

The Discussion and Action Group

Every kind of discussion group has a focus or a goal. The intended goal of this book is to aid readers to *learn* to do more good and then *do* it. So the Discussion and Action Group should not be used for philosophical discussions about goodness, although philosophy may be discussed when it relates to real-life choices.

Discussion questions are good when they provoke thought or rethinking your assumptions, choices and values. When a question or discussion makes you feel uncomfortable that's often a *good* sign!

Discussion is not effective when group members are reminded of stories that they like to tell, so that they are merely entertaining themselves or others.

If you have the urge to teach or witness to your beliefs, you have to first decide if it's really relevant. If so, you need to do it in a way that's not judgmental or condescending, because that certainly won't inspire others to consider or adopt your viewpoint or suggestions.

Why do I believe discussion of this book is necessary for almost everyone?

1. People have blind spots. Many adults are stuck at a certain level of doing good.
2. People may understand a story, but need help to apply the story or door to themselves.
3. You may be missing one or more useful meanings of a story or writing.
4. You may be getting a mistaken meaning from a story or writing.
5. Everyone has biases and different frameworks. A group discussion provides multiple perspectives and balance.
6. If the group discussion format includes an expectation of action, it will motivate people to perform well thought-out actions.

In general, discussions are more fruitful when they are guided along the stages of the *Experiential Learning Cycle*. The first stage, experiencing, is equivalent to reading the story or “door.” After the first stage, the stages are publishing, processing, generalizing, and applying. Application often leads to another experience and the cycle continues.

You can prepare for discussion by answering the following questions (or similar questions), and by making notes as needed.

1. (Publishing) What impressed you about what you read? What do you like or dislike about the story or idea? What does it bring up for you?
2. (Publishing) Was there anything you didn't understand?
3. (Publishing) Did you have any strong emotional reactions to the story or idea?
4. (Publishing) Were there any errors or bias in the material?
5. (Processing) What, if any, were the main messages (the gist, principles, patterns) of the material?
6. (Processing) What is this material's connection to goodness?
7. (Processing) Does this material have any connections to previous pieces?
8. (Processing) How does the material connect to your personal experience?
9. (Processing) If you had a strong emotional reaction to the story, can you figure out why?
10. (Processing) Does the story provide a framework for approaching other stories?
11. (Generalizing) Where in life do the principles and patterns of this operating? Where do the ideas fit?
12. (Generalizing) Do the principles and patterns of this material work only for individuals, or can they be applied to relationships, groups, organizations or nations?
13. (Applying) How can you use the principles or patterns of this material in your personal life?

14. (Applying) How can you use the principles or patterns of this material to help others?

Certainly all of your responses should not be shared at the group. If everyone did this, the group would take far too long.

A Suggested Format

The group discusses one material at a time. In one evening, the group might discuss from one to six materials. One person is assigned to summarize the material the week after it was assigned. The summary takes 3-4 minutes and is used to refresh people's memory. It is recommended that the summary follow the Experiential Learning Cycle. After the summary, the facilitator that evening (the role should rotate) asks for additional publishing comments, then processing comments, then generalizing comments, then application comments. It is quite possible that everyone is satisfied with the initial summary, and the group may immediately move on to the next material. At the end of the discussion period, the group decides how much to read for the next meeting, and it assigns the facilitator and people to make the summaries.

After the discussion portion of the meeting, there is a round of progress and plan, as in the Goal & Growth Group Format.