

# GENERAL BUSINESS 7390, section 20928: BOOKS AN MBA SHOULD READ

Fall, 2019

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This is a 3-credit hybrid course, almost all online. It requires you to read three books, but learn enough about as many as 32 books (class quota is 30 students, but probably we will have fewer) to sound knowledgeable if someone mentions them. The first two books are assigned for everyone: *Made to Stick*, by Chip and Dan Heath, and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, a 2007 book by Marshall Goldsmith. **Please plan to buy or borrow them before the session begins.** I'll randomly assign to each person in the class a third book that is unique to you, but those books will be lent to you at our first class session. You may choose to switch your unique/assigned book with any "alternate" if you wish, as long as you do so on the first night of class.

The class requires that you show up in person, only twice: once for the first night, 6-8 p.m.

**Friday, August 23**, and then for a final exam 6-7:20 p.m. **Friday, November 22.**

Both the first night of class and also the final exam will be held in Room xxx in Melcher Hall.

**Failing to show up the first night means you will be dropped from the course, but an in-advance alternate date for the final exam means that if November 22 doesn't work for you the alternate date will be available.**

## Course objectives

The MBA, the Master of Accountancy, and the M.S. Marketing programs all have goals that this course helps to meet. All ask that students demonstrate effective written communication skills, and the papers you write support that objective. Also, all three programs state goals relevant to ethical reasoning: ability to identify ethical dilemmas, then evaluate alternative courses of action. Some of the book summaries that you will study for the final exam contribute to those abilities.

Specific course objectives are:

- You'll learn something useful from the three books you will read, including how skillful communication can make your ideas memorable. The Heath book should help.
- You'll improve your ability to **use** what you read by considering with others in your group how the ideas in the Goldsmith book could apply to actual actions you might take in the near future.
- You'll become a more **careful** writer. Everything you submit must be written professionally, a likelier outcome with a great deal of rereading and editing.

- You'll sound more sophisticated than you otherwise might, based on your familiarity with three books you will have read and up to 29 others that you may not ever read, but will know about from the summaries prepared by others in the class.
- The book summaries you read in this class will stimulate your intellectual curiosity concerning the range of ideas potentially valuable to you. Consequently, you'll read more other books in the future than might otherwise have been the case.

### **Assignment #1: Summarizing the unique-to-you book**

Some of the book titles came from a survey of our most successful alums; they were asked to supply 2-3 choices each that they would characterize as (1) useful for an MBA, and (2) not miserable to read. My note to the alumni asked them to name books in any non-textbook category: advice, analysis, biography, history, or fiction. Others came from four Websites reviewing business books – the Heaths' *Made to Stick* book came to my attention that way -- or from people whose judgment I respect: Jamie Belinne from the Rockwell Career Center recommended the Goldsmith book. The result is a list of books that I or the library will supply for a unique-to-you, read-and-summarize assignment. Once you have your unique-to-you book, via random draw or a swap with the "alternate" pile, please read it and write up a one-page summary that everyone in the class will read and take an exam over. They will need to know:

What the book said. Nobody wants your opinion of the book, and please be sure you are telling us throughout your paper what the author said, not what the author wrote *about*. Most importantly, be sure to tell us the message of the book? If it had no clear message, do some thinking. Even "Mary had a little lamb" has a thesis: Sometimes pets follow their owners around, and when they do, people react in predictable ways. **Please type the message in red**, making it easier for your classmates to focus on it in studying for the final exam.

Warning: Too many papers that come my way tell the reader what the author wrote about. Those are not "A" papers. It is helpful to read, in a summary of *Liar's Poker*: "Lewis reports that Wall Street bond traders act as though every day is their last day on Earth; they squeeze every dime out of a counterparty without considering that they may want to do business with this individual again in the future." It is not helpful to read "Lewis tells the reader about the perspectives and philosophies of bond traders." Likewise it is not helpful to say "The authors give many examples of..." Please tell us instead what a few of those examples are.

How the book backed up its message. If it used examples, offer at least one. If it made an argument, present the gist of that argument. This section should be about one-third of your one-page write-up.

What the book would help someone to do better. Invest successfully? Make better strategic decisions? Keep good employees with the organization? Allocate time better? Please offer more than a sentence here. **Please make the case that this book would help someone be better at [whatever], and specifics are key here.** Example: “Using the idea from Chapter 5 that a lamb following Mary to school will evoke laughter from her friends, any student could raise school morale by letting a lamb follow him or her often.”

Who wrote the book, briefly, and what qualified him/her/them to do so

When the book was written, and what else that author has written before or since

Anything else that you would want to know if your immediate supervisor at work mentioned that book and you had only read a **one-page** write-up like the one you will write here.

I will post a sample write-up on Blackboard. It applies ideas from *Made to Stick* (MTS), and you are also required to apply those ideas – which means that you need to read both the unique-to-you book and also *MTS* before you write the summary of your book. The expectation is that each of you will know something about 32 books not just the night of the final exam but also after that, because the summaries helped the ideas to stick in your mind.

**Please post your individual book write-up by opening the “Turn it in” icon on Blackboard** no later than **noon Friday, October 4**, and earlier is fine; also at the same time please email the paper to [gelb@uh.edu](mailto:gelb@uh.edu), since Turn it in sometimes works and sometimes doesn’t. I may ask you to make changes to improve the paper, but hope that won’t be necessary. I will assign your grade, which is one-third of your course grade, based on that **first** submission, to motivate you not to just mail in a first draft. An “A” grade on the assignment goes to all who are clear, accurate, **make no errors in the use of the English language**, and follow my directions. Please notice that those directions include thinking and include employing at least one idea from *MTS* to help you write a **memorable** summary. Yes, you need to read all of *MTS* and all of your book, and I need to be able to tell that you did, unless I list a specific set of fewer pages, as is the case with several of these books. I assign *MTS* to raise the odds that the messages in at least some of these books stick with all of you after the course ends. Coincidentally, a Bauer Finance professor mentioned to me over coffee that he thinks it’s the best book a graduate student can read.

I’ll publish the write-ups from all class members on Blackboard by Friday, October 11, and post grades that same day. Since I post the write-ups in sets so that you don’t need to open many Word documents to read them, **please do not use a header or a footer**, because those would then appear on all the write-ups in the set. **Also, please use 12-point type, and space between paragraphs.**

**Assignment #2: a 2 ½ page group paper (assuming five in your group)**

The assignment is to **apply Goldsmith's *What Got You Here...*** in a group paper that merges individual applications written by each group member. Randomly assigned teams of 4-5 students each are asked to carry on online discussions with each other. Each 4-person team's task is to prepare **a 2 page team paper** (2 1/2 pages if there are five of you) on Goldsmith's book, after considerable discussion within your group. The paper will describe exactly four (or five) potential applications of what you learned from reading the book, each pertinent to one of you. Specifically, **you will each describe what you will say, or not say, in a conversation that you expect to have within the next year, in a professional context, and therefore how the book can make that conversation more successful than it might otherwise have been.** It might be a job interview, an evaluation by one's supervisor, a conversation with a subordinate or a client....the book can be used within the scope of any professional's current job responsibilities or the responsibilities of a position you aspire to in the near future. Please offer realistic scenarios, noting for each the material in the book that prompts or justifies what you foresee. A sample will be posted on Blackboard; please notice that its student authors wrote actual words they could use in a given situation, and you are asked to do so also.

Your grade here, like your grade on your write-up of your unique book, is based on my assessment that your group paper is clear, accurate, and followed directions (you were specific, demonstrated that you were thinking, and used the English language professionally). I suggest that you *each*, as individuals, submit to your group one realistic scenario that *applies* what you read. **Then evaluate each other's work carefully, since you'll all receive a group grade.** Please be sure that each example your group submits shows a clear understanding of at least one of Goldsmith's pieces of advice, and cite material from the book that prompts each example.

Then I suggest that you have your best writer turn the set of examples into the draft of a paper that the whole group reads and improves. That group paper is due at noon Friday, October 25 or earlier, emailed to [gelb@uh.edu](mailto:gelb@uh.edu). I'll grade all group papers by noon Friday, November 1, and post grades that same day. Since the grade on the group paper applies to all members of the group, **let me strongly recommend finishing your individual submissions early enough for others to critique all of them, then finishing the paper itself early enough that everyone can read it over and improve it before it comes my way. As with the individual paper, writing errors will damage your grade – an incentive to be careful writers and proofreaders.**

Just to be sure that everyone is adequately helpful, though, a blank form to e-mail to me, evaluating the contribution of other group members, will be posted on Blackboard. Please send that completed form to me by noon Monday, November 4, to [gelb@uh.edu](mailto:gelb@uh.edu), **not via Blackboard e-mail** (that way I can respond and let you know I received it). Within your group, everyone evaluates the contribution of all other group members on a scale where 3 is "fine," and anyone

with an average of 2.8 or above gets the group grade on the paper. Below 2.8 but above 2.2 you lose one letter grade; below 2.2 you lose two.

### **Assignment #3 is the final exam**

Once the one-page write-ups from the class are posted on Blackboard on Friday, October 11, you can begin reading and studying them all. The final exam, **on campus**, will be from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Friday, November 22. Expect two questions (your choice, from three) **covering all of the one-page write-ups and the two books assigned to all**. Each answer is limited to one page; please think more and write less. You'll be given scratch paper on which to draft answers and improve them before writing a final version.

Sample question: Please recommend four books that would help someone invest more successfully, and defend your choice of each. Alternatively, you may see something like: Please recommend four books that would help someone invest more successfully and in case they don't have time to read all four, give them the message of each. In the latter case, be sure you tell them what the book said, not what it was about.

**Be sure that any book you mention is correctly identified by its basic title and author – first and last name.** Your grade on this exam is the final third of your course grade. Your semester grade simply averages your three letter grades: the paper unique to you, the group paper, and the exam. **Please bring your unique-to-you book that you borrowed on the first night with you to the exam to turn in with your paper; that's the only way to receive a grade in the course.**

### **Schedule summary**

*Friday, August 23, at 6 p.m.*, on-campus class in xxx Melcher Hall. You walk in ideally having obtained a copy of *MTS* and a copy of *What Got You Here....* You leave with one additional book to read.

*Friday, October 4, by noon*, you post on Blackboard via the "Turn it in" icon your write-up of that additional book **and at the same time email it to me**. Then or earlier you start discussing *What Got You Here...* with your group, to prepare a group paper due in three weeks, Friday, October 25.

*Friday, October 11*, you can go to Blackboard at noon and see posted write-ups of the individual books from all class members. I'll post grades for these papers on Blackboard. **You need to begin studying them for the final exam.**

*Friday, October 25, by noon*, your group paper is due; please be sure someone emails it to me.

*Friday, November 1*, by noon, I'll post grades for the group papers.

*Monday, November 4*, by noon, is the deadline to send me your form evaluating the contribution of each member of your team to the group paper. **Please assume that the group paper grade you saw Friday is your individual grade as well – that your contribution was considered OK by your team -- unless I let you know otherwise by noon Wednesday, November 6.**

*Friday, November 22*, 6-7:30 p.m. is the final exam, in Room xxx Melcher Hall. I'll post grades no later than noon Tuesday, November 26. **Please check your UH email account to fill out the teacher evaluation form; it should be open and available at that point.**

### **Calculation of your semester grade**

You will have three letter grades and I will “average” them as letters. In other words, unless all three grades are identical (that one is easy!) I will balance out increases and decreases until I have three adjacent grades, then your semester grade is the one that appears twice.

Example 1: on your three assignments you get a B, an A, and an A-.

That's equivalent to a B+, an A-, and an A-. Your semester grade is an A-.

Example 2: on your three assignments you get a B-, a B+, and an A-.

That's equivalent to a B, a B+, and a B+. Your semester grade is a B+.

**The usual caution:** The UH Academic Honesty Policy is strictly enforced by the Bauer College of Business. A discussion of the policy is included in the University of Houston Student Handbook, <http://www.uh.edu/dos/hdbk/acad/achonpol.html>. Students are expected to be familiar with this policy. **BUT if your native language is not English, or you are concerned about your ability to produce professional writing, please have a native speaker of English look over your individual paper and suggest changes. I want to post papers that use standard, accurate English, since every student will be studying from them. YOU write the paper, but it's fine to have grammar and usage improved by someone else if either needs improving.**

**One more thought:** Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS ([www.uh.edu/caps](http://www.uh.edu/caps)) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. Also, there is no appointment necessary for the “Let's Talk” program, which is a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. [http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets\\_talk.html](http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html)

The following pages list the books. The assumption that I'll assign 30 is based on the quota of 30 students. The actual class size will govern the number of book write-ups that you will see posted to study for the final exam, of course.

Title of the book	Author
<i>(Note: books coded as "A" will be those for which students draw.</i>	
<i>Those coded "B" are available to swap for a book you draw.)</i>	
The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference	Malcolm Gladwell A
The World Is Flat 3.0: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century	Thomas Friedman A (pp. 1-277 and 489-639.
Hit Refresh	Satya Nadella A
The Power of Habit	Charles Duhigg A
The Trusted Advisor	David H. Maister, Charles H. Green, and Robert M. Galford A
Negotiating at Work	Deborah Kolb and Jessica Porter A
How to Win Friends & Influence People...	Dale Carnegie & Associates A
The Wisdom of Crowds	James Surowiecki A
Death by Meeting	Patrick Lencioni A
Pre-Suasion	Robert Cialdini A
Managing the Unexpected	Karl E. Weick and Kathleen M. Sutcliffe A
The Fuzzy and the Techie	Scott Hartley A
The Four	Scott Gallaway A
Give and Take	Adam Grant A
Lean In	Sheryl Sandberg A
Other People's Money	John Kay A
The Man Who Knew	Sebastian Mallaby A (Start on p. 327)
Factfulness	Hans Rosling A
The Four Pillars of Investing	William J. Bernstein A
Principles	Ray Dalio A (Start on p. 280)
Start Something That Matters	Blake Mycoskie A
Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China	Evan Osnos A

Zero to One	Peter Thiel A
Just Listen	Mark Goulston A
Grave New World	Stephen D. King A
The Culture Map	Erin Meyer A
A Fine Mess	T. R. Reid A
Nudge	Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein A
The Fracking Debate	Daniel Raimi A
Think Like a Freak	Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner A
<b>(Alternates below aren't inferior, just....</b>	<b>more specialized)</b>
The Deals that Made the World	Jacques Peretti B
Boomerang	Michael Lewis B
The Good Jobs Strategy	Zeynep Ton B
What Great Salespeople Do	Michael Bosworth and Ben Zoldan B
The Quest	Daniel Yergin B (Start on p. 453)
This Changes Everything	Naomi Klein B
What Matters Now	Gary Hamel B
The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels	Alex Epstein B