



Readback: A Marine Aviator's Manual for Navigating Life's Hardest Lessons

Ryan A. Cherry

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A detailed guide to achieving personal excellence, Readback draws from personal military experiences to encourage people to act with integrity and exhibit dedication to their goals.

Retired colonel Ryan A. Cherry's insightful memoir and self-help book *Readback* recalls his career as a military pilot and proffers guidance from the lessons he learned along the way.

Comprising twenty-two lessons in total, each derived from Cherry's work as a military leader who oversaw hundreds of soldiers in times of combat and also worked at the Pentagon, this is a broad and ranging guide with life, leadership, and personal growth advice. Cherry recalls his time as an aviator who deployed five times, including four times to Iraq. Beneath these experiences run memories of his working-class background in New England, childhood struggles including hearing loss, and time playing college football prior to joining the military. Personal challenges related to infertility and his son's health issues are also covered. Takeaways for all are shared throughout, with the book concluding each chapter with a summary of its main points and connected guidance.

There is a didactic quality to the text, which explains its military jargon in its footnotes and clarifies its many, sometimes momentum-overwhelming acronyms in an extensive glossary. Military slang is well incorporated: Cherry notes that he was eager to log "red time" (aviation logbook entries) during one deployment, for example. Still, some discursions arise, as with asides to explain aviation lingo like "hand of God" or to elucidate technical and tactical matters like how helicopters are controlled from the ground, how their training operations run, and how helicopters fly in combat formations. At times, as when the book pauses to provide the background context of how helicopters are parked, these explanations prove too distracting.

The prose is uneven, oscillating between stilted formality and more effective conversational direct addresses. It is at its most engaging when relating anecdotes about military life in a straightforward manner. Clichés arise that undermine it, though. Still, its general advice is dispensed with clarity, with Cherry recommending effective means of navigating challenges, being resilient, and remaining disciplined. Its approach to such matters is rather practical and often unsurprising, though, as when it advises taking small, daily steps and discusses the importance of perseverance. Nonetheless, its leadership philosophy is quite clear and generous, as when Cherry notes that small acts of kindness can boost morale, making its strategies for self-improvement, teamwork, and achieving one's goals appealing.

An instructive memoir and self-help book, *Readback* mines general lessons from an officer's lifetime of military service.

JOSEPH S. PETE (April 23, 2026)

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