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What's in a Book Club?

Three Reads That Brought Us Closer Together During the Pandemic

Mason Cooley, professor emeritus at the College of Staten Island, may have been ahead of his time when he said, "Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are." Even though this speaks metaphorically to using our own imaginations to travel through the pages of our favorite novel, it also takes on a more literal meaning since pandemic stay-at-home orders were initiated. While RiverFront's Engage Group had already decided to form a book club prior to the pandemic, we never imagined it would offer more than just an escape from the day-to-day. It is an opportunity to feel together during a time of social isolation, an opportunity for keeping our firm culture alive, and a way to feel a little more "normal" in this unusual time. Plus, with every form of social media becoming a potential doorway to anxiety, escaping into the printed world has never felt more necessary.

The concept of book clubs may be older than you think: while they might not look like the standard book clubs we see today, history shows us that various groups were meeting as early as the 1700s, to discuss literary works and poetry. Even further back (think 400 BC), we might also note that some of our greatest philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, would meet to discuss questions surrounding everything from politics to human nature. Over time, there is no doubt that advances in technology and the development of online communities only made book clubs more accessible to the masses. They are even, dare we say it, cool? Our children may still complain about their imposed nightly, "reading time", but there is hope that they learn to love reading as much as we do. With the hashtag of #bookstagram growing to 56.7 million posts on Instagram, the question remains, "What are you reading?"

The Engage Book Club may be young, but together we have read three books over the past year. Our first choice was *"The Moment of Lift"*, by Melinda Gates, but since then there has been growth with every book we review. We are challenged to think differently and to hear new perspectives. Discussing a book tests your views and opinions and can ultimately strengthen your communication skills as well. Our book club gives us a chance to be pulled out of our day-to-day routines and allows us to make connections between other ideas or fields that may have nothing to do with our own work or life. Empathy grows as we read about people unlike ourselves or with different life circumstances, and yet we can see the connection between all of us. We have a close team already, but with each book club meeting, we discover more commonalities among us, and strengthen our relationship as a team.

Book club also gives us an opportunity to read books we may not otherwise choose for ourselves. Our second book club pick, *"Grit"*, by Angela Duckworth, challenged all of us to look at our own "focused persistence" for signs of grit, or determination in the presence of failure and obstacles. Do you have what it takes to succeed if talent is not the only measure of success? Most recent was our third book, *"American Dirt"*, by Jeanine Cummins. A diversion from our previous non-fiction reads, this novel had all of us 'feeling the feels'. It follows the story of a Mexican woman who had to leave her life behind and escape to America as an undocumented immigrant with her young son. We recommend that you grab a tissue (or a whole box) to make it through this read.

Book clubs create opportunities for us to be part of a team: We challenge you to pick up the book. Whatever your genre of choice, whatever topic interests you, set your intention to read and do not break that appointment with yourself. Hold yourself accountable or find a book club that can. There are also many online forums for discussion, so that feeling when you finish a book, and you just *need* to talk to someone about it, can be quenched. We cannot wait to share what our next RiverFront women's book club pick will be. People are busy, and it's nice to know we have a designated chunk of time devoted to connecting and geeking out over good books.

So, I ask, what are you reading? If you have a book that you have loved recently, feel free to share with us. You can email me at smartin@riverfrontig.com.

References:

<https://bookriot.com/a-history-of-book-clubs/>

About ENGAGE

RiverFront founded Engage in 2019 with the goal of changing and improving the experience for women in financial services. The mission of Engage is to engage women in our industry through mentorship, education, and support.

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