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Beware the business books

Got a note the other day that the [FMA's Research Assistance Center](#) acquired a new book that might be of interest. It's [The 100 Best Business Books of All Time: What They Say, Why They Matter, and How They Can Help You](#) by Jack Covert and Todd Sattersten. The book provides brief reviews of their top 100 books and includes important lessons from each.

In all honesty, I'm not the biggest fan of business books. I think it's more of the hype that surrounds the "flavor of the month" rather than the actual books. Many are well-written and -researched, but once everyone jumps on the band wagon, I've got to hear about cheese being moved, listening to the wisdom of the crowds, and searching for a new blue ocean. Buzz words become replacements for common sense, and people drop them in conversations trying to lose friends and alienate people.

But the 100 Best is quite a varied list, which includes some favorites ([The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#) and [Good to Great](#)) and some unusual picks ([Oh, the Places You Go!](#)) I actually saw a book I liked quite a lot on there: [Moneyball](#).

[Moneyball](#), written by Michael Lewis, covers Oakland A's General Manager Billy Beane and his efforts to compete with the giants of Major League Baseball on a limited budget. Beane applies stats to everything and tries to use those numbers to find value where others don't. In the earlier part of this decade, that value could be found in hitters who didn't strike out a lot and were able to reach base frequently and in pitchers who didn't have the 90-MPH fastball and kept walks to a minimum. Usually these players didn't look like superstar athletes, and that is why the Oakland A's gobbled them up at a fair price. The strategy has worked to a point, as the team has been competitive but has yet to win a World Series.

The book is a solid choice. It has good lessons to be learned:

- Rely on numbers, not old-guard voodoo
- Don't be afraid to change team dynamics
- Looks can be deceiving

Of course, books aren't dynamic, and markets are. While many of the lessons provided in the book are valid, the examples aren't.

For example, most teams now value the same things the Oakland A's found value in only eight years ago. In fact, Milton Bradley, also known as "Meltdown" Bradley after several public outbursts with the Chicago Cubs this year, signed a rich three-year deal at the beginning of this season because he was a league leader in on-base percentage in 2008. Some of the free spenders in Major League Baseball followed Billy Beane's lead.

As a result, Beane has had to change his approach somewhat. This year has signed big home run hitters, such as Matt Holliday, who don't necessarily fit the profile of smart, patient hitters. He has had to find new value in a copycat market.

Such is the case with business books. Some of the lessons are for a lifetime, but many of the examples are only temporary.

I find that many of the people I speak with in metal fabricating companies have the experience and knowledge to make the best decisions for their own operations. They just don't happen to have an author's contract. Perhaps they should.

Excuse me now. I've got to find my cheese.