

Team building activities that work

Author: Tatenda Sayenda . January 2021

Team building is an important investment that any organization can make. It builds trust, mitigates conflict, encourages communication, and increases collaboration. Effective team building means more engaged employees, which is good for company culture and boosting the bottom line. Furthermore effective organizational or team performance is based on a clear understanding of the shared goals, strategies, and work plans, along with the individual roles and responsibilities of team members. Equally important are interpersonal qualities of trust, communication, and mutual accountability.

The most successful, memorable *team-building* events are ones that don't feel like a day at the office or the one's filled with theory and no fun activities. According to Forbes Magazine, spending time together, sharing an experience, or working towards a common goal allows bonding to happen more organically and far more effectively.

The following are some *fun activities* that your team can engage in to build better team relations and cohesion:

Fun indoor team building activities

With the COVID 19 pandemic, going out for team building weekends or outdoor excursions may not be possible this year. But that does not mean we cannot engage in some fun activities virtually that can help build the team. While working remotely there is a possibility that team members can become disengaged.

- **Virtual yoga class/ workout session:**

The team can set up a virtual workout session where they work out together or have a yoga session together. Furthermore, the team can challenge each other to a fitness or health challenge, whereby they challenge each other to achieve a certain health goal ie. 2 week AB challenge or 2 weeks zero starch or zero sugar challenge, etc. It's a great way for team members to connect on a personal level beyond work and build relationships while spending quality socially distanced time with one another.

- **Virtual happy hour**

Another fun way to engage with your team during this lockdown period is to host a virtual happy hour/ virtual drink date. Everyone pours themselves a drink then meets on Zoom. To break the ice, you can have each person say what they're drinking and if applicable, how they made it. Take it a step further and ask your team about their drink of choice. You'll be surprised to find out that you have more things in common! (*Forbes Magazine, 2020*) This virtual happy hour recreates a typical bar experience.

There are also some fun games that the team can engage indoors. In an article by Sage HR, the following are possible indoor games that your teams can engage in to build better team relations:

- **Dog, rice, chicken**

The team can also engage in games that require thinking and planning together. Now, this is a fun game that requires the team to think and plan effectively. Dog, Rice, Chicken game encourages creative problem solving with the team. With this game of the team members are given the role of a farmer and the rest of the team acts as villagers. The farmer has made 3 purchases at the market (dog, rice, and chicken). To get home he has to cross a river in a boat. His boat is small, meaning he can only carry one item at a time. He cannot leave the dog alone with the chicken because the dog will eat the chicken, and he cannot leave the chicken alone with the rice because the chicken will eat the bag of rice. How does he get all three of his purchases back home safely?

The villagers (the other team members) can help him in coming up with a solution, which is simple if the group thinks creatively and together.

- **Two sides of a coin**

In this team exercise, one member shares a negative incident that they encountered in their life (at a professional level or personal level). This incident must be a true incident. They then re-share that memory, but this time focusing on the bright side (the positive takeaways from their incident). Another team member or the rest of the team can help their teammate shed light on the positives of their negative experience. Afterward, another teammate shares their negative story and the same occurs. This activity helps team members see the good in things and people and challenges the preconceived notions.

- **Team birthday line up**

A great icebreaker team activity, this quick and simple game is recommended for training that involves a focus on problem-solving, communication, and cooperation. The participants are asked to fall in line side-by-side. They are then asked to rearrange their line in order of their birthdays (considering only the month and date). What's the catch? The challenge is that the group members cannot talk at all. They can resort to using sign language, nudges, and other techniques to determine each other's birthday. This ideal team challenge game for more than 8 participants and you might see some members taking lead and directing the members to achieve the desired outcome. To make it even more fun the team can even blindfold a couple of participants, using a platform/bench for members to stand – where if anyone falls, the group has to start all over again.

- **Scramble puzzle**

The idea behind this activity is to establish high levels of trust, leadership, and communication among different members of the group.

You need blindfolds and 2 sets of very easy pre-school level puzzles. Have the team blindfolded and sit

in a circle arrangement. One of the teammates is without the blindfold and has to sit outside with his/her back to the group.

Spread puzzle pieces across the table in front of the blindfolded group. The members must try to assemble the pieces and complete the puzzle. The person sitting outside will have the same puzzle in a completed format and can guide/instruct the blindfolded group in putting the puzzle together.

- **Human knot**

This game combines team fun with communication and creativity. The participants are asked to stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, facing inside of the circle. Each member is asked to extend his or her right arm and grab the hand of someone standing across the circle. And the same is repeated with the left arm. There are two conditions to follow:

1. Everyone should hold the hands of two different people
2. No one should hold the hand of someone who's standing directly next to them

The objective of the game is to untangle everyone forming the human knot without breaking the circle. If the chain breaks, the group has to repeat the exercise.

- **Earth ball**

Goal setting is equally important for creating highly functional teams. This group task ensures this and more. The team members are instructed to keep a beach ball or balloon in the air for a specified number of hits without letting it hit the ground. Additionally, no one person can touch the ball twice in a row. Ask the group the number of hits they can manage before they start with the activity. This fun activity is much harder than it seems! If the group is struggling, allow them to review their strategy and create a plan for the next attempt. The team with the highest number of hits in one attempt is the winner.

Fun outdoor team building activities

When one hears of a teambuilding session the first thing that comes to mind are fun activities outdoors eg. Rolling in mud, conquering heights, etc

Below are some fun outdoor activities to build the team:

- **Company retreat**

What makes team building fun is making it different from ordinary office activities. One step in making it fun is going on a road trip as a team to a location where you can further engage in other fun team building activities. Find a place possibly out of town where you can drive as a team, or may hire a bus or divide into teams and drive to the location. Driving together, enjoying the different scenery and bonding, gives the team time to know each other in an informal setting. This could be a perfect opportunity to know each other outside the office.

- **Community-based outdoor activities:**

Your teams can engage in fun activities that involve giving back to the community:

- An Organized Charity Walk/Run – Sign up for a walk/run that benefits a specific cause. If you collect donations, you can contribute proceeds to the event’s supporting organization. The employees can divide into teams and see which team finishes the walk or run in the fastest time.
- Tree planting-With a lot of deforestation happening across the world, teams can engage in tree planting activities. Your team can come together to improve our environment by organizing a corporate tree planting event.

There are also some fun outdoor games that the teams can engage in:

- **The amazing chase**

(Inspired by the popular reality TV show The Amazing Race – on which teams race around the world) with each leg of the competition requiring the groups to solve puzzles, interact with locals, and complete challenges – this interactive scavenger hunt has teams following clues around their city and taking on physical and mental challenges to move on to the next destination. This is one of our most popular activities because people get the chance to bond with one another while exploring their location.

- **Corporate castaways**

This hosted activity that will have your group split into “tribes” to tackle fun physical and mental challenges and compete in a competition inspired by the “Survivor” TV show.

- **Company olympics**

The organization can organize a fun-filled sports day! Split up into a variety of teams and participate in a wide variety of different events running throughout the day. Some of the events that are great to do at a Sports Day include:

- Relays
- Soccer tournament
- Long jump/ high jump
- Basketball/ netball matches
- Tug-of-war

- **Spider web**

Spider Web makes for an amazing team building game with its ability to make the group members learn valuable lessons in persistence, cooperation, leadership, support, and trust. A web is built using a large ball of string and duct tape, between two-pillar posts/tree or any other solid fixed pole-like object. Each team gets a point every time someone passes through a hole of weaved web without touching the string.

Once a particular hole is used to pass by someone, it gets closed for subsequent members. This requires strategizing on part of the team in terms of safety and suitability of different passages for different team members. (Erts, 2016)

- **Paintball**

Paintball is a competitive team shooting sport in which players eliminate opponents by hitting them with dye-filled capsules that splatter upon impact. It's a fast-paced, fun, and exhilarating group activity.

- **Family BBQ**

Pick a date, a theme, and a park/outdoor venue, and have each member of your team contribute a special dish for a BBQ. Sitting and eating together is one of the best and easiest ways to bond as a group. You can encourage your team members to bring their families along, this a good way of getting to know more about your teammates by meeting and knowing their family.

Do team-building activities work?

When engaging in team building, the key result is improving team relations and cohesion. There is no pointing in engaging in games only to have the team still the same with the same issues. *Team building interventions* and activities must be able to lay a foundation for true change in how people work in teams. Team building must be a long term intervention.

A study by Small Group Research looked at other studies between 1950 and 2007. They found that team building has positive, measurable effects on performance, but only when the activities serve the purpose of the exercise. The first step in team building is to identify the challenges that your team faces. Before you schedule activities, consider what you're trying to achieve. Are there conflicts between team members? Is communication poor? Are people focused on their success instead of the team's success? Do they solve problems poorly? Are they using their strengths improperly? Once you know what needs to be addressed, you then come up with activities that can help address those issues.

The point of team building activities should not be to have teammates competing against each other but be able to enforce the importance of working together as a team to achieve a specific goal. If you want to work on your team dynamics, use exercises that make people work together. Activities should include problem-solving, identifying and using strengths, and plenty of communication. Success in the activity should be a mutual success. The activities must be able to improve skills that apply to the job. It can not just be about playing games and having fun. The most important thing is to keep the energy going when you are now back at the office after a team-building session. The challenge with most team building sessions is that they fall flat once people are back at the office. Find meaningful ways to keep team interaction beyond the usual office interactions.

In the busy modern workplace, it's easy to forget the importance of regular team building activities. However, by failing to prioritize such activities, you may well be failing in ensuring that your company is working together effectively. Whilst most team-building exercises may be light-hearted, building

community and team spirit can be an effective preventative measure against disillusionment and faltering engagement (Howells, 2019). The American Psychological Association reports that team building makes employees feel valued, and valued employees are motivated which equals better performance and success for the organization.

Tatenda Sayenda-Havire is a Consultant at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm. Phone +263 (242) 481946-48/4

References:

Top 50 Team-Building Games that Your Employees Would Love to Play-Norbert Erts (2016)
(<https://blog.sage.hr/top-50-team-building-games-employees-love-play/>)

Why Team Building Is The Most Important Investment You'll Make-Brian Scudamore (2016)
(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianscudamore/2016/03/09/why-team-building-is-the-most-important-investment-youll-make/?sh=2212cc5e617f>)

45 Outdoor Team Building Activity Ideas for Work Groups
(<https://www.outbackteambuilding.com/blog/45-outdoor-team-building-activity-ideas-for-work-groups/>
)

Do Team Building Exercises Really Work?
(<https://glideconsultingllc.com/team-building-exercises-really-work/#:~:text=A%20study%20by%20Small%20Group,challenges%20that%20your%20team%20faces.>)

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/Team-Building-Activities-That-Work>