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Why Reading Books Should be Your Priority, According to Science

You're not doing yourself any favors if you're in the 26 percent of American adults who haven't read even part of a book within the last year.

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CREDIT: Getty Images

More than a quarter--26 percent--of American adults admit to not having read even part of a book (https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/lacking-motivation-heres-how-to-pull-yourself-out-of-a-slump.html) within the last year. That's according to statistics (https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/feel-guilty-about-procrastinating-7-simple-tips-for-pulling-out-of-a-slump.html) coming out

of the Pew Research Center (http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/23/who-doesnt-read-books-in-america/). If you're part of this group, know that science supports the idea that reading is good for you (https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/17-daily-habits-highly-successful-people-have-and-rest-of-us-probably-dont.html) on several levels.

Reading fiction can help you be more open-minded and creative.

According to research conducted at the University of Toronto (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10400419.2013.783735), study participants who read short story fiction experienced far less need for "cognitive closure" compared with counterparts who read non-fiction essays. Essentially, they tested as more open-minded, compared with the readers of essays. "Although nonfiction reading allows students to learn the subject matter, it may not always help them in thinking about it," the authors write. "A physician may have an encyclopedic knowledge of his or her subject, but this may not prevent the physician from seizing and freezing on a diagnosis, when additional symptoms point to a different malady."

People who read books live longer.

That's according to Yale researchers who studied 3,635 people (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5105607/#R3) older than 50 and found that those who read books for 30 minutes daily lived an average of 23 months longer than non-readers or magazine readers. Apparently, the practice of reading books creates cognitive engagement which improves lots of things, including vocabulary, thinking skills and concentration. It also can affect empathy, social perception and emotional intelligence, the sum of which helps people stay on the planet longer.

Reading 50 books a year is something you can actually accomplish.

While about a book a week might sound daunting, it's probably doable by even the busiest of people. Writer Stephanie Huston (http://www.businessinsider.com/i-challenged-myself-to-read-50-books-a-year-and-it-changed-my-life-2018-3) says her thinking that she didn't have enough time turned out to be a lame excuse. Now that she has made a goal to read 50 books in a year, she says that she has traded wasted time on her phone for flipping pages in bed, on trains, during meal breaks and while waiting in line. Two months into her challenge she reports having more peace, satisfaction, improved sleep while learning more than she thought possible.

Successful people are readers.

It's because high achievers are keen on self-improvement. Hundreds of successful executives have shared with me the books (https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/17-books-which-make-great-gifts.html) which have helped them get where they are (https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/32-books-highly-recommended-by-extremely-successful-people.html) today. Need ideas (https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/24-favorite-books-of-high-achievers.html) on where to

start? Titles which have repeatedly made their lists (https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/26-books-anyone-thirsting-for-success-should-read.html) include: *The Hard Thing About Hard Things* by Ben Horowitz; *Shoe Dog* by Phil Knight; *Good to Great* by Jim Collins; and *Losing my Virginity* by Richard Branson.

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Why You Should Hire Emotionally Intelligent Employees

Specific skills and experiences are only part of the hiring puzzle.

AmarilloView
By Denese Skinner

CREDIT: Getty Images

Perhaps you've heard the saying, "hire hard, manage easy." This implies that having a well thought-out hiring strategy can lead to on-boarding employees that best fit your company culture. This saying certainly holds true in today's age, where having a cohesive culture has become essential for a strong business.

Making a good hiring decision starts by creating a highly detailed and specific job description designed to flesh out the best applicants. In general, your job description should include the specific skill set you look for in an employee. For a great web programmer, this may be using JavaScript to code. For a sales representative, this may be previous experience in sales in your industry.

Unfortunately, if employers only stick to the hard skills side of the hiring decision, they are omitting what may be the most important criterion: is this person a good cultural fit for the team?

Could the answer to finding the perfect new team member be hiring based on emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence (EI), a term coined by researchers Peter Salavoy and John Mayar, refers to a person's ability to recognize, understand and manage their emotions, as well as the ability to recognize, understand and influence the emotions of others. Someone with high EI is aware of how their emotions drive their own behaviors and impact others. They are also capable of managing those emotions, both their own and others, even while under intense pressure.

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EI plays an important role in everyday life, particularly in a business setting. Individuals with high emotional intelligence work better with others, manage clients more efficiently, and help foster a welcoming and accepting company culture.

Imagine how different your hiring process could be if you looked for applicants with high EI as thoroughly as you do hard skills like experience.

In his book, "What Makes a Leader," Daniel Goleman proposes five main constructs around which to frame Emotional Intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation.

If you were to incorporate these into your applicant for potential hires, it might look something like this:

Self-awareness

"Tell us about a time that one of your weaknesses had a negative impact on your work team's performance."

Self-regulation

"Tell us about a situation in which you became frustrated in a professional setting and you were able to redirect these feelings in a positive manner."

Social Skills

"Describe a situation involving your work team where you were able to manage conflict

within the group to help them move forward."

Empathy

"Share an actual situation that happened at work that showcases your ability to consider

other people's feelings in your decision making."

Motivation

"Is there a work-related situation you can tell us about where you put a lot of energy and

effort into an important project that went unnoticed or unrecognized by others?"

Conclusion

Why not be as intentional about developing interview questions around EI constructs as you are about identifying the desired hard skills?

A web programming candidate who can code in JavaScript could get the job done. A web programming candidate who can code in JavaScript *and* who has high emotional intelligence? They could hit it out of the park.

This leaves us with one final question: are you ready to interview hard so you can manage easy?

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