
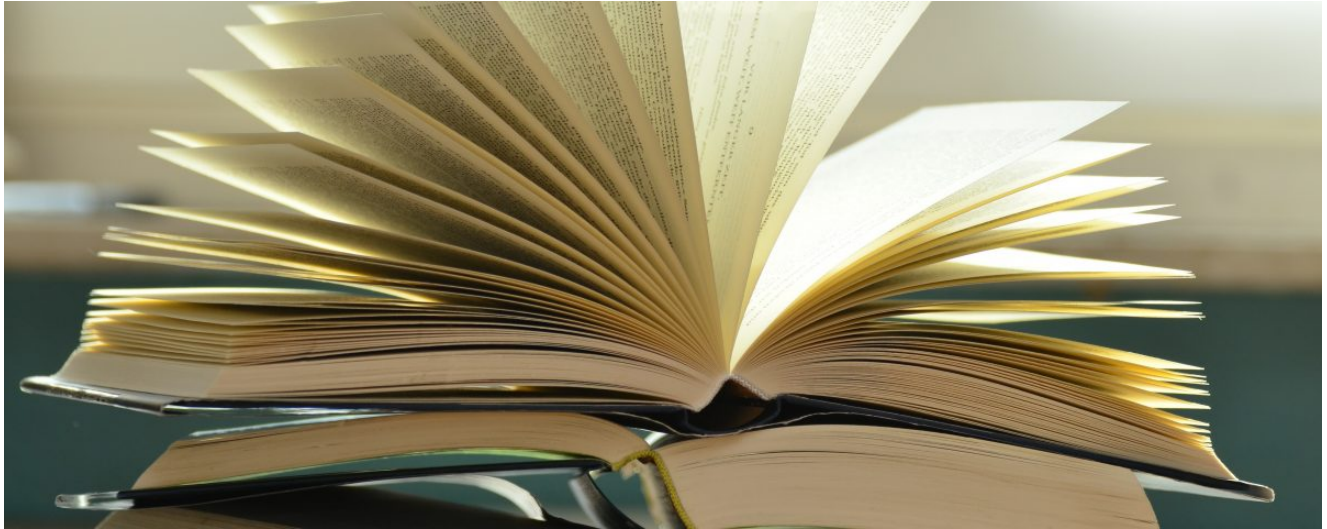


# Top 5 business books of 2019

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Simple decisions can have a profound impact on a business. The authors of this year's top five business books provide powerful examples of how the devil is truly in the details. All go beyond the platitudes of scaling a business to deliver very specific recommendations for growing your business that leaders can start applying today.

Using the 4 Decisions *Scaling Up* framework (People, Strategy, Execution and Cash), here are my favorite books of the year.

## **PEOPLE**

*What You Do Is Who You Are: How to Create Your Business Culture* by Ben Horowitz

Every company needs a strong culture, but few pundits do a credible job of detailing how you can sculpt one that endures and delivers the results you're seeking. Silicon Valley tech entrepreneur and acclaimed venture capitalist Ben Horowitz tackles that challenge in this entertaining book, anchoring his insights in the context of three historical legends and a fourth modern-day story of survival and redemption. Along the way, he delivers specifics, such as the need to establish a "shocking rule" like Amazon's "No PowerPoint presentations in meetings" or Facebook's "Move fast and break things." (If you don't have a shocking rule, borrow his four strategies for creating one of your own.)

Horowitz also takes on the Peter Drucker bromide that culture eats strategy for breakfast, showing how both can be effective if they cohere. Of course, a change in strategy sometimes dictates a change in culture. That's been the case at Facebook, where the new

shocking rule is “Move fast with stable infrastructure.”

## STRATEGY

*Fusion: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies* by Denise Lee Yohn

Published in 2018, *Fusion* made this year's list because there's not been a better strategy book written since and I simply missed it when I compiled the list last year. My bad! Denise Lee Yohn does a masterful job of showing how to bring together the Customer Experience (CX) and Employee Experience (EX) to build a powerful brand.

One way to foster this integration is through rituals. At Salesforce, for instance, Yohn shows how *Ohana* spirit permeates the organization, both inside (where employees greet colleagues with “Aloha” and sign off emails with “Mahalo”) and outside. At the annual “Dreamforce” gathering of customers and third-party vendors, Salesforce opens with a traditional Hawaiian blessing; monks and nuns from the Plum Village Monastery lead meditation sessions and encourage mindfulness among the team.

What a firm calls its employees and customers might seem minor, but *Fusion* will persuade you it's critical. I recently asked clients in the real estate industry to read this book when they were deciding whether to call their customers “residents” or “tenants” and it helped them make the right call.

How do you greet each other? Refer to customers? Sign off on emails? *Fusion* will show you how to make the best decisions to power your company's growth in 2020 and beyond.

## EXECUTION

*Think Like Amazon: 50 ½ Ideas to Become a Digital Leader* by John Rossman

No one would deny that Amazon knows how to execute and dominate its industry. Rossman, a former top executive at the company, details 50 very specific secrets behind the success of the world's largest retailer, showing exactly how Amazon applies each idea.

Take Amazon Leadership Principle 4, “Leaders are Right, a Lot.” Amazon requires that leaders possess the expertise and acute attention to detail that allows them to roll up their sleeves and lead big initiatives from the beginning as “Chief Product Officers,” with little headcount and a small budget.

It's an approach that is in stark contrast to the “outdated” traditional model of management, which is about telling others what to do and where the size of your budget and team is the “coin of the realm,” as Rossman explains. It's also much more effective in powering business

growth, he shows, given that old-school leaders rarely understand why something did or didn't work well enough to put that knowledge to use, he points out.

If you and your team are ready to dive into the detail of the product and customer experience, this book is chock full of ideas.

## **CASH**

*Excellence Wins: A No-Nonsense Guide to Becoming the Best in a World of Compromise* by Horst Schulze

Horst Schulze, a co-founder of The Ritz Carlton Company, created a culture of excellence that is a model for all organizations while beating a cancer said to be incurable. And he did it in one of the toughest industries in the world – a 24/7 crucible of demanding customers, newbie employees and thin margins.

*Excellence Wins* shows how he was able to recruit, train and lead “ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen” to create a gold standard that brought the brand into the common vernacular. What leader doesn't want to be the “Ritz Carlton” of their own industry?

What shines through this book is Schulze's attention to detail, from the 17 golden-rule behaviors employees reviewed (one per day); to the precision with which each customer was greeted, backed up with research that showed it dramatically reduced complaints the rest of the stay. What is the precision within your own organization?

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

*Stillness is the Key* by Ryan Holiday

Every philosopher and religion comes back to one idea: Finding and maintaining inner peace. This stillness is foundational, whether you're aiming an arrow or making critical decisions in scaling a company.

Nonetheless, the ability to “quell the turmoil inside us, to slow the mind down, to understand our emotions, and to conquer our bodies” has always been extremely difficult, as Holiday explains. What he succeeds at doing is detailing ways we all can uncover and draw upon the stillness we already possess in three domains: the body, mind and spirit. It's about finding simple routines to calm each: Take a walk, get rid of stuff, bathe in beauty, and limit your inputs, for instance. Drink in this book written by one of the most brilliant curators and thinkers of our time. Namaste!

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