Leadership

The Responsibilities of Leadership

Being the leader of a book group can be quite a responsibility! The leader or moderator will be something between a group chairperson and a host. It is the leader?s job to not only keep the discussion moving, but also to make sure that everyone in the room is comfortable and engaged.

He or she will need to:

- Prepare for the discussion
- Not dominate ?or let anyone else dominate?the discussion
- Keep the discussion flowing

Note: *For more information on moderating a book discussion, see the Running Meetings section*.

Professional Leader, or Member-Led?

Choosing the leader for your book group is an important consideration, with several different factors. Some groups choose to hire a professional leader from outside the group and others select leadership from within the group on either a permanent or rotating basis. There are pros and cons to both the professional and member-led options.

Hiring a professional leader, the pros:

1. Nobody within the group needs to prepare. The professional leader will do all the work needed to lead the discussion, including selection of the book itself.

2. The discussion will be focused and well-structured every time. When rotating leadership among group leaders, the quality of the discussion is likely to vary depending on the experience level of the individual leader.

3. Because the professional leader has no personal relationship with the members, he or she is

better able to deal with possible "problem" members without fear of offending them or losing a friendship.

Choosing a member to lead, the pros:

1. Members are in control of the choice of books, meeting date/time, and the structure of the discussion. Generally, a professional leader will choose his/her own books and the members will have little or no say. Professional leaders also have a set time and structure for their discussions.

2. No extra expenses! Professional leaders can cost anywhere from $75 to $200 per session, possibly more!

3. With rotating leadership, the entire burden of preparation does not fall on one member every time and all members are able to have a sense of "ownership" in the group.

Finding a Professional Leader

Professional leaders aren't always easy to track down, and some areas may have more people in this profession than others. If you decide this is the route you want to take, however, here are some ideas for locating a professional leader:

1. Talk to your friends, relatives, or acquaintances who are in book groups. They may already be using a professional leader, or have hired one in the past.

2. Attend book discussions at local bookstores and/or libraries. Often, these organizations hire outside leaders, and those leaders may be available for private book groups as well.

3. Talk to English teachers at high school or community college. Teachers or professors may be willing to take a night or weekend to lead a discussion.

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