BRUCE A. THOMAS

LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT

READ. REFLECT. GROW.

RECOMMENDED READING GUIDE

Leadership • Career • Personal Growth



Books to inspire growth, strengthen leadership, and help you live with purpose.

Personally curated by Bruce Allen Thomas

bathomasleadership.com

A Personal Welcome

Leadership development is a lifelong journey. Throughout my years of military service, federal executive leadership, coaching, and personal growth, books have challenged my thinking, strengthened my perspective, and helped shape the leader I continue to become.

I assembled this guide to help you discover resources that strengthen leadership, deepen self-awareness, improve relationships, and encourage purposeful living. My encouragement is simple: do not just read to gain knowledge. Read to grow—and put what you learn into action.

— Bruce Allen Thomas

How to Use This Guide

1. Choose your focus. Identify the leadership, career, or personal growth area that matters most right now.

2. Start with one book. Use the Top 10 or browse the themed reading categories.

3. Reflect. Capture an idea that challenges your assumptions or confirms an important value.

4. Act. Practice one specific behavior before moving to the next book.

5. Revisit. Use the fillable reading and growth plan at the end of this guide.

A note on the selections: This guide includes enduring titles from my original 2021 reading list and a small set of newer books to explore. Some books are explicitly Christian; those are identified in a dedicated section. The short takeaways and exercises are editorial prompts, not quotations from the authors.

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Bruce’s Top 10: Where to Start

01. The 5 Levels of Leadership — John C. Maxwell Focus: Influence beyond position

02. The 360 Degree Leader — John C. Maxwell Focus: Leading from anywhere

03. The Five Dysfunctions of a Team — Patrick Lencioni Focus: Team trust and accountability

04. Crucial Conversations — Kerry Patterson and colleagues Focus: High-stakes communication

05. Emotional Intelligence 2.0 — Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves Focus: Emotional self-awareness

06. The Oz Principle — Roger Connors, Tom Smith, and Craig Hickman Focus: Personal accountability

07. The Mentor Leader — Tony Dungy Focus: Developing others

08. You Don’t Need a Title to Be a Leader — Mark Sanborn Focus: Everyday influence

09. Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership — James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner Focus: Leadership without formal authority

10. First Things First — Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill Focus: Purposeful priorities

Suggested starting point: Choose the title that addresses your most immediate growth opportunity—not necessarily the first title on the list.

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Personal Leadership & Influence

The 5 Levels of Leadership

John C. Maxwell

Why read it: Understand how influence develops beyond an assigned position.

Leadership takeaway: People choose to follow leaders for different reasons.

Put it into practice: Ask a colleague what earns their trust in a leader.

The 360 Degree Leader

John C. Maxwell

Why read it: Learn to lead up, across, and down within an organization.

Leadership takeaway: Influence is available at every level.

Put it into practice: Offer support to someone outside your reporting line.

You Don’t Need a Title to Be a Leader

Mark Sanborn

Why read it: Recognize the difference everyday actions make.

Leadership takeaway: Leadership begins with intentional behavior.

Put it into practice: Take initiative on one unmet need.

Everyday People, Extraordinary Leadership

James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner

Why read it: Explore leadership practices for people without formal authority.

Leadership takeaway: Ordinary people can create extraordinary impact.

Put it into practice: Recognize an everyday leader and tell them why.

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Accountability & Character

The Oz Principle

Roger Connors, Tom Smith, and Craig Hickman

Why read it: Explore the relationship between ownership and results.

Leadership takeaway: Accountability starts with your response to circumstances.

Put it into practice: Name one challenge you can influence and take the first step.

The Wisdom of Oz

Roger Connors and Tom Smith

Why read it: Apply personal accountability in work and everyday life.

Leadership takeaway: Ownership strengthens relationships and follow-through.

Put it into practice: Replace one excuse with a concrete commitment.

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Communication & Conflict

Crucial Conversations

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler

Why read it: Develop confidence in high-stakes discussions.

Leadership takeaway: Respectful dialogue matters when emotions rise.

Put it into practice: Prepare one important conversation using facts and curiosity.

Difficult Conversations

Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen

Why read it: Understand differing perspectives in hard exchanges.

Leadership takeaway: Listening is part of problem-solving.

Put it into practice: Ask what you may be missing from the other person’s view.

Crucial Confrontations

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler

Why read it: Explore ways to address broken commitments.

Leadership takeaway: Clear expectations and calm accountability can coexist.

Put it into practice: Address one unmet expectation without assigning blame.

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Emotional Intelligence & Self-Awareness

Emotional Intelligence 2.0

Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves

Why read it: Explore self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationships.

Leadership takeaway: Emotional habits can be developed deliberately.

Put it into practice: Notice and record one emotional trigger this week.

Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ

Daniel Goleman

Why read it: Build a foundation in emotional intelligence.

Leadership takeaway: Self-understanding affects how we lead others.

Put it into practice: Pause before responding to a frustrating situation.

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Team Leadership & Collaboration

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Patrick Lencioni

Why read it: Explore common barriers to effective teamwork.

Leadership takeaway: Trust underpins productive disagreement and commitment.

Put it into practice: Ask your team where collaboration feels difficult.

Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Patrick Lencioni

Why read it: Find practical approaches to team health.

Leadership takeaway: Team effectiveness takes intentional practice.

Put it into practice: Select one team habit to improve over the next month.

The Ideal Team Player

Patrick Lencioni

Why read it: Examine qualities that strengthen teamwork.

Leadership takeaway: Talent alone does not create a strong team.

Put it into practice: Identify one collaborative behavior to model.

Servant Leadership in Action

Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell, editors

Why read it: Consider service as a leadership practice.

Leadership takeaway: Leadership success includes developing other people.

Put it into practice: Remove one obstacle for someone you support.

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Purpose, Productivity & Life Balance

First Things First

Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill

Why read it: Reconnect daily priorities to enduring values.

Leadership takeaway: Important work deserves intentional time.

Put it into practice: Schedule one important, nonurgent priority.

Life Matters

A. Roger Merrill and Rebecca R. Merrill

Why read it: Consider the relationships among work, family, time, and money.

Leadership takeaway: Balance begins with conscious choices.

Put it into practice: Review one commitment against your values.

The Time Trap

Alec MacKenzie

Why read it: Identify time drains and productivity habits.

Leadership takeaway: How you spend time reflects your priorities.

Put it into practice: Track interruptions for two workdays.

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Inspirational Leadership & Legacy

The Mentor Leader

Tony Dungy

Why read it: Learn a people-centered approach to leadership.

Leadership takeaway: Developing others can multiply impact.

Put it into practice: Encourage a person whose growth you can support.

Lincoln on Leadership

Donald T. Phillips

Why read it: Examine historical lessons about character and communication.

Leadership takeaway: Leadership steadiness matters during uncertainty.

Put it into practice: Reflect on how you communicate during pressure.

Martin Luther King, Jr. on Leadership

Donald T. Phillips

Why read it: Consider leadership lessons from the civil rights movement.

Leadership takeaway: Conviction and action can shape lasting change.

Put it into practice: Identify a value you need to demonstrate more visibly.

Leadership Lessons from a UPS Driver

Ron Wallace

Why read it: Explore leadership through a career of service and advancement.

Leadership takeaway: Humility and people-first leadership travel across roles.

Put it into practice: Thank someone whose contribution is often overlooked.

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Faith-Based & Servant Leadership

Lead Like Jesus

Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry

Why read it: Explore leadership through a Christian servant-leadership lens.

Leadership takeaway: Inner motives and outward behavior both matter.

Put it into practice: Consider whom you can serve without expecting recognition.

Jesus on Leadership

C. Gene Wilkes

Why read it: Study biblical principles of servant leadership.

Leadership takeaway: Humility and service are leadership choices.

Put it into practice: Practice one act of quiet service.

The Purpose Driven Life

Rick Warren

Why read it: Reflect on purpose from a Christian worldview.

Leadership takeaway: Purpose can guide daily decisions.

Put it into practice: Write one sentence describing what matters most.

If You Bite and Devour One Another

Alexander Strauch

Why read it: Explore biblical responses to conflict in church life.

Leadership takeaway: Conflict requires both truth and grace.

Put it into practice: Seek understanding in one strained relationship.

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Additional Books Worth Exploring

The following titles are suggested additions to the original 2021 collection. Consider them alongside the enduring books already included. They are not presented as books personally read or endorsed by Bruce without his review.

The Coaching Habit — Michael Bungay Stanier Ask better questions and resist rushing to advice.

Dare to Lead — Brené Brown Explore courage, trust, and difficult leadership conversations.

The Culture Code — Daniel Coyle Examine belonging, safety, and team culture.

Think Again — Adam Grant Practice intellectual humility and reconsider assumptions.

Hidden Potential — Adam Grant Consider how growth environments help people develop.

A Reading Rhythm That Works

Choose one book, set a realistic completion date, capture three insights, and commit to one application. A book becomes more valuable when its ideas change how you show up for other people.

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My Personal Reading & Growth Plan

Complete the fields below in a PDF reader that supports interactive forms. Save your completed copy to track your growth.

1. My development focus:

2. The book I will read:

3. My target completion date:

4. Three ideas I want to remember:

5. One action I will take within seven days:

6. How I will know I am making progress:

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About Bruce Allen Thomas

Bruce Allen Thomas is the founder of Bruce A. Thomas Leadership & Development, where he helps individuals, teams, and organizations grow through executive coaching, leadership development, and practical learning experiences.

A retired U.S. Air Force First Sergeant and federal executive, Bruce brings more than four decades of public service experience to his work. He is an International Coaching Federation Professional Certified Coach (PCC), a Maxwell Leadership Certified Team member, and a Dale Carnegie-certified leadership trainer.

His work emphasizes character, purpose, relationships, accountability, and the belief that leadership is demonstrated through influence and action—not simply a title.

Your Next Chapter of Growth Starts Here

Books introduce ideas. Intentional practice, reflection, coaching, and development help turn those ideas into meaningful action.

Explore coaching and leadership development: bathomasleadership.com

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