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# TEMPO

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IT'S A LIVING

## Business keeps him all booked up

By **Patrick T. Reardon**  
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Chris Murray enjoys reading big, meaty biographies of major historical figures, such as the one he recently finished about Cardinal Richelieu, the powerful 17th Century French statesman.

But it takes Murray a couple of months to work his way through a tome like that because, when he gets home in the evening, he doesn't feel much like picking up a book.

The reason: Reading is what he does for a living — a lot of reading.

As the editor-in-chief of Soundview Executive Book Summaries, the 47-year-old Murray reads 1,000 business books a year, or about a third of the business titles published annually.

He reads at his office in suburban Philadelphia. He reads on the weekend before the rest of the family is out of bed and at any free moment, such as when he's waiting for his son to finish a swimming lesson. He reads on vacation — well, except for the family's recent trip to Paris. And, often, he gets up at 4:30 a.m. on a weekday to read for two hours before heading to work.

"I'm reading six, seven, eight books at a time," Murray says.

The irony is, however, that Murray rarely finishes a book. And the frustration is that he has a set of shelves in his office, filled with books he wants to read but probably won't get to until



**Chris Murray reads about a third of all the business books published annually.**

his retirement.

Each year, Soundview provides summaries of 30 useful business books for middle managers and top executives who are too caught up in the concerns of making money and meeting pay-

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# MURRAY: Taking care of business

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rolls to wade through the books themselves.

Founded in 1978, the company is the oldest such service and also the only one that offers detailed book condensations in print, digital and audio forms,

ranging from \$119 to \$169 per subscription. It's Murray's job to weed through the scores of books that arrive each month and decide which to present to a committee of editors who determine the ones to summarize.

Some books — though not a lot — he's able to reject as soon as they reach his desk. "If you have a book on delegating, you've missed that boat," he says.

Others are so good that, in one quick look, Murray knows they should be summarized. For example, "First in Thirst: How Gatorade Turned the Science of Sweat into a Cultural Phenomenon" (AMACOM Books) by Darren Rovell. "I started reading it, and I couldn't put it down."

While the speed of that decision was relatively unusual, Murray's fragmentary reading of the book wasn't.

During the vetting process, Murray never reads a book from beginning to end. He takes in just enough of it, sometimes over the course of six or seven sittings, to determine whether it's worth condensing. Sometimes, later, he will go through the book from cover to cover. But, of the 1,000 business books he examines each year, he fully reads no more than 50.

"I look at the [dust-jacket]. I look at the table of contents. I look at the introduction," he says. "In the introduction, you get the value proposition of the book — 'Here is what you are going to learn.' You can then pick and choose chapters. I get some books with a great title and great introduction, but then, when you read two chapters, it's platitudes."

By contrast, "Management Wisdom from the New York Yankees' Dynasty: What Every Manager Can Learn from a Legendary Team's 80-Year Winning Streak" (Wiley) by Lance A. Berger with Dorothy R. Berger was richly rewarding, even for a Red Sox fan such as Murray.

"It killed me to do a Yankee book, but I did like the stories — and I guess they've been a little successful over the years," he says.

Murray says his wife, Donna, a librarian, "is definitely a book-aholic." But, then, so are

## Editor's favorite business books

Since 1999, Chris Murray has read and evaluated some 7,000 business books. Here are two he especially liked:

### ■ "Leading Change: Overcoming the Ideology of Comfort and the Tyranny of Custom" by James O'Toole

(Jossey-Bass, 1995) — "The lessons of James O'Toole are important — a leader is a leader only if he has followers. But what really struck me about that book were the examples that O'Toole uses — the failure of Robert Owen's pro-employee factories or the fact that [W. Edwards] Deming couldn't get U.S. managers to heed his warnings about quality — and his uncompromising stance that amoral leadership is never right."

■ "The Hungry Spirit" by Charles Handy (Broadway, 1998) — "The Hungry Spirit" is about the greater good that can come from capitalism. It has lessons on the macroeconomic level, but also on the personal level — including what Charles Handy, who's an organizational and strategic theorist-turned-management philosopher, calls 'creating the sublime.' The whole book is really inspiring. Handy, by the way, is extraordinary. I recently sent a collection of his short philosophic essays to a billionaire businessman, and this tycoon couldn't put it down!"

she and their two children, Samantha, 14, and Nick, 11.

Business books aren't known for sprightly prose, but Murray often uses the word "fun" when talking about his job. For one thing, he says business books are better written today than they ever were. Even more, he likes having so many to choose from.

But, Murray acknowledges, there come times when he just has to take a break. "Every once in a while," he says, "I just need to read something different — a short novel, like 'The Remains of the Day.'"

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