

# Team Building Exercises That Work



It seems as common as not that when a group of employees hears the phrase 'Team Building' they immediately look to see if they can schedule that day off from work. How is it that 'Team Building' has become a phrase that leaves a bad feeling in the pit of many people's stomachs? According to a 2012 survey from Citrix of 1000 workers 31% said they cannot stand team building exercises

Unfortunately, often team building exercises are foisted on to dysfunctional teams who are made to spend time in close contact frequently playing games that teach them to cooperate, communicate or try to relax and have fun together. The challenge with team building is that if the team is a well-functioning team the team building activity is first just an activity, sometimes a reward or other time just an opportunity to do something collectively and not necessarily designed first as a team building activity. When the team is a poor functioning team or organization the activity becomes a chore to get through as it seems an end unto itself.

Building effective teams is not a single day activity but a way of doing business on a regular basis. Often, the best team building activities are design as something else and the team building is a by-product. This is especially true with the newest employees to enter the workplace, the millennials, as they frequently seek opportunities to get something done as part of a collective group.

Calling an activity a team building activity probably won't really work. But creating a team building opportunity can work when you focus on other goals and let the team building happen.

## **Team Building Exercises That Can Work For You**

Research does show us that cohesive teams that feel connected produce better results. Research from the American Psychological Association (APA) demonstrates that people who feel valued also feel motivated to do great work. Working with a team with people you like and who respects and acknowledges your contributions generally makes one feel more valued. The Head of the APA's Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program has shared 5 simple team-building activities that have been shown to build stronger bonds and stronger teams. One important component to keep in mind is one you probably know all to well, and that is that one size does not fit all.

1. **Social Community Engagement (Volunteering).**Being engaged in an activity that makes a person feel as though they are helping someone else, making a contribution or change makes one feel emotionally fulfilled. Spending this time

and experiencing these positive emotions with co-workers can help build bonds. If the organization provides resources or time, including supplying items or financial support or even in the absence of direct financial support letting employees use 'work' time to volunteer this can also build a positive bond with the organization.

2. **Getting Active and Healthy:** The opportunity to use work time and resources to get fit and have fun can result in healthier employees who feel better connected to one another and, as a result, perform better as team members. However, the trick is selecting the right sports. Selecting high contact sports like basketball or football may not be the way to go. Sports that encourage teamwork and minimize team against team competition can work much better. Going for group walks, bike rides, obstacle courses, golfing, rowing, yoga, tai chi, zumba and other beneficial sporting activities where employees work side-by-side and can chat can be more effective as team building
3. **Shared events,** such as attending a baseball game or tour of the local legislature building or other historic site, or a museum, gallery, or even the park can be great rewards to your employees. Even if you cannot afford to foot the entire bill, helping organize or coordinate the event and obtaining a group discount can enable the opportunity for employees to share an experience and during the experience share casual conversations and build bonds.
4. **Shared Learning:** Providing employees with the opportunity to participate together in learning and education activities can also create an atmosphere for team building. These can take the form of professional development activities or other learning opportunities such as financial management, nutrition and so on. You can bring this in-house or support a small team of employees the opportunity to learn and bond.
5. **Breaking Bread.** How many workers today head off solo for a meal or eat alone at their desk? The opportunity to eat together and share a casual conversation enables a team mate to spend time together that is not under pressure to perform. As such, bringing food into the workplace and feeding employees so they can keep working is not the point. The shared meal should be the focus and not just the fuel. This should include eating in the workplace now and then and eating outside the workplace. Great teams find opportunities to get together and talk outside of work conversations. This can occur in a before or after work favorite restaurant or during work hours but not during work such as on a shared coffee break. With their busy lives many co-workers do not have the time to have these casual interactions before or after work, but this is where social networks can help. Connecting with colleagues on Facebook may not be the way to go but connecting on LinkedIn or Google + can help create opportunities for brief conversations about news, company news, trends and more

At the end of the day people differ in many ways but almost all people want to be valued and counted. Creating opportunities for your employees to build relationships can help you help them achieve both.