

Please, don't tell me more about you

Of books and how people just want to talk about themselves

Last night I attended my first meeting of a book group. Around the table were a dozen women. One lady, who had also never attended the group, decided she would take the reins and introduce herself. And so she did—telling us her story, her children's stories and her grand kid's stories.

As we went around the table, some women shared their name, occupation and where they live, while some women went into great autobiographical detail, even into the TMI (too much information) territory. We heard about what high school they attended, family secrets, divorce, how their ancestors got to America, angst about the kids (there was a lot of emphasis on their children), and very little about their reading or book interests.

But, let's get back to me

When we finally got around to discussing the book, one (self-absorbed) woman kept bringing it back to her experiences, her life, her likes, her dislikes. Everything someone else said made her want to share something irrelevant to the book and only relevant to herself. At one point, she digressed into discussing whether her second son (who is probably in his early 30s) had attachment issues because he spent a few weeks in the NICU after being born prematurely. (Yes, this really happened.)

I began to think I had mistakenly attended a group therapy session.

Are you being social?

Imagine that instead of a book group, this was Twitter or Facebook. Among the stuff in your feed is a bunch of self-promoting, self-analyzing, self-absorbed stuff. Do you pay attention? I bet you don't. Because when you are in a social setting, like a book group or social media, you are there to share and discuss and *interact*. It is a multi-sided conversation—not a one-sided discourse.

Now, take a look at your marketing materials. How much is about how great you are, and how many awards you've won? How much shows you understand and empathize with your readers (customers, donors, etc.)? If the balance is tipped in your favor instead of your reader, then you are talking way too much about yourself.

Who cares?

To be a more successful communicator (or book group participant), start listening more and talking less. And when you do talk, make sure you aren't being self-absorbed.

Here's the thing: Nobody cares as much about you as you do.