

Building an A-Team

“Teambuilding exercises, when properly structured, can help employees develop skills and boost retention rates.”

Donald Trump was recently asked what he looks for when hiring a leader to run one of his companies. He said someone who is a team player and effective leader. According to Trump, the presence of both qualities in one person is rare. Teambuilding can help develop new leaders while refreshing experienced leaders on basic skills.

Regardless of the size or type of company, teambuilding can also be an invaluable tool for building better team spirit and improving communication, management and leadership skills among staff.

Another plus: employee engagement surveys by market research firm Gallup show that companies with strong programs to develop staff have lower turnover, higher margins and more satisfied customers.

Bring the team together

In today's corporate environment, teams are often based in different locations. Long hours and high pressure also leave no time for developing much-needed rapport with colleagues. Teambuilding provides a welcome opportunity for employees to bond in a friendly, relaxed, but structured environment.

Activities are most effective when designed to achieve a specific outcome. For example:

- **Away days:** A good solution for company-wide functions that allow attendees to get to know one another. Examples include family days, dinners and golf outings.
- **Experiential learning:** This is useful for fine tuning specific skills. Collectively working out challenging scenarios helps to develop soft skills such as inter-

team communication, goal setting and problem solving.

- **Ropes course & extreme challenges:** Physically and mentally demanding challenges bring the team together for survival and competition.
- **Treasure hunts:** Best when time is short and the emphasis is on having fun and letting loose.

One example: Multinational glass and ceramics manufacturer Corning recently met in Shanghai's Gong Qing Forest Park for a Treasure Hunt with their Greater China business development managers. Four teams raced around the park collecting treasure to build their "quotas." Despite heavy rain, participants laughed throughout the friendly competition and marveled at seeing new sides of their colleagues.

According to the sales manager, "Meeting the team face to face in a relaxed environment is important for me to get buy in for some of my projects. Team building activities help us get to know each other more while discussing usual business topics."

For Corning, getting the regional managers together for a fun session is an important part of HR policy. With the company's turnover rate at just 3 percent in China, compared to the nationwide average of 8 percent, their strategy is working.

Planning the activity

While some companies design their own teambuilding exercises, many also turn to professional event organizers and facilitators to plan and host teambuilding events. Aside from taking care of logistics and details, vendors can also bring creative, innovative and proven activities to maximize the return on participants' time. Be sure to find an experienced facilitator

and confirm that their approach is a good match for your team.

Whether organizing a teambuilding event in-house or working with a professional provider, remember these tips:

- Have a theme. Small gifts, such as a poster or video, also make a nice memento.
- Consider incorporating your company values into the exercise. Building a deeper understanding of company culture can be a strong retention factor.
- Set a limit of two or three goals for the activity so that energy is focused and participants aren't overwhelmed.
- Seek different perspectives before the event. Talk with participants as well as leaders.
- Use an experienced facilitator who can host a smooth agenda.

While teambuilding is not a fix for all team problems – difficult personalities, pressures from market conditions or company culture – it is an effective way to build team spirit, develop crucial soft skills and hopefully keep the best players onboard.



Warwick John Fahy is a certified professional facilitator and executive speech coach helping to enhance personal and team productivity. Warwick is the chairman for Toastmasters International and the founder of the Professional Speakers Association in China. He competes in triathlons and is active in corporate social responsibility. Contact him at warwick@globalteamwork.com.