

## CHAPTER THREE



# INVEST IN YOUR EMPLOYEES

Leaders, stop here and make a list of everything you're doing to help your employees grow. The shorter the list, the more *you* are the problem.

As we grow our businesses, most leaders function in them as some sort of practitioner. Occasionally, I hear, "I'm a real entrepreneur. I work *on* the business, not *in* the business." But most of the time, we allow ourselves to lapse into doing some of the minutiae, especially if it's something we think we are expert at. We get caught up in the day-to-day running of a department, helping a client, or overseeing projects. We get so caught up in these tasks that we forget the most important thing we're there to do: grow our people.

What are you doing to encourage your employees' growth? If you're just reading this book with a blank stare, it's not enough. If it's a short list, then just know that your competitor for talent (who is everybody else in business, by the way, not just your competitor in your sector) is doing more. What are the ten programs that you are going to start? I'm not talking about one hundred programs, but I'm not talking about just one, either. Who will be the champions of those programs? What are the key performance indicators (KPIs)

of the success of these programs? How are you going to promote the fact that you have these programs?

You can't just offer this stuff and forget it. You have to make sure it's working, being used, and measured. You might be thinking, *But what if I grow my employees and they leave?* Well, that could happen, but what if you don't grow them and they stay? The worst situation is having employees who aren't growing. If they're not growing, you're not growing.

## **PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS**

We want people to be as educated as possible in their jobs. We want them to know more today than they knew yesterday and more tomorrow than they know today.

At our company, we invest up to \$60,000 a year in educating our people. That's pretty substantial for a company our size. Over the past 10 years, we've spent over half a million. We feel so strongly about it that we even maintained this investment during the recession, when a lot of companies were quick to slash training. Most importantly, we track and measure these events. If we see a valuable training opportunity, we'll proactively work to take advantage of it. When the training is complete, we announce it to the company. If an employee says, "I'm going to a seminar tomorrow, but it's free, so I'm not going to report it," I tell that person to notify us because we have to document it. Whether it's free or costs \$10,000, the point isn't to know how much we're spending; the point is so everyone knows how much we're gaining.

Information about training is e-mailed through the entire company every quarter, and annually, we put a huge poster on the lobby wall. It reads, "Growing our Rockstars" and displays all the things that we did in the past year to grow our team members. The

training poster hangs in our lobby because I want every vendor, every potential client, and most importantly, every potential employee to see that we invest in our people.



An annual recap of our team's training and education opportunities are proudly displayed in our lobby so that all visitors (clients, vendors, and potential team members) know how focused we are on growing our team.

A conference seminar is a great way for people to learn new skills, but it's not the only way. Learning is often just as valuable if it's done via a webinar, conference call, or blog. In my opinion, all of those opportunities pale in comparison to the greatest education tool of 'em all. Want to know what it is? (Hint: it's what you're doing right now.)

## **READING!**

Give me a strong cup of coffee and an insightful book, and I'll take that any day over an expensive, remedial seminar. The investment of time and energy demanded by the act of reading makes the lessons learned so much more rewarding, personal, and memorable for the reader. If you have the right book, you're literally carrying a seminar in your pocket. You can refer to it repeatedly. Have you ever read someone's book, liked it, and decided to attend that author's seminar to "learn more"? Then, when you heard the author speak, you were disappointed to learn that the presentation only contained the same info as the book (but less of it)?

That experience plus the belief in the unrivaled educational power of reading books is what led us to create our most-talked-about cultural achievement and our richest investment in our people.

## **BETTERBOOKCLUB: WE PAY PEOPLE TO READ**

Through our specially designed book club, we *pay people to read*. You read that sentence correctly, but let me say it again anyway: we pay people to read. Remember that I said some of this culture stuff is easy and cheap, but some of it is expensive and hard? Well, our book club, officially known as BetterBookClub, is definitely the latter. But let me tell you, it's the best, most effective, and most efficient education we do. It's the most popular cultural initiative we have and the most buzz-worthy thing

that people outside our organization talk about. To brag a little more, it's a total home run. And when you see the results through my eyes, you'll agree it's worth every penny we spend and every drop of sweat we shed.

Here's how it all came about. First of all, I'm an avid reader, and I'm constantly acquiring new books to help me grow as a person and a business leader. About seven years ago, my wife pointed at the big stack of business books I'd accumulated at our house and said, "You've got to get these books out of my house." It occurred to me that if I took them to work and made them available there, other people would get good use out of them too. So I brought them to the office, put them on a big shelf, and said, "Anybody who wants to read my books, please read them."

For months, they just sat there. People often are unwilling to pick up an instructional book, because it's kind of a pain in the neck. They did that in school. I admit some of those business, marketing, and management books can look pretty daunting. But I didn't give up. I'd learned some valuable lessons from those books, and I wanted to share them. So, to get people reading books, I used the oldest trick in the book: I paid them. I went back to my team. "Hey, I'm going to go a step further," I said. "I will pay you to read these books. I've written various amounts inside the covers—\$25, \$50, \$75, \$100—and if you read the book, I will pay you that much money." That did it. Pretty soon, what started out as a little nudge on my part became a full-blown cultural program that we will never stop doing.

To manage this program, we empowered a champion within our organization to keep up with the books and their use. Then we built an online platform that enabled us to record who'd read what, how much we'd paid them, how they rated the book, who they recommend it to, and a repository for their book reports. The result? Hundreds of participants led to thousands of dollars paid out, tons of knowledge absorbed,

lots of insights, many great conversations, and the generation of ideas that led to better things in our company.

I'm continually surprised by the books people enjoy. There are currently over five hundred approved books and videos on the shelves in our foyer, and our library grows by five to ten books a week. We track who reads the most and which books are read most often so that people can create some competition around learning. All the books still have ratings according to their dollar value, and there's a poster in the hall that lists the top twenty books in the company.

**MLG'S**


NAME	BOOKS	POINTS
Anna Matham	139	0
Jeremy Bewley	120	0
Laura Hill	83	4025
Margaret Lantz	62	325
Chris Skovall	59	200
Bryan Ripstein	56	1000
Ryan Anderson	37	1075
Jim Thurman	17	0
Jennifer Bracker	16	2700
Robert Johnson	10	0
Ali Dunfee	9	875
Kristy Nuttall	8	0
Kaya Dell	7	200
Shane Chinsky	5	0
Carmen Brown-Harris	3	0
Lindsay Kucash	2	375
Tim Vincent	2	175

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NAME	BOOKS	POINTS
Greg Howell	61	0
Richmond Williams	39	2875
Jenny Zwickowicz	44	3325
Jennifer Floyd	39	1100
Megan Hayes	38	3025
Angel Puhnam	32	323
Carin Dennis	26	2000
John Schemel	27	1875
Lisa Henne	26	3625
Recher Rosello	27	1850
Adam Chiswick	21	1475
Laura Hudson	21	1325
Suzanne Rosenbaum	19	3125
Tirumaine Widdor	18	475
Deak Rutledge	17	3075
Keri Johnson	17	75
Reese Beane	16	350
Damon McKittrick	13	500
Kate Sabornie	17	325
Heidi Wilson	12	450
Ben Doster	11	850
Drew Williams	10	725
Joe Hayden	10	450
Kristy Wilson	10	300
Michael Hoffmann	9	425
Krista Chyngkura	8	300
Kelly Hays	7	325
Jonathan Barker	7	300
Garth Stanley	7	125
Les Spomer	5	150
Levi Brandenburg	5	0
Sarah Kuhl	3	75
Jeffrey Madison	3	0
Brian Shipp	2	0
Kelsey Gauderson	1	100
Noah Warner	1	100


**lb**

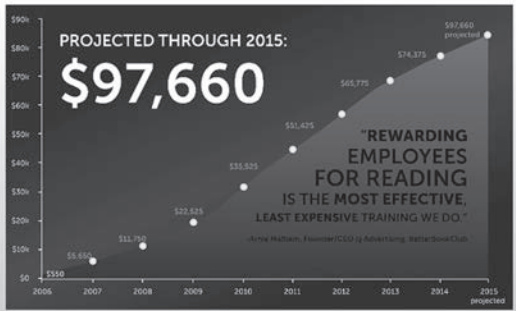
NAME	BOOKS	POINTS
Shannon McGee	23	750
Jessica Grady	17	17
Carlos Freeman	17	0
Chandra Michulka	11	0
Mandy Roman	8	500
Quinn Allen	7	450
Jason Goucher	4	225
Lisa Jennings	4	175
LeAnn Bevan	4	350
Melissa Duncan	4	125
Jasmin Martin	3	250
Krista Brown	3	225
Maika Leonard	3	200
Garrett Harrison	2	200
Teemu Wustmann	2	125
Karibity Pokras	2	100
Colleen Mason	1	100
Deborah Franco	1	100
Ryan Richards	1	100
Stephanie Ellison	1	100
Jonathan Palmer	1	50
Kenneth Overholt	1	25
Nicholas Thomas	1	25
Rebecca Thomas	1	25



EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO ENGAGE THROUGH READING

**MLG'S TOP READ BOOKS:**





**PROJECTED THROUGH 2015:**  
\$97,660

**"REWARDING EMPLOYEES FOR READING IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE, LEAST EXPENSIVE TRAINING WE DO."**  
Anna Matham, Founder (CEO) of Advancing, Better Book Club

**TOTAL BOOKS READ OR TAGGED: 1,923**

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When you've paid out as much as we have for reading, sharing the amount, the team's favorite books, and the most active readers seems like a natural. Find a way to get books into the the brains of your team.

What's useful about that is if new employees just start by reading the most popular books, they are immediately on the same page as other people. At the same time, we don't set limits. If people want to read

a book that no one's read, that's great too. Now they have knowledge and a little insight that, maybe, no one else does. Finally, they don't have to read books for money. Many don't. In our system, people have the ability to tag and report on books outside the pay-to-read program. Hundreds of books have been read that way.

We invest about \$10,000 a year and have paid nearly \$100,000 over the last seven years to get books into brains. It's an insanely popular program, with a huge participation rate of over 70 percent. We pay and recognize people for taking knowledge from books and applying it to their jobs. The money spent on paying people to read is significant, as are the time and resources used to maintain the system. But the benefits are crazy good.

- **Agile.** Employees who struggle to find quality training in the form of a seminar can *always* target a book that speaks directly to their needs.
- **Effective.** When you invest the time and energy it takes to read (and reread) a book, that information sticks with you in a way that a one-time seminar might not.
- **Efficient.** You could pay a few thousand dollars for an airline ticket, hotel, meals, and per diem for *one* person to attend *one* conference on the clock. Or you could pay the same amount for a hundred people to read hundreds of books on their own time.

Whenever I tell folks about BetterBookClub, they always say, “Well, we'd like to do that. Can we use your system?” The answer used to be no, but by growing the scope and functionality for ourselves, we found a way to share this system with others. At BetterBookClub.com, any company can design and implement its own book club. It doesn't have to be done the way we do it. Certainly, people don't have to be paid to



read. In fact, enormous value can be derived from a small collection of ten books if they are the right ten books.

Whatever you do to invest in your employees, just be sure you understand this: innovation or opportunity can come from any place. We all soak up incredible amounts of knowledge if we're open to it. When the student is ready, the teacher appears. I just think that when you're willing to attend training, to absorb information through books, and to respect the opinions of others, big things happen.

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By the way, if you are thinking...yeah, we have a book club, consider what I believe to be the top 4 reasons traditional book clubs don't work as intended in organizations:

1. "The boss" tries to shove titles down team members throats.
2. Growth is not inherently present in the existing culture.
3. "The boss" does not participate.
4. "The boss" says it's important but does not prioritize, recognize, or incentivize.



## ABOUT THIS EXCERPT

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*Worth Doing Wrong* is the first full-length publication by Arnie Malham, Founder/President of cj Advertising and Legal Intake Professionals.

For years, business leaders and culture officers have looked to Arnie for advice on creating employment environments that foster innovation, drive profits, and grow rockstar employees who work and play hard.

An integral part of creating that culture is the innovative BetterBookClub platform launched in late 2014.

Endorsed by thought leaders, authors, and business owners, BetterBookClub is spreading rapidly across the country, the continent, and the globe.

**For more information about BetterBookClub or *Worth Doing Wrong*, visit [www.betterbookclub.com](http://www.betterbookclub.com) or [www.worthdoingwrong.com](http://www.worthdoingwrong.com)**