Energy Books That Shouldn't Make You Snore

A Reading List for Professionals in the Energy Industry

By Luke Currin

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I love working in the energy industry, but I find it difficult to track down energy books that don't lull me into a deep sleep. Even a big nerd like me needs some drama, controversy, action, and mystery to inspire me to keep turning pages.

I believe there are lots of energy professionals like me, so I thought I'd share my—and some of my fellow E Sourcers'—favorite edge-of-your-seat energy reads. The list below features stories about the history and inner workings of power companies and oil and gas majors; technology pioneers who have seemingly achieved the impossible; and the invisible forces of nature that make the fast pace of our modern society possible. I hope you enjoy them, and please share your favorites in the comments section below!

For the History Buffs

The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power, by Daniel Yergin, is in my opinion like Homer's The Odyssey: an epic tale about people going to incredible lengths to reach something they love. Yergin takes readers back to the birth of the oil and gas industry, and adds personality and character to the historical figures who searched for black gold and established what has become a global industry that permeates throughout society.

The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World, also by Daniel Yergin, is a no-less-epic sequel of sorts to The Prize. The story begins as the Berlin Wall crumbles. Yergin debriefs some of the most shocking events in recent history, from Fukushima to the Arab Spring, that fundamentally altered the energy

landscape. Though The Quest covers oil and gas, it focuses more heavily on the electricity sector and how different power sources affect society, the economy, and the environment.

The Wizard of Menlo Park: How Thomas Alva Edison Invented the Modern World, by Randall Stross, teleports readers back in time to the exciting and sometimes mundane daily life of famed inventor Thomas Edison. By narrating Edison's love for his work, interactions with others, and shortcomings, Stross shows readers that, though Edison was one of the most important inventors in American history, he was also human like the rest of us.

Courtesy: iStock

For Those Who Want a Future Like the Jetsons

Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future, by Ashlee Vance, is a must-read for cleantech junkies. Vance, a technology writer for Bloomberg BusinessWeek, tried for more than a year to convince Musk to let him write a book about the billionaire Tesla founder. After Vance started writing anyway, Musk finally agreed to interviews, under some funny conditions. The result is the only book out there with intimate details about Musk's past, family life, outlook on work, and role in building some of the 21st century's most exciting ventures.

For the Policy Wonks

Energy Myths and Realities: Bringing Science to the Energy Policy Debate, by Vaclav Smil, is a sobering analysis of the discrepancies between the things we hear about energy and the scientific realities that sometimes conflict with them. Smil helps readers appreciate the scale and gravity of energy issues, and Bill Gates heralds him as an important figure for the industry because he brings pragmatism to debates that can easily disintegrate into emotional impasses.

Energy for Future Presidents: The Science Behind the Headlines, by Richard A. Muller, is a quirky but intensely relevant guide to how and why energy is one of the most important policy issues for every future US president. Muller explains how the physical properties of different energy sources, such as jet fuel, have significant implications for society. If you aspire to be president, Muller's guide might improve your chances of being elected.

Power Hungry: The Myths of "Green" Energy and the Real Fuels of the Future, by Robert Bryce, offers important perspective for those who believe renewables are a silver bullet when it comes to addressing climate change. With his characteristically blunt tone, Bryce employs physics and mathematics to highlight the shortcomings of renewables in a society that demands a tremendous amount of reliable power. Read the book to discover which two fuel sources he believes will play the biggest role in powering the future.

For the Humanitarians Who Think Big-Picture

Lighting the World: Transforming Our Energy Future by Bringing Electricity to Everyone, by Jim Rogers, is a book for energy professionals motivated or daunted by the challenge of bringing clean electricity to the roughly 1.2 billion people in the world without it. Rogers takes readers to areas of Uganda, India, and Peru, among other places, where electricity—and the education, healthcare, and quality-of-life benefits it enables—is nowhere to be found. But Rogers' conversations with individuals and organizations around the world working tirelessly to make clean electricity available to millions will cause any service-oriented energy professional to consider buying a plane ticket to help the cause.

For the Energy Entrepreneurs

Reinventing Fire: Bold Business Solutions for the New Energy Era, by Amory B. Lovins and the Rocky Mountain Institute, plots a road map to a low-carbon future enabled by a smorgasbord of energy technologies. In the face of technical, financial, and political barriers to the advancement of a clean energy economy, Lovins' book presents a bold, refreshing plan to achieve real greenhouse gas emissions reductions while growing the economy and creating jobs.

Resource Revolution: How to Capture the Biggest Business Opportunity in a Century, by Stefan Heck, Matt Rogers, and Paul Carroll, is an inspiring read for those feeling bogged down by the monumental energy and resource demand challenges of global economic growth. Rogers, a director at McKinsey & Company, and Heck, a consulting professor at Stanford University, share their insights on how innovators can tackle big problems with sustainable solutions.

Share your favorite energy reads in the comments section below!