



Community The executive club: Oprah meets operations

ON THE SECOND TUESDAY of every month, a rare sort of book club meets in downtown Newburyport, Mass. At its gatherings, there are no conversations about plots and characters. Instead, the members—a collection of M.B.A.'s, Ph.D.'s, lawyers, and entrepreneurs—discuss how to apply the business lessons from their monthly reads. In a recent meeting, one member told how that month's book, *One Small Step Can Change Your Life: The Kaizen Way*—about chopping big changes into digestible chunks—inspired him to help turn around an employee's performance one day at a time. Another, a neophyte sales executive, narrated her own character development, describing how she had conquered her fear of flying—a requisite for her new job—in increments.

This group, the Better Business Book Club, was the idea of Don Crane, the creative director of Aloft Group, a marketing firm. Starting the club was a business move: He thought it might attract new clients. So far that hasn't panned out. But in the 18 months that the group has been meeting, the BBBC has attracted more than 100 members from all over New England. They meet in Aloft's office, in



Open-Book Management
All who attend a BBBC meeting are free to discuss that month's biz tome—even those brave enough to admit they didn't read it.

a room outfitted with a circle of rocking chairs and an antique popcorn machine.

Membership is free, and it's easy to join—attend a meeting, hand over an e-mail address, and you're in. Aloft hosts a blog, where BBBC members can make recommendations for the club's next book. Past selections include *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, *The Toyota Way* by Jeffrey Liker, and *Jack: Straight From the Gut* by Jack Welch. Crane says that the most popular discussion was of Starbucks founder Howard Schultz's autobiography. The group even recruited a local barista to share his experiences.

Many members are like Michael Beek, owner of job placement firm eSessments in Westford, Mass., who says the BBBC has motivated him to read the important business books he'd been putting off. Crane echoes that sentiment. "The unexpected benefit of starting this club is that I'm reading books that I never would have otherwise," he says. And Crane hasn't given up on the one benefit that he had expected. "We keep hoping to land a few clients," he says. —Darren Dahl