

Starting a Study Group

by Dennis Hooper; copyright © 2002, published in the *Houston Home Journal* on October 15, 2002

Would you like to have an enjoyable, low-pressure, highly effective way of building teamwork, mutual support, and improved productivity in your workplace?

One possibility is to start a “study group.” There are all kinds of good information available in books, but a lot of people tend to stop reading once they finish formal education. It takes discipline to read a book--and especially to think about how the information in that book might be relevant to your workplace. These limitations can be overcome by reading a book together with your workplace colleagues.

I'm not suggesting everybody literally sits around and reads the book together. I'm talking about people agreeing to read a small portion of the book during the week, then getting together, usually over lunch, to review and discuss what everyone read.

Participation should be voluntary, but once a person agrees to be a part of the study group, he or she is expected to be there and actively participate. In many workplaces, it should be relatively easy to gather from 3 to 12 people willing to work together on this kind of learning.

Finding a particular day of the week to meet is sometimes difficult. Once that's overcome, then finding the particular book to read is the next hurdle. Once you have a study group in operation, then the individuals involved can recommend books of interest to them. The group needs to use some kind of decision-making process to decide which book among those suggested will be the next one for the group to examine. For the very first study group, somebody has to make a decision--I suggest that you make it a book that most people will enjoy.

The expectation is that each person will have read and be prepared to discuss the assigned segment of the book for that week. This is often a full chapter, sometimes two, depending on how aggressive the group is willing to be. Each week, one member of the group volunteers to prepare a typed, one-page summary of the content of the assigned segment. He or she comes with a copy of the outline for each participant, prepared to lead the discussion of that portion of the book.

The process consumes about an hour each week. As people assemble at the appointed time, folks start eating. I usually allow the first twenty minutes for food and informal conversation (and to let the latecomers arrive).

Then it's time for the designated leader for the week to share a summary of the content of the book, encouraging discussion of the concepts as they apply to the practical work of the group's business. Often there is quite a lively conversation generated, and individuals leave with a variety of potential application ideas. Sometimes the group decides to initiate a major improvement in the workplace because of the stimulation of the book's content.

A study group like this can occur in almost any workplace of three or more people--manufacturing facilities, professional offices, real estate agencies, even retail stores. The book can be on a general topic that could apply to anyone (leadership development, parenting, healthy relationships, spiritual growth, etc.), or it could be very specific to a particular industry or technical field.

A study group of sixteen people from very different businesses currently meets each week at a local restaurant. We are studying a book that explores how successful managers behave.

If you would like to start a study group in your organization and would like a little support in getting it going, send me an e-mail or call me at my office at (404)-575-3050.