

Title:

How and Why to Start a Business Book Club

Word Count:

683

Summary:

I suggest and encourage business book clubs. Maybe you would like to start one within your organization or maybe you would prefer to build one among colleagues from outside of work. Either way this article will outline the keys to help you build a successful single event or long-term club.

Keywords:

book club, book clubs, business books, business book club, reading

Article Body:

Book clubs have been quite a rage over the last few years. Fueled in part by Oprah and others, the concept of reading a book then gathering with others who have read the same book has become "cool" again.

The reasons people have found them valuable include:

- a great way to have meaningful conversation.
- a way to support your own reading habit (I need to have the book read before the meeting!).
- a way to form a community - to have a great reason to gather with other people to bond.
- A way to learn something in a fun way.

It is for all of those same reasons and more that I suggest and encourage business book clubs. Maybe you would like to start one within your organization or maybe you would prefer to build one among colleagues from outside of work. Either way this article will outline the keys to help you build a successful single event or long-term club.

1. <B>Market the idea.</B> Once you are excited about this concept, use your influence and knowledge of your target group to market the concept to them. Even if your goal is to build a long-term "club." Don't market it that way -

that requires too big of a commitment for many people. You are trying to encourage people to try something new that will requires their time both to read and participate. Rather than inviting them to make a long-term commitment, encourage them to read one book, then once they see the fun and the value, you will have them hooked.

2.       <B>Gain commitment.</B> Once you have sold people on the idea make sure you gain a commitment to participate. People are really committing to two things: reading the book, and coming to the "meeting." After all, if no one comes to the meeting, (or comes without having read much of the book) you won't have much of a conversation!

3.       <B>Start small.</B> Identify the number of people you will feel good about having involved. Experience shows that if you have 4-5 highly committed people you will have a successful experience. More is fine too, but you don't have to have everyone in the organization or every person at a certain level participating for it to be successful.

4.       <B>Start easy.</B> Not everyone is an avid reader. So pick a book that will be an easy sell in terms of topic and length. Picking the new 450-page book you are interested in might not be the best place to start. Remember that the value of the book club experience is more than just the book you read, but the conversations and ideas they stimulate.

5.       <B>Make it fun.</B> This is a part of your marketing effort. Have food. Decorate the room, reminder invitations, etc. in a theme suggested by the book. Make the event itself something that will both encourage people to attend and create a buzz so other people want to attend the next one.

6.       <B>Have a facilitator.</B> Someone needs to be responsible for facilitating the conversation. Beyond the normal facilitator roles of keeping others participating that person needs to have a few questions prepared that are designed to stimulate conversation.

7.       <B>Facilitate lightly.</B> The facilitator should facilitate but not lead. Remember that you are after input, participation and having people involved in the conversation. Don't let it become a lecture.

8.       <B>Keep the group involved.</B> Beyond the group's involvement in the conversation itself, get everyone's input into future meeting times, setups, facilitators, and perhaps most of all, books. When people feel involved, they

will be more invested in the success of the next event, and beyond.

I have helped organizations think through how to start these groups and have facilitated these discussions. While we have talked about the benefits that can be gained by individuals who participate in these groups, the organizational benefits can be huge as well. For the investment in a book for each person, organizations can create powerful conversation, deep professional development and better relationships.