



Stimulate Dialog & Learning through Team Book Clubs

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



Consistently high performing organizations are learning organizations. They continuously develop. They gain and apply new knowledge making learning an uncompromised priority. Yet few of us currently have the time or budget for conducting frequent formal learning programs. What else can you do? Many organizations are turning to informal learning methods to keep their individual and organizational development moving forward. One popular method is the formation of team book clubs.

Team based book clubs that study non-fiction books provide a great opportunity for informal learning. They provide an easy and economical method to stay current on contemporary thought leadership. Combined with the wisdom, encouragement, and accountability that small groups provide, they are a very attractive alternative to training programs for many topics. As an added benefit, books can be read at the convenience of the reader's schedule.

Book clubs are also an important tool in creating dialog in organizations, particularly where real transparency and feedback are limited. Book clubs stimulate three important conversations: 1) ones that employees want to have with their bosses, 2) bosses want to have with their employees, and 3) employees want to have with their peers. Book content by virtue of being third party material is easier to discuss than actual people and behaviors in many work environments. People often have a boss, employee, or peer with whom they would like to have a meaningful dialog, yet typical meetings and hallway chat are not suitable. An informal book club however regularly brings up the opportunity for substantive discussion.

Here are ten steps to running a team book club:

1. Recruit 1-2 others to join you in sponsoring a book club in your organization. Your boss would be a great one to include ensuring the club meets with his/her approval and has his/her support behind it.
2. Craft some draft guidelines by which you will conduct your book club. Include the types of books you expect to read, the frequency of your book review meetings/calls, meeting/call venue, duration, and the expectations of involvement for each of the club members.
3. To maintain book club member involvement, rotate responsibility between them for choosing the books to read. Rotate the discussion group leader responsibility too for each discussion group meeting. If meeting at lunch time, assign or rotate responsibility to collect the food orders, supply the sandwiches, etc.
4. Ensure the book club guidelines facilitate the benefits you are looking for in your club. Benefits include individual learning, stimulating dialog, improving team performance, identifying best practices, and/or staying current with contemporary thought leadership.
5. Aim for a group size of 5-10 people to enable everyone to be engaged in the discussions. If your prospective group is more than ten people, break the group up and start multiple clubs. When you have your group members set, review and finalize the club guidelines you plan to follow.
6. Pick your first book to read, have everyone get a copy (or centralize the purchase through one individual if appropriate), and start your book club. Agree on the number of chapters you will read in each reading period. Start with about 100 pages per week. Schedule your group discussions, e.g. Mondays from 11:30am – 1:00pm.



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7. Disseminate your book club discussion questions that you plan to discuss prior to your scheduled book review meetings. They might be specific to the book section or general ones you will use at every meeting, e.g. 1) What are the main themes in this section of the book? 2) How do these themes apply to us as individuals? 3) How do they apply to us as a team? 4) How might we put this into productive use in the coming weeks and months within our organization?
8. Ensure everyone in the meeting contributes and has a chance to offer their comments. Close the meeting by having each person give a summary of what they found most meaningful in the chapters covered and how they plan to apply it in the coming week.
9. Confirm the reading assignment for the next book section and the date/time of the next meeting/call before adjourning the meeting.
10. Repeat the reading assignments and team discussions until the book is finished. At least 2-3 weeks prior to the conclusion of each book, confirm the next book to be read and repeat the process.

If you are still not convinced this is a good use of your time, consider giving it a try with one book. As an incentive, if you select my book, *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others*, I offer to join your team for a 30 minute Q&A conference call to close out your book club discussion – no charge. You just have to buy the books! Many companies are using this book in their book clubs and finding it to be an ideal candidate due to the behaviors it targets and the practical advice it offers.

There is not a more economical approach to creating important employee dialog, imparting knowledge, and putting knowledge into application. Give it a try!

Mike Hawkins is the award winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.activatingyourambition.com), and president of Alpine Link Corporation (www.alpinelink.com), a consulting firm specializing in helping individuals and organizations reach their peak potential.

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