the risks you face in your organization. I constantly scan Amazon looking for “risk management” in their search engine.

How to read a book: I had a full time Mom as a kid and also I am a victim of 12 years of Catholic school. Reading was a big part of my life for as long as I can remember. After I buy/obtain a book and start to read it, I always have a highlighter and pen alongside. I highlight items in the book that I want to remember and make note of my thoughts in the margin. I then turn back the corner on that page.

When I finish a great book with a lot of value, I put it on a shelf I have dedicated to books I really liked. At least annually, I review these books. Now, I don't have to read the whole book, just the turned back pages and read the “yellow” areas and the notes. Just a thought for you, but this technique has worked well for me.

Also, I recommend *Harvard Business Review*, the *MIT Sloan Management Review* journal, *Foreign Affairs*, *Psychology Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal* for regular reading to keep up with trends and issues of interest.

So, in no particular order, here are my risk based reading recommendations for you.

***Warnings Unheeded: Twin Tragedies at Fairchild Air Force Base* by Andy Brown**

If you have been to any of my live programs over the last 15 years I have been telling people about the tragedy known as CZAR 52. This terrible tragedy involving a B-52 occurred in 1994 and is chronicled in great detail in Dr. Tony Kern's great work *Darker Shades of Blue*. An attendee at one of my programs recently told me about this book by Brown in which he again covers the CZAR 52 tragedy while he also covers a different event that occurred four days prior to the B-52 crash. This crash did not involve another plane but instead an airman with a long history of mental illness that went ignored by executives in the air force. While the stories are tragic the book is a well-written work again proving that when we ignore *problems lying in wait* we will ultimately have a terrible tragedy.

***The Gray Rhino: How To Recognize and Act on the Obvious Dangers We Ignore* by Michele Wucker**

There is another book on this recommended reading list is a book by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan*. This great work explains how to recognize and act to address the “unknown unknowns” that occasionally pop up and cause us great problems. Wucker explains very clearly how difficult it is to address these “unthinkable” events. However, most of our tragedies are not black swans; rather they are gray rhinos. These events are very clearly running right at us, but for many reasons we fail to get out of the way and our inaction results in tragedy. This is a great read with many practical examples.

***Careful: A User’s Guide to Our Injury-Prone Minds* by Steve Casner**

This book is a great read and filled with wonderful examples of how stupid we are with respect to avoiding injury and death. While we are getting so many new toys and tech stuff that helps us live better the human mind is still behind the curve so injuries and accidental deaths are on the rise. Casner is obviously well versed on the safety stuff. In this book he shows very clearly that there is not a safety warning we won’t ignore or a “foolproof” device we can’t turn into a killing tool.

***The Dash: Making a Difference with Your Life from Beginning to End* by Linda Ellis and Mac Anderson**

I debated putting this great book (a 20-minute read) on this list, but decided to do so because it is an essential read. While it does not deal with managing risk (my favorite topic to discuss) it is more about “the dash” that appears on every headstone between date of birth and date of death. What will your dash say about you? Not to digress, but I have read a lot of books on how to “live to be 100.” In each book it always gets down to the Eight Fs: Family, Faith, Freedom, Friends, Food, Fun, Funds and Function. The last one, function, involves your dash. What have you done to make the world a better place? I hope you enjoy this as much as I did.

***Blue on Blue: An Insider’s Story of Good Cops Catching Bad Cops* by Charles Campisi**

This book should be mandatory reading for everyone in the law enforcement field. Campisi was in charge of the NYPD Internal Affairs unit for many, many years. In this read, he gives hundreds of examples of misconduct involving NYPD cops and how he ran a very successful unit to help catch these bad cops while simultaneously sending a message to all the other cops that “you will be caught” if you try to do something wrong. As I read this work, I remember an experience I had in Wales many years

ago. After two days of lecturing there, the Chief Constable said to me, “I think you have lied to us for two days – you are not an American – you are a Welshman!” I told him I was an American and his response was “How do you know so much about my organization?” My answer was that we work in the same circus just with different clowns. Everyone in police work needs to read this book because what happens in NYPD can happen in your department and “forewarned is forearmed.” I think you will enjoy his writing style also, but also please note how many of the cops he arrested were living in the basement of their mom’s house.

***Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town* by Jon Krakauer**

Like so many other great books I have read over the years, I would not have picked this one up but for the fact that I was so impressed with another book he penned (I will ask the editor of this to see if “penned” is still a usable word and has not fallen away like “dialing” has) years prior - *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster*. This work is as well written as it is very troubling. While the book focuses on the crime of rape at this University in Montana, I have learned from my campus law enforcement friends that this serious issue is ubiquitous throughout America. And while the book focuses on rapes perpetrated by college athletes, it is not just the jocks who are perpetrating these criminal behaviors. What is equally troubling is the response (or lack thereof) from campus and local law enforcement and the local prosecutors. Couple this with a jury pool that is filled with people who are enamored with college athletes and we have a perfect storm for ratifying inappropriate behavior thus encouraging future similar conduct. I did not enjoy reading this book but I commend it to all – particularly to those of you who have a relative or friend in or in route to college.

***Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania* by Erik Larson**

Another book that surprised me. I thought this would be a history read, but it ended up being a risk management read. I was told for years that the United States got involved in WWI after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. According to Larson this is not true. The US involvement in WWI did not occur until well after the *Lusitania* event, but the British thought that if they allowed the Germans to sink a ship with Americans on board that the US would then help out in WWI. This is a fascinating trip through history from over 100 years ago showing exactly what Mr. Churchill (yes, that Mr. Churchill) knew in WWI about German subs, where they were and what he did with this information.

***Against the Tide: Rickover's Leadership Principles and the Rise of the Nuclear Navy* by Rear Admiral Dave Oliver (USN, Ret.)**

Well written by Rear Admiral Dave Oliver (USN, Ret.) this is a fascinating book about a man who changed the course of history. In the news today are stories about the United States Secret Service and when you read the experts they all say that there needs to be a “change in culture” in that organization. I hear similar stories about jails, police departments and fire departments all in trouble and everyone talking about a “changing culture.” This is much easier said than done. How do you change culture that has existed in an organization for decades? That is what this book is all about. Our navy diesel sub commanders in WWII were a tough bunch of hard drinking, cigar-smoking warriors who did a fantastic job helping win the war for the good guys. Admiral Rickover was tasked by presidents Truman and then Eisenhower to build a nuclear fleet – and the opposition he faced from the heroes of WWII was unbelievable. How did a 5’2” Jewish guy with a squeaky, high voice change this culture so successfully? That is what this book is all about. This is a must read for everyone in leadership positions in public safety written by a fellow with some personal involvement in the story. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

***Willful Blindness: Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Peril* by Margaret Heffernan**

If you have been to any of my lectures, you are aware of my focus on trying to address the *problems lying in wait* in your organization. Too often, people in the organization are blind to these problems. There are a number of reasons why this occurs and the author of this great book identifies the problems – and provides solutions. This is a great work and should be read by all in leadership positions in any organization.

***Think Like a Freak: The Authors of Freakonomics Offer to Retrain Your Brain* by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner**

A sequel to their earlier work, *Freakonomics*, and again well done. The authors in this work continue to challenge the thought process used by so many people and this work will help retrain your brain on how to look at a problem and identify a viable solution.

***The M Factor: How the Millennial Generation is Rocking the Workplace* by Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman**

When I look at the list of topics to be covered at various seminars around America, I regularly see programs directed at how to address the new

generation of employees that are now being hired. Many of these programs focus on the problems, but this book is loaded with solutions on how to integrate this new generation into the workplace.

***Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* by Robert Putnam**

Bowling is up, but organized bowling leagues are down. This simple statement sums up a lot of problems we face today. Many people are running parallel and not interacting with each other. I have a personal concern that we are not sharing knowledge and experience with each other – and as a result we will continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. A great book with lots of interesting data inserted throughout the work.

***Flight 232: A Story of Disaster and Survival* by Laurence Gonzales**

Again, Gonzales does not disappoint the reader with this fantastic, in-depth look at an airline tragedy from years ago. The captain of this plane, Al Haynes, is on the lecture circuit and I have heard him several times. I liked his program and this book fills in a lot of blanks about what really caused so many to die on that DC-10.

***Field Command* by Charles “Sid” Heal**

For those of you on the law enforcement side of things, particularly those of you who are still active, this is a must read. I met Sid back in the ‘70s when he was with LASD. He retired as the Commander of their Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) and during his tenure there he also remained active in the USMC reserve. This guy is a genius – and this book on how to make things work in the field is simply brilliant. I strongly recommend this to all supervisors and up in law enforcement. For those of you who are trying to promote, this book will be of great help to you.

***Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the US Navy* by Ian W. Toll**

We all watched with great pride the actions of the Navy Seals in Pakistan taking out Bin Laden. And we all watched what the Seals did off the coast of Somalia when the Maersk Alabama was seized by pirates. And these were not the first exploits of this great group of navy personnel. So my question was: “What is the history of the Seals?” And then the question became, “What is the history of the U.S. Navy?” In my search for answers I came across this book and read it – and then reread it. Frankly, it gave me the chills on both readings and is a fantastic read. It is all about risk management, but

the words “risk management” do not appear in the book. On a personal note, I have visited the USS Constitution many times in Boston harbor, but after reading this book, my next visit was an entirely different experience.

***Unaccountable: What Hospitals Won't Tell You and How Transparency Can Revolutionize Healthcare* by Dr. Martin Makary**

For those of you who have been to my live lectures, I often point out how much the public wants from law enforcement in terms of transparency and how much heat is directed at police and sheriff departments when there is the slightest hint that a cop has done something wrong. I wish that the public would have a similar concern about the medical profession in the U.S. – and what is really going on there in terms of murders, deaths and cover ups. You will be utterly fascinated by the breadth and depth of problems in hospitals. This book is a mandatory read if you have anyone in your family scheduled for surgery any time soon.

***Going Pro: The Deliberate Practice of Professionalism* by Dr. Tony Kern**

This is the most recent work by an American treasure, Dr. Tony Kern. We are so fortunate to have him on our side. I first became familiar with him when I read *Darker Shades of Blue: The Rogue Pilot*, a book about tragedies in the air force. I have subsequently had the honor of listening to him speak and visiting his great website. In this book, he traces the roots of professional behavior from centuries ago with some great research. He moves into the complex world we live in today, and how professionalism is absolutely essential if we are going to survive. This book is a must read.

***Disastrous Decisions: The Human and Organisational Causes of the Gulf of Mexico Blowout* by Andrew Hopkins**

Dr. Hopkins writes a great book. I read some of his earlier work, but this book focuses on the Deep Horizon tragedy. He is able to cut through all the tech talk and show all the *problems lying in wait* at British Petroleum, TransOcean, Halliburton, and the drilling industry as a whole that led to this massive tragedy that killed 11 while also damaging the Gulf region. His thoughts on high-reliability organizations, confirmation bias, lessons learned, audits and tunnel vision are enlightening.

***The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* by Charles Duhigg**

This book was recommended to me by Dale Stockton, the editor of LawOfficer.com and a long-time friend. This book is filled with

examples of how we (as people and as organizations) get locked into a line of thinking - a habit - and how these habits can help us and hurt us. How did Alcoa Aluminum lower their injury rate and simultaneously increase share value? How did the United States lower the infant mortality rate so dramatically? What habits do you have that are impacting your ability to perform at the highest level possible?

Wait: The Art and Science of Delay by Frank Partnoy

I have not read anything else by the author, but the title caught my eye and this is a great book. If you have been to any of my lectures, you know I try to separate events into two types - time to think and no time to think. Those events that give us no time to think are the ones that need constant and rigorous training. But most events give us some time to think and, as my recommendation has been for years, if you have time to think – use it! Portnoy has done a ton of research on this and takes it a step further: if you have time to think – use every bit of it. If you have an hour, use 59 minutes. If you have a year, use 364 days. A great book with a lot of practical examples.

Monday Mornings by Dr. Sanjay Gupta

This is the fellow you see on the morning news – good looking guy who speaks well and packs an M.D. behind his name. I bought the book on a fluke and now recommend it to all of you. We learn from our own mistakes – but it better to learn from the mistakes of others. In this fictional work (based on real situations, I imagine) a group of doctors in a medical center have regular meetings on Monday morning to talk about the mistakes they have made with the goal of preventing mistakes made by others in the group. You are probably familiar with one of the classes I teach – non-punitive close call reporting – and this book (in my mind) validates that line of thinking. A great read that applies to your high-risk job.

Adapt: Why Success Always Starts with Failure by Tim Harford

What a fantastic read – and while not filled with excitement, it is packed with real-life stories about individuals and organizations that fail to adapt to changing times and circumstances. The mistakes that Johnson and McNamara made in Vietnam cost a lot of American lives and many other problems. The President and the Secretary of Defense had no clue what was really going on in ground and air operations. Fast forward 40+ years. The mistakes Bush and Rumsfeld (and Obama and his group) made in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused us some substantial problems, and they are

almost identical to the mistakes made in Southeast Asia.

Both administrations failed to have any feedback loop with successful ground personnel as to how to win the war – they did not listen to the colonels who were closest to what was really going on. Harford explains this better than I can in this quick recommendation, but this book is all about organizations that, because of size and decentralization, fail to adapt to what is really going on. An excellent read all the way around and you will learn a lot about navigation, medicine, profits, losses and much more in this great work. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

***Thinking, Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman**

Most of you have heard my thinking on Non-Discretionary Time and Discretionary Time events (NDT vs. DT), how the brain works and the difference between fast and slow thinking. I have bored you with thoughts like “never make a split second decision if you don't have to” and similar type statements.

So here is a question for you: You buy a bat and a ball for \$1.10. The bat cost one dollar more than the ball. How much did the ball cost? If you are honest with yourself, many of you came up with the obvious answer: 10 cents. Well, the correct answer is not a dime, but rather a nickel. Many of you got the right answer, but you had to think just a bit to do that.

How about if I asked you that question while you were driving a car in the rain? How about if I asked you that question when you were tired? Does that make a difference in the way we process information? I ramble about these things, but Kahneman got a Nobel Prize for his work on how the brain works.

***Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand**

Another work that I probably would not have bought, but I got it as a gift from a friend of mine (who ordered it electronically for me through Amazon and sent it to my Kindle. Who would have ever dreamed we would have this ability?).

Anyhow, here I am in Southern California and have read quite a bit about the Great War, but I had never heard of the focus of this book. You will be utterly fascinated about his story of “survival, resilience and redemption,” but I put this into my risk section because of the detailed research that the author has on how many military personnel were lost stateside during training – and when you read the portion explaining that there were

56,000+ accidents in aviator training with 19 airmen dying every day – you will be as shocked as I was. A great read.

Blue Threat: Why to Err is Inhuman by Tony Kern

Dr. Kern is one of the 10 smartest people in America and anything he writes I will read it because he is a wonderful writer. This work is simply phenomenal. He attacks my favorite topic: how to eliminate error. Most of the tragedies I have studied in so many different disciplines get down to good people who make honest mistakes. This can be fixed and Dr. Kern gives some excellent ideas on how to do so. A must read for all in the risk business.

The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right by Atul Gawande

This is the first book I have read written by this author, but I must get the rest of them. A brilliant piece on the importance of checklists and how they work. He uses real examples out of his profession, medicine, but gives concrete examples from the construction industry, aviation and law enforcement. Many of the errors we make could have been prevent if a checklist was in place and taken seriously.

Just Culture: Balancing Safety and Accountability by Sidney Dekker

Dekker is a new author for me, but I will try to find other books he may have written. This work surrounds the importance of reporting systems and how they work – and why they don't work. While the focus of the book is taking the criminal prosecution component out of the equation when someone makes a mistake at work, there is a lot of other valuable information about building a reporting system that works. This work was near and dear to my heart because of my involvement in www.firefighterclosecalls.com and while I do not agree with all his recommendations, I do recommend the book for your consideration.

Outliers: The Story of Success by Malcolm Gladwell

Gladwell is the author of *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* and *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. Smart guy and now he has written *Outliers*. Did you know that most of the best hockey players in the world are born in January, February and March? And why is Bill Gates so darn successful? And why do some very smart people fail while others with less talent succeed? This and many other questions are explored and answered in another interesting look at data analysis. Gladwell has a ton of stuff in this book that you will find interesting and thought provoking.

***The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century* by George Friedman**

What a brilliant work by Friedman. It is the first book of his that I have read, but I will look for others. Well researched and chock full of data about what we can expect in the next century. And I know how difficult it is to predict the future with any accuracy, but his thinking processes are well laid out and I am confident you will enjoy this work.

***Panama Fever: The Epic Story of the Building of the Panama Canal* by Matthew Parker**

As many of you may know from my live lectures, my dad was a merchant seaman during WWII. And while he did not talk about the war a lot when I was a kid, I was utterly fascinated with his tales of the Panama Canal. I guess I always just took it for granted (“Okay, so someone built a canal between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans...”) but I was unaware of what a fantastic engineering feat this was – and how many people died during the build. Truly a fascinating read.

***How We Decide* by Jonah Lehrer**

Another look at the processes involved in decision-making, why we do what we do, and how others can persuade us to do things that will benefit them. There are lots of fascinating stories about the early studies of the brain in here, particularly on what we thought we knew a long time ago about how the brain works. Lehrer ties this in nicely with the present and how modern people (that would be you and me) think things through to make decisions.

***Why We Make Mistakes: How We Look Without Seeing, Forget Things in Seconds and Are All Pretty Sure We Are Way Above Average* by Joseph T. Hallinan**

A former newspaper guy who saw the train coming (no more papers pretty soon), so he started writing books. And this work (of course) is all about risk and what can be done to prevent mistakes from happening. It is filled with a lot of interesting facts and data (Quick: is San Diego east or west of Reno?) and other such stuff (BTW: that was an easy one. Everyone knows that San Diego is west of Reno! So I will ask you a tougher one: Is Rome north of south of Philadelphia? Not so sure are you, even though you have been looking the globe all of your life). If you are into the analysis of data and reading interesting studies and reports of why people make mistakes this is a good read. And, just for your info, San Diego is east of Reno.

***The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes - And Why* by Amanda Ripley**

Brilliant author (*Time* magazine veteran) who has developed a passion from her experience as to how people react during tragedies and disasters. From 9-11 to Katrina to plane crashes to crimes of violence – how and why do you react the way you do? And more importantly, what can you do to perform better if involved in the unthinkable?

***The Impulse Factor: An Innovative Approach to Better Decision Making* by Nick Tasler**

The cover caught my eye (it is a traffic signal) enough to read the summary of the book. What a great read regarding why some of us play it safe and others risk it all. If I offered you a guaranteed \$1000 in an envelope right now or you could take a 50/50 chance for \$2000 in another envelope, which would you take? It seems like a no brainer to me, but about 25% of people will take the risk and go for the unknown rather than the sure thing. And I guess this is true because I watch some of the brainless decisions on "Deal or No Deal" and it makes you wonder what people are thinking about. Anyhow, this text deals with why we do some of the things we do. Also is a very clever online test in the book that allows you to find out what kind of person you are with respect to risk. A fascinating read with a lot of great examples.

***Everyday Survival: Why Smart People Do Stupid Things* by Laurence Gonzales**

Several years ago I read another work of his, *Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies and Why*, and was so impressed that when I was offered a pre-publication purchase on his next work I jumped on it. And I was not disappointed when it came in the mail. Why smart people occasionally do really stupid things is a common thread throughout the book, and he provides countless examples of sheer idiocy perpetrated by people who should know better. He finishes his book with some thoughts on the future of the earth (as we know it) if we continue to waste resources.

***Darker Shades of Blue: The Rogue Pilot and Flight Discipline* by Tony Kern**

Blue chronicles tragedies in the USAF (and other aviation incidents) with the focus on identifying the rogue pilots and what the consequences can be in a high-risk job if these rogues are not addressed. Kern is one of the smartest people in America today and I recommend all of his works without reservation. If you are ever teaching a class on employee discipline to managers, this book will give you a lot of examples to use. This book was out of print for years but is now available.

***Predictable Surprises: The Disasters You Should Have Seen Coming, and How to Prevent Them* by Max Bazerman**

Bazerman is a regular contributor to *Harvard Business Review*. In the first chapters of this work he lays out a good argument on why we ignore obvious clues that a disaster is in route. He moves on and gives some excellent strategies on how to recognize problems prior to occurrence.

***Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies* by Charles Perrow**

Perrow is one of the serious writers on risk. This is a nice summary of his thoughts and is often cited by other experts in the field.

***Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why* by Laurence Gonzales**

The subtitle on the cover says it all and hooked me: “Who Lives, Who Dies and Why.” There are a lot of thoughts in this book on how the brain functions in an emergency and what you can do up front to prevent your death. The checklist in the last chapter on what to do if you are ever in a discretionary time emergency is excellent.

***Inviting Disaster: Lessons From the Edge of Technology* by James Chiles**

This is a brilliantly written summary of a number of high-profile tragedies in the world and what really caused them. It is a must read for the serious planner. Also, pick up his newest work: ***The God Machine: From Boomerangs to Black Hawks: The Story of the Helicopter***. This is a fabulous book on how the helicopter (that we know today) was developed. Every problem in the development of a machine that met the four requirements of a (helicopter) had to be addressed from an engineering and risk standpoint. The human mind is simply amazing.

***The Logic of Failure: Recognizing and Avoiding Error in Complex Situations* by Dietrich Dorner**

Okay – so it was originally written in German and interpreted into English. Dorner does a lot of high profile studies at a major German university. A very tough read (get out your notepad) but well-thought out in showing how people make decisions and why so many decisions end up going bad.

***Beyond Fear: Thinking Sensibly About Security in an Uncertain World* by Bruce Schneier**

Nice book that puts things in perspective.

***Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* by Gary Klein**

The fellow who came up with the Recognized Prime Decision Making (RPDM) theory that I discuss in my programs has written a dynamite book on how we think things through. His analysis of how our brain works and how decisions are made – particularly split second decisions – is truly fascinating. A must read for anyone in public safety or other high-risk jobs.

***Safety in the Chemical Industry: Lessons from Major Disasters* by Om Prakash Kharbanda and E.A. Stallworthy**

What the heck caused Bhopal back in the '80s? Interesting read on why things go right and wrong in the chemical business.

***The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization* by Peter Senge**

Perhaps the most difficult book I have ever read. Get out a yellow legal pad, a dictionary and a lot of time but he is a deep thinker.

***Why Things Break: Understanding the World By the Way It Comes Apart* by Mark Eberhart**

Early on in the book, Eberhart discusses getting marbles from his parents when he was a kid. Rather than play with them, he heated them up in the oven and then dropped them in ice water to see how they would break. His behavior reminded me of a person I am very familiar with, so I had to buy it and read it. A somewhat technical book on molecules but well worth the read as it shows how the nail can cause the whole building to fall.

***The World is Flat: A Brief History on the Twenty-first Century* by Thomas Friedman**

Friedman gives a nice overview of where this world is headed in terms of globalization. After you read it, you may get some ideas of how you can modify your thinking to maximize both your own and your agency's performance in this changing world. This book is really an eye opener as to how the gap between the United States and other countries has narrowed considerably, including in areas where many thought we would always have a substantial lead.

***The Southwest Airlines Way* by Jody Hoffer Gittel**

I have never met the author but plan to. She is brilliant and falls into one of my ten smartest people in America list. How is it that Southwest is the only airline regularly making money? How is it possible that Southwest

has been flying for over 35 years without a single person dying from an accident on one of their airplanes? Some of her thoughts can be transferred immediately to your operations.

***Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* by Peter Bernstein**

A fascinating work on the history of risk and how we have ended up where we are today. A lot of funny historical stuff and a great work on understanding risk.

***How Doctors Think* by Jerome Groopman**

Every year we hear about data regarding how many people are killed from medical malpractice. The number of deaths hovers around 100,000 annually. Groopman posits that a lot of these problems are not caused by a lack of technical competence, but because of cognitive bias issues that influence how doctors think. The book is a series of case studies where MDs made up their minds too quickly, based their decision on partial or wrong information, or did not really listen to what the patient (and the family) was saying. Interesting read, and the same issues face professionals in other occupations including law enforcement, fire service and EMS operations.

***Jihad Incorporated: A Guide to Militant Islam in the US* by Steven Emerson**

Read it and weep. I believe an accurate (and sad) discussion on where we are on war against the radical jihadists and how disjointed our response is to their goal to have a world under sharia (religious) law. As a country, we have not even recognized this risk, let alone prioritized or commenced true mobilization to address this risk that will be present for decades to come.

***Silent Knights: Blowing the Whistle on Military Accidents and Their Cover-Ups* by Alan Diehl**

I had heard rumors that the US Military has lost more soldiers, sailors and marines from accidents and illness than from combat. I did not believe the rumors. Then I read *Silent Knights* and I now believe the rumors to be true. This brilliant piece by a very brave man lays out the issue with the arrogance, cover-ups, and doublespeak coming from military leaders. The silent knights are the brave women and men who die because of the incompetence at the highest levels in each branch. As you read it though, please note the absence of tragedies in the nuclear navy. Perhaps Admiral Rickover had a plan that worked!

***The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbably* by Nassim Taleb**

When Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense, a reporter asked him, “What worried you at night?” Rumsfeld responded that he was most concerned about the “unknown unknowns.” A lot of illiterate people got a laugh out of this phrase, but anyone associated with risk management knew exactly what he was talking about. Taleb lays it out in great detail and, more importantly, gives some thoughts on better ways of looking at things so that you can spot the black swans in advance. Truly a brilliant work!

Also, pick up his prequel, ***Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets***. Not quite as much fun as the other, but still a good read.

***Hard Call: The Art of Great Decisions* by John McCain and Mark Salter**

Whether you like him or don’t like him, McCain is an interesting guy. *Hard Call* discusses people throughout history who made decisions – some good and some really, really bad. It is a nice book to read that complements the detailed work of Gary Klein. Klein discusses the process in an antiseptic way. McCain shows how the process is implemented in real life throughout history.

***Managing the Unexpected: Sustained Performance in a Complex World* by Karl E. Weick and Kathleen M. Sutcliffe**

Read the 2007 version of this book. A fantastic read on how to create the HRO – High Reliability Organization. These two authors have really put together a great book on how to turn your organization (private or public sector) into the HRO. A must read for anyone who is running (or will be running) an organization.

***San Francisco is Burning: The Untold Story of the 1906 Earthquake and Fires* by Dennis Smith**

As a native San Franciscan I was eager to read the book. Smith has a long history of brilliant work writing books related to public safety operations. This text is extremely well researched and a great read. I was shocked to learn what really caused the fires that followed the earthquake – it was not what I had heard nor was it what I had been taught. This is a must read for anyone involved in planning for disaster.

***Terror at Beslan: A Russian Tragedy with Lessons for America's Schools* by John Giduck**

Scary stuff indeed – and hopefully not something that ever happens in our great country. Giduck makes a powerful argument that it is not a matter of if, but rather when and where this will happen in America. Beslan is a small town in Russia and in September of 2004 a group of radical terrorists took over a school there and did unspeakable things to the students, faculty and anyone else who was there. Giduck does a good job at laying out some control measures that we need to have in place to prevent such an event from occurring here. Introduction to this book by Dave Grossman.

***The Firecracker Boys* by Dan O'Neill**

I have often wondered why we are not drilling for oil at Anwar in Alaska. Why are people up there so afraid of what needs to be done? I could not believe what our government tried to do after we developed the A-Bomb in 1945. Dr. Teller (and some other people) decided that one use of nuclear power would be in major excavation and construction projects around the world. And to prove it would work, they went to Alaska to start lighting these “firecrackers” and... well, that was the birth of the environmental movement in America. Fascinating read that will open your eyes and it might explain the fear that Alaskans have about “their government trying to help them.”

***Flirting with Disaster: Why Accidents Are Rarely Accidental* by Marc Gerstein and Michael Ellsberg**

So, you think you know what happened to the unsinkable *Titanic*. How about what Chernobyl and, right here at home, Katrina? Both space shuttle tragedies, *Challenger* and *Columbia*, should have never occurred. And how about British Petroleum (pick one of their tragedies) and the pharmaceutical tragedy known as Vioxx? Were these unavoidable misfortunes that no one could possibly have imagined? All of them were tragic disasters that could have been prevented or whose damaging repercussions could have been mitigated if people really understood the discipline of risk management.

***Lies My Teacher Told Me - Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* by James Loewen**

This book was recommended to me by Sid Heal and when someone with his reputation recommends a book it becomes a must read. He and I were having a chat regarding “cultural ignorance” and how little many people know about the United States and the development of this great country

when this book popped up in his comments. “Lies” is a strong word, suggesting a deliberate act, but this book raises a compelling case that students in our educational system (and I was once in that system) have been lied to regarding so many aspects of the growth of our nation. From the Revolutionary War to the treatment of Native Americans to slavery to the world wars and Vietnam, there has been a lot of missing information and misinformation spread about. You know my thoughts regarding learning from mistakes of the past and how that knowledge can help prevent future error. This book provides a lot of specific detail regarding our past and many of the mistakes we have made as a country. Obviously, the author has his biases, but I vetted several of his facts and I became a believer that our textbooks need some serious improvement. I hope this book fills in a couple of blanks for you.

***Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created OSS and Modern American Espionage* by Douglas Waller**

I know this is a list of books on risk and that this is a bit of a stretch, but it is my list so I will do what I want. If you follow the news, in May of 2010 there was a story about two CIA agents (one a new grandmother and the other a musician) who were killed prior to September 11 in a bomb attack by what we now know as Al Qaeda. Their deaths could only be reported after the death of Bin Laden for some security reasons. I read about the deaths as I was finishing this book. Where did the CIA come from? Who was this Bill Donovan fellow and how did he get involved in all of this? And why do the CIA and the FBI fail to get along, even today? Waller answers these questions and many more in this book. If you enjoy WWII intrigue and how we prevailed in that conflict, or if you just like to read the spy stuff and how the U.S. developed the Central Intelligence Agency, this book is for you.

Thanks for your interest in my reading recommendations regarding risk issues. I sincerely hope this is of some benefit to you.

Gordon Graham