

Team Building

It won't work unless people see the benefit of team building

By F. John Reh, About.com Guide

It is not enough to get your group together off site and have a few icebreaker games. If you want team building to work, you have to show the members of the team that it benefits them personally.

There is very little "team" in teamwork without a lot of motivation. We live in a society that seems fascinated with individual accomplishment and almost oblivious to teams. Even in team settings like sports, we single out the All-Stars and the MVP (Most Valuable Player) of each game. That is the environment you have to overcome in order to build your group at work into a team.

Get Started Team Building

Do you think of your group as a team? They won't think of themselves as a team if you don't. Do you reward team performance, or only individual achievements? You won't have much success in team building if you don't reward team performance. Let your group know that they are a team, that you expect them to perform as a team, and that you will reward their successes as a team. That's the first step toward team building.

Remember that team building must be an everyday activity. It is not something you can just do quarterly at some off-site function.

Motivate Team Building

If you want team building to work, it's not enough to tell them that they are a team and must perform as one. You also have to show the members of the team that it benefits them personally.

Most of us are selfish individualists. We watch out, first and foremost, for ourselves and do what benefits us most. We have to be motivated to include anyone else. Fortunately, it is pretty easy for us to see the benefits of including others, so most of us do that readily. Love is a strong motivator. Parents, for instance, watch out for their children. Money is another strong motivator. It is one you can use as an employer. However, the strongest motivator available to a manager (since it is unlikely your employees will fall in love with you) is self esteem. The more the individual sees a benefit to his or her self esteem from supporting the team, the more successful your team building efforts will be.

First of all, your people have to acknowledge that they are part of a team. You can reinforce this by holding team meetings, posting team news on the bulletin board or your intranet page, and tracking team performance against team goals.

Secondly, they have to believe that the team is capable of producing more than the sum of its members. Lance Armstrong is a great bicycle racer, but he could not have won the Tour de France without the support and assistance of his team members. You may have a great customer service rep on your team, but without the cooperation of the other members of the team he or she would not be able to handle as many calls. You have to make this readily apparent to them and clearly delineate the increased rewards they can achieve through teamwork.

Reinforce Team Building Efforts

One company I know had a great customer support team. Their director challenged the team with higher and higher goals. He celebrated their successes in meeting and exceeding those team goals. He also celebrated them as individuals. The team decorated the cubicle of everyone who was having a birthday. They did community service projects together. They had fun at work. And they enjoyed beating the goals Clint set for their team. They got a significant boost in self esteem from belonging to a winning team.

Making up t-shirts, etc. with a team logo or motto can help reinforce the sense of team identity, but it's not required. You should know your team well enough to know whether or not something like that would be positive reinforcement for them.

Don't make the mistake of one Accounting Manager I knew. The motto he picked for his team and had printed on ballcaps he gave them didn't fly. He hadn't involved the team in selecting either the motto or the object on which it was printed.

I recommend you develop your own exercises where possible. No outside consulting company knows your company culture as well as you do. You can do a variety of exercises or play a variety of sports. I have built successful team building exercises around golf (for non golfers) and bowling. Another currently popular team building exercise is Paintball. About's Paintball Guide explains the basics with these articles.

Here are some additional resources to help you craft your own exercises:

Creative Icebreakers, Introductions, and Hellos

From Business Training Works, details of 15 exercises from which to choose.

Tag Team Tic Tac Toe

Angela Zakon offers this team building exercise based on the popular game.

If you do decide to go outside for consultant help, here are a couple of ideas:

City Challenge

City Challenge conducts this orienteering-based exercise in over a dozen cities, primarily in the UK and Europe.

The Lost Dutchman's Gold Mine

Performance Management Company's classic game is one of my favorite collaboration exercises.

Ropes Courses