

The Circle
Dave Eggers
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Sci-fi thriller chases transparency to dangerous extremes

Dave Eggers' latest novel is a profound meditation on the perils and possibilities of technological innovation, privacy in a digital age and the power wielded by multi-national corporations.

Set in the fictional town of San Vincenzo, California, most of the action revolves around The Campus, a sprawling complex that houses the inner workings of The Circle. The Circle is a monolithic tech firm that aims to know and share the sum of human knowledge.

Enter Mae Holland, a fresh-faced customer experience representative who joins The Circle just as some new innovations are being unveiled. The Circle has a team of engineers working to stop tornadoes from happening, just as they have a team counting every grain of sand in the Sahara, just to prove that no question is unanswerable. Their biggest project however is "Transparency", which is supposed

to record everything, everywhere, all the time. Its goal: to promote openness, accountability and democracy for all. It begins with one Congresswoman who vows to wear a camera for all her waking hours and record every action.

Soon, more elected officials are donning cameras and pressure is brought to bear on those who do not. The Circle then turns the cameras inward, so the entire world can see everything The Circle is doing. Dissenters are shown to be cranks or worse, criminals and deviants, child porn merchants or terrorist supporters. Any worries about The Circle monopolizing this information for its own gain are swept aside in the name of openness and the greater good.

This book may confirm the fears of a technophobe and make the digeratti squeal with joy, at the same time. I know it kept me in the armchair late into a cold Sunday night.

Though fictional, this book poses some very real questions. How can we have privacy and openness? How much information should be made public in the name of safety? Who watches the watchers? Who are, in fact, the watchers?

This book is so compelling, you'll want to buy two copies: one for yourself, and one for a member of your inner circle.

A leadership primer that should be required reading

I was prepared to dislike this book. With an exclamation point in the title and the emphatic first initial in the author's name (to paraphrase a quote, I've found it to be the mark of a scoundrel or two), I was not feeling optimistic. I confess most "business" books leave me cold. It seems to me that they are all selling the same things, be it a management consultant, an efficiency expert or a supply chain guru. "Buy my book and all will be revealed, all problems solved."

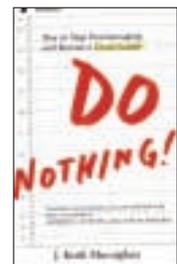
Imagine my surprise to find myself nodding away in agreement within the first four pages. Sixty pages in, I'm taking notes and making lists for myself and then I come to "Backwards Induction." This process is derived from the formal economics of game theory but essentially just means starting at the end goal of a problem and working

your way back to the beginning, kind of like dis-assembling an engine to find out how it works. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book, but there are more lessons in store.

Despite what the title says, of course you don't get to really do nothing. You have to read this book for starters, but you also need to learn to trust more, relinquish control and ignore performance goals, all in the name of better leadership. I know some of you, especially successful business leaders, may roll your eyes and say, "Sure, professor, you stick to the classroom where you belong. I fought my way to the top because of my drive and determination to succeed."

That may be true, but this book may help you achieve even more. Who knows, you may even discover how to "Do Nothing!"

Lest this turn into a fanatical love letter, be warned that Professor Murnighan does have his faults: he is overfond of using sports team examples, and the book does occasionally sound like an MBA lecture. Leopards and spots, right? Still, I was surprised by how much I enjoyed this book.



Do Nothing!
How To Stop Over Managing and Become A Great Leader
J. Keith Murnighan
Portfolio/Penguin
Hardcover
224 pages
\$28.50

Desmond Hallett is a lifelong bibliophile who devours three books a week on average. Feedback: dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com, [@AtlanticBus](https://twitter.com/AtlanticBus), [@ABM_Editor](https://twitter.com/ABM_Editor), [#OffTheShelf](https://twitter.com/OffTheShelf)