


PROFESSIONAL READING LIST



The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List is intended to enrich the knowledge and understanding of the civilian, military, contractor, and industrial workforce who participate in the entire defense acquisition enterprise. These book recommendations are designed to complement the education and training vital to developing essential competencies and skills of the acquisition workforce. Each issue of the *Defense Acquisition Research Journal* will include one or more reviews of suggested books, with more available on our website at <http://dau.edu/library>.

We encourage our readers to submit book reviews they believe should be required reading for the defense acquisition professional. The books themselves should be in print or generally available to a wide audience; address subjects and themes that have broad applicability to defense acquisition professionals; and provide context for the reader, not prescriptive practices. Book reviews should be 450 words or fewer, describe the book and its major ideas, and explain its relevancy to defense acquisition. Please send your reviews to the managing editor, *Defense Acquisition Research Journal* at DefenseARJ@dau.edu.

Featured Book

Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead

Authors: Jim Mattis and Bing West

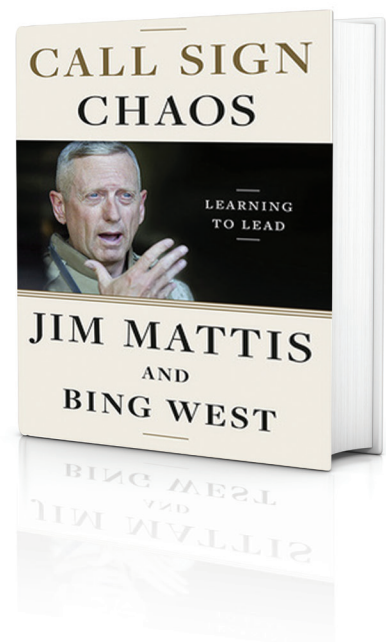
Publisher: Random House

Copyright Date: 2019

Hardcover: 320 pages

ISBN-13: 9780812996838

Reviewed by: David Riel, Professor of Acquisition Management, Defense Acquisition University



Call Sign Chaos' central theme is the primary author's pursuit of leadership and his maturation as a leader. Unlike many leadership books where personal stories are used to reinforce foundational leadership principles, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis and his co-author, Bing West, write of Mattis' odyssey from "carefree youth" to the highest levels in the Department of Defense (DoD), while sharing nuggets of leadership wisdom along the way. The authors share Mattis' journey divided into three sections, from a young second lieutenant with direct platoon leadership to increasingly broader leadership positions in the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) and DoD. Yet, while the stories are enlightening and leadership principles worthwhile, the reason this book should be on every acquisition professional's reading list is its link to the foundational changes we are experiencing in our DoD acquisition world, driven through the Adaptive Acquisition Framework (AAF).

Although the AAF was just published in January, its roots can be found in the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS), written by Mattis, and the acquisition reform legislation of the past several National Defense Authorization Acts, most notably FY16's Section 804, Middle Tier of Acquisition. In reading *Call Sign Chaos*, the acquisition professional can quickly grasp the leadership origins driving what Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen Lord calls the "most transformational acquisition policy change we've seen in decades." Early in his command, Mattis cultivated a bias for action, referred to as "developing a culture of operating from commander's intent demand[ing] a higher level of unit discipline and self-discipline than issuing voluminous, detailed instructions" (p. 44). He further explains that personal initiative, aggressiveness, and risk-taking are instilled by a culture that has cultivated and inculcated these characteristics over years, where mistakes are tolerated and risk-takers rewarded, akin to what today's acquisition professionals are being told by DoD leadership.

As Mattis reached the highest levels of the USMC, he recognized that the essential asset of speed is "the least forgiving, least recoverable factor in any competitive situation" (p. 238), including inter-state strategic competition—the primary concern outlined in the NDS. To achieve speed, Mattis learned to "prize smooth execution by cohesive teams over deliberate, methodical, and synchronized efforts that ... squelch[ed] subordinate initiative" (p. 238). That attitude permeates the current drive towards employing different acquisition pathways to give our Warfighters a sustained technological edge at the speed of relevance. Mattis establishes trust as the foundation of achieving that speed. Trust, that subordinates can sense, enhances their sense

ownership. This may include relying on strategic plans versus briefings of every detail for a fluid situation, such as one might readily find in the Urgent, Middle Tier, and Software Acquisition pathways.

Reading *Call Sign Chaos* is well worth the acquisition professional's time. It provides a better understanding of the roots of our culture shift towards speed, as well as insight into the AAF's maturation. It sets the stage to further the progression toward delivering weapon systems at "the speed of relevance" by providing "streamlined, rapid, iterative approaches from development to fielding" (National Defense Strategy, 2018).