



Discussion Questions

Working 9 to 5

A women's movement, a labor union, and the iconic movie

By *Ellen Cassedy*

Working 9 to 5 offers a wealth of discussion material for book club members and students. Ellen Cassedy would be glad to talk with your book club or your classroom. Please be in touch with her at www.ellencassedy.com.

1. What were the main concerns of women office workers when 9 to 5 began in the 1970s? Are they different today? How and why?
2. How did people get involved in 9 to 5? Why did people join 9 to 5? What made it attractive? Why did they stick with it?
3. What was the difference between 9 to 5's paid organizers, its volunteer leaders, and its rank-and-file members? What tasks and responsibilities did each have?
4. What key choices did the organizers make about how to organize women office workers and how to get employers to respond to their concerns? What mistakes did they make? Why?
5. What surprised you about 9 to 5?
6. What was the role of humor and fun in 9 to 5?
7. How is/was organizing women workers different from community organizing?
8. What kept/keeps women from speaking up on the job? How did 9 to 5 deal with that?
9. How was the 9 to 5 organization different from a union?
10. How did the labor movement respond to 9 to 5 at first? How did that response change?
11. Was District 925 different from other unions? How?

12. Why are some employees/workers resistant to the idea of joining a union?
13. A recent Gallup Poll found that 68% of Americans say they support unions, but only 10% of all workers are union members? What are the reasons for this big gap?
14. How did employers respond to 9 to 5? What was the impact of anti-union consultants?
15. In the mid-1980's, there were dozens of chapters of the 9 to 5 movement in cities around the country. Why didn't the 9 to 5 movement grow bigger than it did?
16. How did the author change through her involvement in 9 to 5?
17. What was the impact of the Hollywood film and the Dolly Parton song?
18. Do you think the media – newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, social media – do a good job of reporting on the concerns of women, women workers, and labor unions? Do you think their reporting is incomplete? Thorough? Biased?
19. What did 9 to 5 achieve? What did it fail to achieve?
20. Since the “second wave” of feminism in the 1970s, how have conditions changed for American women?
21. Was the movement's impact different for low-income women, women of color, middle-class women, and working-class women? What victories have they won to improve women's lives and promote more equality? What still needs to happen before one can say that women have achieved full equality?
22. What parts of the book were uplifting? What parts of the book were frustrating? On balance, is the story of 9 to 5 uplifting or frustrating?
23. An old labor song says “Every generation's got to win it again.” What does that phrase mean? Do you agree with it?
24. What organizing efforts today remind you of 9 to 5?
25. Having read this book, do you have advice for today's organizers and activists?