

**Business books****FT business books: what to read this month**

Charting the rise of the influencing industry and how experts could make better leaders



**Janina Conboye, Jonathan Moules, Patrick McGee and Isabel Berwick** YESTERDAY

## ‘The Choice Point: The Scientifically Proven Method to Push Past Mental Walls and Achieve Your Goals’, by Joanna Grover and Jonathan Rhodes

To eat the cake, or not to eat the cake? If you have overdone it with the sugary snacks and have set yourself a goal to eat fewer of them, then this simple question is a “choice point”. These points are defined by the authors as the moment you decide to shift your attention away from an unwanted thought (in this case, cake) that might stop you from making a conscious choice to continue with your goal (eating some nuts instead).

When we set long-term goals for ourselves, especially at work, we face many of these “choice points”. Here Joanna Grover, a certified coach and member of the Harvard Institute of Coaching, and Jonathan Rhodes a psychologist who works with both professional athletes and business executives, set out a guide on how to use “functional imagery training” to change behaviour and keep on track.

The authors believe the methods in the book can work for anyone. According to Grover and Rhodes, the research that underpins Fit shows “mental imagery elicits emotions, and that emotions are the key to amplifying motivation and changing behavior”. The aim is to train your imagery ability so you can improve how you plan and stick to your goals.

In three parts, the book helps the readers to think about themselves, their values (this is a strong theme throughout), what they want to achieve and how to apply Fit to make progress. The third section offers insights on how the technique can be applied to teams. The authors recommend taking notes, tracking your progress and taking time away between sections to reflect.

## ‘Credible: The Power of Expert Leaders’, by Amanda Goodall

In this book, Bayes Business School leadership professor Amanda Goodall outlines a vision to shake up her own profession. Too much of what is held up as good leadership practice is based around personality traits and character. None of this has apparently made much difference. As Goodall writes: “Given the abundance of research into leadership, why is so little reliable and generalizable information known?”

Goodall wants business leaders and decision makers to focus instead on appointing and supporting “credible expert leaders”, rather than generalist MBA-type managers, as a way to guarantee better leadership. *Credible*, as Goodall explains, is the result of the “line of research I have followed for many years”, and her hope is that it is applicable to all.

Goodall packs the book with examples of what she means, particularly in the healthcare arena. The heads of the Mayo Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic, two very successful US hospital groups, are both run by physicians, not general managers. Meanwhile in 2021, not a single clinician was appointed to a major UK health service review body — a group led by a former soldier.

The latter part of the book focuses on how to make experts into great leaders, and making whole organisations expert-run as specialists are developed throughout their careers. If more people adopted this approach, it might also mean that they could save money by not needing expert advice from big, incredibly expensive consultancies. As Goodall wryly points out, those consultants always take care to train up experts within their own ranks.

## ‘An Influencer’s World: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Social Media Influencers and Creators’, by Caroline Baker and Don Baker

Influencing is big business. From Facebook and Instagram to Twitter and TikTok, the husband and wife authors offer a glimpse into its rise and evolution.

With backgrounds in psychology and business journalism, the Bakers dig into the business, history, culture and psychology of influencing. They spoke with a wide range of people, from the influencers themselves to brands, talent managers and mental health professionals.

The first chapters remind readers of the earlier social media platforms such as MySpace and the first iterations of Facebook. Then YouTube, Instagram and TikTok came along, and now we have Substack, a platform that enables writers to get paid for newsletters via a subscription model, and Clubhouse, a voice only app.

As we know, some influencers have been supremely successful — especially when they already have an element of “celebrity” to turbocharge their social media presence. As the book rightly points out, the Kardashians “are the epitome of the reality-to-influencer phenomenon”.

The book also documents other successes: the early adopters, particularly direct-to-consumer brands, capitalised on the dynamics of the influencer industry to fuel rapid growth. It touches on the dark side, with a chapter on dealing with bullies and trolls.

The book lacks depth on certain aspects such as regulation, while critics may also disagree with its upbeat conclusion that influencing will evolve to become a more regulated and equitable space.

## ‘Winner Sells All: Amazon, Walmart, and the Battle for Our Wallets’, by Jason Del Rey

Business journalist Jason Del Rey offers up a well-researched, detailed account of “the battle for our wallets” between two very different retail behemoths, Amazon and Walmart.

Thirty pages in, one anecdote reveals how in 2011, Amazon prodded customers to scan items in the stores of its rivals, compare prices with its own, and receive a 5 per cent discount.

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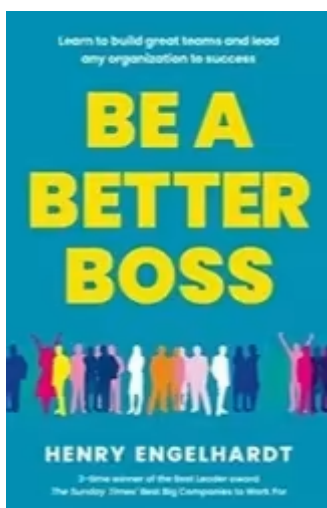
The data-savvy move turned into a public relations nightmare once politicians attacked Amazon for surveilling small businesses. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos got angry with his team, saying “no one would care” if they went after Walmart, Target or Costco, but they had made the mistake of dragging in mom-and-pop shops.

The rise of these two retail giants can be fascinating when told through the perspective of, say, smaller rivals that went extinct or brands whose margins were squeezed. But, in fact, *Winner Takes All* is focused on two companies whose overlapping business

interests feels less existential than the author wants them to be. This doesn't necessarily make it less insightful, however.

The book is billed as the “Ali-Frazier of retail”, but rather than a boxing bout that tends to deliver one clear victor, the book is perhaps more of a dual biography, where two champion athletes excel at different sports with interesting results.

## ‘Be a Better Boss: Learn to Build Great Teams and Lead Any Organisation to Success’, by Henry Engelhardt



Founders often become serial entrepreneurs because they have a talent for starting new ventures. Henry Engelhardt, co-founder of the insurer Admiral, has instead become a serial self-help book writer because he built one company from nothing to a revenue of almost £4bn over 25 years, amassing a wealth of management experience and start-up stories that he now wants to share.

This easily digestible book is divided into four sections, ending with a list of tips that “you can take to the office and use the next day”, and useful for anyone who is put in charge of a team. Engelhardt is on a mission to teach, describing this book as a manual. “I want to see a world of better leaders and managers,” he writes.

There is a degree of refreshing honesty in Engelhardt’s writing, admitting his failings as well as the successful practices that he wishes others to adopt. This includes laying out profit, revenue and share price charts for Admiral, showing the growth and dips in the company’s fortunes.

He also lists Admiral’s various best workplace awards. The clear implication is that good business begins with leading your people well, and that means making sure they are fulfilled at work.

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