

1) CORPORATE TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES: HELP CROSS-TEAM PROJECTS SUCCEED, STEP-BY-STEP

Sometimes it's not clear how cross-team projects should proceed. Follow these guidelines on corporate team building activities for accomplishing as a group what individuals can't do alone.

1. Set up some basic parameters: a goal for the next meeting, everyone's role, and the type of discussion (e.g., brainstorming vs. goal setting). Be sure to include any earlier agreements.
2. Use this series of framing questions. First, ask:
 - Where are we so far?
 - Can we report the status of the project's main elements, listing everything we know?
 - What do we want to achieve at this meeting, specifically?
3. At the next meeting, ask:
 - What's the best way to reach our goal for this meeting?
 - Should we brainstorm or share what we've prepared?
 - How should we best think this through as a group?
 - Let's throw around a few options and work out how to move forward.
4. Make assignments and tap the energy of the group.
 - What are our action items?
 - Who's the best person to focus on each particular action?
 - How do we make this happen?
 - What's our deadline? (This is essential.)
 - Next steps?

2) TEAM BUILDING TRAINING: LEADERSHIP RX FOR COACHING YOUR TEAM

Well-supported teams receive the information, training, and rewards they need to keep chugging along. Here are four prescriptions for coaching your team:

1. **Don't skimp on guidance.** Employees are remarkably adept at developing self-correcting strategies, not to mention workarounds for obstacles. They'll be much more effective, though, if you're in there asking what they need and providing skilled coaching.
2. **Get help if coaching isn't in your skillset.** You need to model the attitude you want your team to adopt, but an expert coach can jump in to help you if the processes for running large-scale projects aren't clear or you see conflict within or between your teams.
3. **Timing is important.** At what point you offer coaching matters. The beginning is a good time to explain purpose and processes. Use natural breakpoints—such as thirds or halfway through—to help everybody take stock, make adjustments and solve problems.
4. **Debrief at the end of the launch,** and run a postmortem later, especially if things go wrong.
5. **Watch for coaching aptitude among your team members.** Any one of them may have the main coaching talent in your group. Draw on it, develop it and reinforce it. Resist the impulse to feel threatened and squelch it.

3) TEAM BUILDING EXERCISES: TEST YOUR TEAM'S ABILITY TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE

People who don't understand the strategy and the big picture can work hard on the wrong things, make poor decisions, or quit out of frustration.

Do your people "get it"?

To find out, use this team-building exercise to test their ability to discuss the big picture.

For example, ask each person the same five questions about the strategy to see if their answers line up with yours:

1. Who are the customers or customer segments we serve, listed in priority order?
2. What are the services we provide now, and which ones need to change as we implement the current strategy?
3. What is our value proposition, and how does it set us apart and give us an edge in the marketplace?
4. Which environmental trends/issues (such as market, economic, societal, political, or environmental) are essential to our strategy?
5. What are three things your division is doing (or doing differently) to support the strategy?

Each question gets at the intent behind the strategy. There are right answers and wrong ones. And the answers change as strategy changes.

Good people could be working hard on the wrong thing if their understanding of these questions is off base. Your job as a leader is to ensure that everyone in your reporting structure knows the answers.

4) TEAM BUILDING TRAINING: HELP YOUR TEAM GET COMFORTABLE WITH RISK

Encourage your team to take risks? The very idea is enough to make many CEOs shudder.

Because you shoulder the responsibility of keeping performance high for the entire organization, sometimes you may be risk-averse. Even acknowledging the existence of risk requires you to admit that you don't have all the answers. That doesn't sit well with the image of you as a fearless, confident leader.

When facing a new, risky project, follow a straightforward process. Use these tactics to help your team evaluate risks and build its confidence about confronting the unknown:

1. He asks the team to imagine every lousy scenario, even the most unlikely, what he calls the "darkest nightmares."
2. He gives everyone a chance to describe those scenarios in detail and then to "peer into the darkness" together.
3. The team collectively devises a detailed plan in response to each nightmare.
4. After fears are exposed and dealt with, the team has a protocol in place for every "nightmare" scenario.

Bottom line: Leaders who hone their skills at engaging with risk, who learn to acknowledge the fear and overcome that emotion, can also help others summon their courage and unleash tremendous potential.

5) TEAM BUILDING TRAINING: 10 STEPS TO GET YOUR TEAM'S MOJO GOING

Need to get your team's momentum going, so they're invigorated and ready for their next goals? Here are ten steps blogger Terry Starbucker recommends:

1. **Don't dive in—yet.** First, pause and reflect on the year gone by. Learn from the setbacks and savor the wins. Talk them over with your team.
2. **Analyze your blueprint.** Review your plans and projects. Visualize the full picture, then describe it.
3. **Size up your team.** Ask yourself: Is everybody committed to the plan? Do we have unresolved issues? Do we need to reshuffle tasks or jobs?
4. **Express the goals.** Call upon your team to help you articulate the big goal and three to five of the fastest or best ways to get there.
5. **Raise the bar.** Calculate how to do things better.
6. **Read your own fine print.** In Starbucker's parlance, the "fine print" is the flip side of your strengths. While it's good to be a "hard charger," it's bad to charge right over your people or customers.
7. **Get out your "virtual Q-tip."** Sit quietly without a smartphone or other distraction and take in what's happening. Then create this "listening environment" every time you're with one or more members of your team.
8. **Set an "accountability meter."** This is not just the big target your team has to hit. It's the expectation gauge for every person on the team.
9. **Give frequent feedback.** Key your feedback to your accountability meter and correct course immediately.
10. **Remain patient, calm and open to ideas.** Your people and your customers are looking to you to set the standard as their leader.

6) FUN TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES: TAKING THE MARSHMALLOW CHALLENGE

With 18 minutes, 20 sticks of spaghetti, a yard of tape, a yard of string and one marshmallow, Tom Wujec believes he can tell you how innovative any team is.

Here's how to conduct his fun team building game:

After giving a four-member team the list of supplies mentioned above, Wujec asks them to build the tallest free-standing structure they can. The only rule: The marshmallow needs to be on top.

"I believe the Marshmallow Challenge is among the fastest and most powerful techniques for improving a team's capacity to generate fresh ideas, build rapport and incorporate prototyping—all of which lie at the heart of effective innovation," says Wujec, who is a Fellow at Autodesk, the leading 2D and 3D technology firm.

He has used this team-building exercise with CEOs, business-school students and kindergartners. And he has learned some surprising lessons about the nature of collaboration.

Among them:

- **"Ta-da!" can quickly turn to "Uh-oh."** Most people begin by orienting themselves to the task, he says. They talk about what their structure will look like, sketch it out, and jockey for a leadership position in the group.

Wujec says, "They spend most of their time assembling the structure, then just as they're running out of time, they gingerly put a marshmallow on top. They stand back and admire their work—'Ta-da!'" Then the entire structure collapses under the weight of the marshmallow.

- **Rapid prototyping is the name of the game.** Recent graduates of kindergarten tend to perform best in the Marshmallow Challenge. They produce the tallest and most interesting structures.

Why? No one spends any time trying to be CEO of Spaghetti Inc.

Kindergartners, unlike other groups, start with the idea of the marshmallow and work backward, building multiple prototypes along the way. Kids get instant feedback with each version about what works and what doesn't, in other words, they use an iterative process, so they don't end up with a collapsed structure at the last moment.

- **CEOs perform best with an executive admin on the team.** Why? Admins facilitate and manage the process. Facilitation skills plus specialized skills equal success.

Ultimately, says Wujec, the Marshmallow Challenge helps people find hidden assumptions, build a common language and learn how to manage the marshmallow.

7) TEAM BUILDING TRAINING: REVISIT TEAM'S SIZE AND TASKS

Nothing right is going to happen with your team if the basic structure isn't right. Here are some guidelines:

1. **Look for signs that it's too big.** The larger the team, the slower it moves. Consider a smaller team or a tiny executive committee.
2. **Dispense with tactical trivia.** Toss everything except important work that requires collaboration.
3. **Enforce healthy norms.** Four universal ones: everybody is as committed as the leader; every issue is on the table; everybody's voice is heard; and what you say and do when you're with the team is the same thing you say and do outside the team.
4. **Have your team review its structure.** Revisit size and tasks.

8) TEAM BUILDING TRAINING: CONSISTENT CONTRIBUTORS = GOOD TEAM

Whether a group is planning a conference or working on a shared budget, the more cooperative the group is, the more likely it can rise above a challenge. It helps a leader to understand, then, why some groups cooperate more than others.

In a new study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, two professors find that a "consistent contributor" makes all the difference.

"The consistent contributor looks for the collective good first and good personal second," explains Keith Murnighan, a professor of risk management at the Kellogg School of Management.

The contributor initiates cooperation, leading others to follow suit.

"In a larger group, if someone consistently acts as a friend, it's easier for others to act as friends, and everyone benefits," says Murnighan. "In a budget meeting, for example, each person wants the most for his or her division or department. One person asks, 'What's in the best interest of the organization?' The marketing department head sees that R&D is on the brink of a major breakthrough and says, 'We can make do with what we had last year, so let's contribute all of the increase to R&D.'"

Bottom line: Encourage consistent contributors on your team, or add one: yourself.

9) TEAMWORK EXAMPLES: 'FEDEX DAYS' – MAYO CLINIC'S SECRET – TEAMWORK AFTER 9/11

1. 'FedEx Days': Forget carrot-and-stick motivators

To get better results, companies don't need better managers, says Daniel Pink, author of *Drive*. They need more radical autonomy among employees.

The old carrot-and-stick approach is failing, he says. It's for work that most Americans aren't doing anymore.

"It's good for simple, routine, rule-based tasks, like turning a screw the same way," he says. "But there's 50 years of science that says it's ineffective at creative, complex work.

Example: Atlassian, an Australian software company, holds something called "FedEx Days" once a quarter, on a Thursday afternoon.

On that day, leadership says to software developers, go work on whatever you want, with whomever you want. On Friday afternoon, show the rest of the company what you've done.

The initiative is called "FedEx Days" because team members have to deliver something overnight.

In one day, employees have come up with scores of ideas for new products, fixes to existing products, and other improvements within the firm.

The approach is radical, says Pink. Leadership is saying to a capable team, "Let me get out of your way because you're a talented human being."

"What we want more than anything else is engagement," he says.

2. Mayo Clinic's success secret: team collaboration

After a diagnosis, patients at the Mayo Clinic meet with a team of specialists who help them understand what's happening so they can decide about treatment together, says president and CEO Denis Cortese.

This kind of teamwork is the stock-in-trade of Cortese, who won last year's top leadership award from the National Center for Healthcare Leadership.

Asked why health care so often lacks the team collaboration that makes Mayo famous, Cortese traces the problem to medical schools, where he says students aren't trained to work in teams. Each student takes exams alone, and even in clinical practice, most rewards relate to things you do as an individual, such as specialized procedures and reading X-rays.

What's more, he says, "doctors are going into sub-, sub-, sub-specialties where it is easier to build all-in knowledge in that area where they operate alone. But it is difficult to take care of patients with five different conditions. That requires teams."

Can you mimic the Mayo teams on behalf of your customers? A conference call upfront to plan out services? A whole team descending on your customer's problem like pit stop mechanics rushing up to refresh a racecar?

3. Teamwork after 9/11

The day after friends, colleagues, and family members died in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center, Mark Loehr asked his people to come to the office. Not to work, but to share their thoughts and feelings about what had happened and what they should do about it.

In the ensuing days, the CEO of SoundView Technology encouraged his team to find meaning in the horror by deciding on a project they all could participate in. Instead of making a group donation to victim relief, they decided to contribute one day of the technology brokerage's profits. In the past, that figure had reached as high as \$1 million, a remarkable contribution. But as word spread about what SoundView employees were doing, enthusiasm grew, and the company ended up donating \$6 million.

In a crisis, people look to leaders for emotional guidance. Loehr helped his team find meaning even in the face of seemingly meaningless violence and chaos.

10) ENCOURAGE TEAMS TO SHARE WHAT THEY KNOW

A study published in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* points out that companies investing in knowledge-transfer software aren't seeing much improvement in their information flow. One reason: Employees simply won't share what they know.

"A lot of companies have jumped on the bandwagon of knowledge sharing" by investing heavily in software, says one of the authors. "It was a case of, 'If you build it, they will come.' But they didn't come."

Unlike knowledge hoarding, knowledge hiding is when someone intentionally conceals information from a colleague, perhaps out of distrust or undermining the other person.

Authors of the study say that people tend to hide knowledge in one of three ways:

1. Playing dumb. Employees pretend not to have the requested information.
2. Being evasive. Employees provide incorrect information or falsely promise to give a complete answer later.
3. Rationalized hiding. An employee might say, "I'm not allowed to provide that information," or blame someone else for their inability to share.

Keep information flowing in your corridors and among your teams with these tactics:

- Increase staff members' perceptions of their colleagues' trustworthiness. You can do it by emphasizing a shared identity or highlight an example of an employee who followed through on a promise.
- Encourage virtual face-to-face or in-person contact and discourage reliance on email communication.
- Remove incentives for employees to "betray" one another.

Building a culture of trust is key in encouraging employees to share what they know.

11) CORPORATE TEAM BUILDING: FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR TEAM, FIRE THE PRIMA DONNA

If you're a leader who has a prima donna on your team (one who produces great results but alienates everyone), what should you do? It's simple. Bite the bullet and fire that person.

Here are three reasons why you should:

1. **You'll get more from the rest of your team.** Prima donnas are productivity and morale killers. When they're playing their game, everyone around them is miserable, resentful, and spending most of their energy griping about the prima donna.

Take the diva (or divo, as the case may be) out of the picture, and everyone else gets on with the work. As a leader, you'll likely be pleasantly surprised by how much more creative the rest of your team is when they get to breathe some of the oxygen the prima donna was sucking out of the room.

2. **You'll send the right message.** While it feels a little strange to quote Karl Marx, curing a prima donna situation is one in which the good of the many outweighs the good of the few. By getting rid of the prima donna, you send the message that the health and welfare of the team is more important than the ego of any individual.

Most people are motivated by being a part of something that's bigger than themselves. You can't create the conditions for that to happen when one person is demanding the spotlight. Don't let one bad apple spoil the whole bunch.

3. **You'll save yourself headaches.** As tough as it can be to let go of someone who is getting results at a critical time, you've got to do it and look at it as an investment in the long-term success of your team.
4. **It's like removing a Band-Aid from your arm.** You know the Band-Aid will pull some hairs out when you remove it. You can just rip it off or peel it slowly. Either way, it's going to hurt. You might as well rip it off and get it over with. The same is true of firing someone who's established a history of being a long-term source of heartburn and headaches. Get it over with.

12) FOSTER TEAMWORK TO CUT COSTS BY SHARING FINANCIALS

One thing that binds the Zappos team together is the openness with numbers. It shares vital signs not just on the team level but across the entire company.

What are the tenets of a team culture that values such broadcasts? Speak to the masses. Craft and communicate metrics in a language everyone can understand. Make deadlines and accountability visible.

For example, at the online shoe company, a finance class teaches every employee to read a balance sheet.

"Last year, a lot of people in the company wondered how we did a billion dollars in revenue but didn't turn a big profit," says Loren Becker, a supervisor of training at Zappos. "So we showed everyone that about half of our money went to buying the goods we sold, a quarter went to rent and salaries, a quarter went to advertising and other expenses. Pretty soon, there's not a lot leftover of that billion."

That communication about financials has fostered teamwork in cutting costs.

Becker hears people saying things like, "Maybe we can do without these pens."

"We've become a lot more cost-conscious because of our openness," she says.

Lesson: Broadcast deadlines, goals, responsibilities, and progress for everyone to see. Help team members be more aware of each group's objectives.

13) TEAM BUILDING TRAINING: TEACH YOUR TEAM HOW TO RESPOND TO CHANGE

You've laid out how you're going to hold the team accountable, and they all understand what's expected of them. You've planted responsibility squarely in their laps. But you're not totally home-free.

There's one more piece of the puzzle left: responding to change.

Few teams remain static over time. As an organization matures, so does a group's mission. Objectives can and often do change midstream. This can occur when:

- A team must respond to an urgent competitive threat.
- A management shakeup can lead the team in a different direction.
- New technology enables a team to grapple with new challenges.
- Some members of the group leave, and newcomers bring different skills or backgrounds.

Change can prove incredibly disruptive if it deflates or defeats the team's performance to date.

Teammates who were held accountable for producing results may now complain: "It was all for nothing," "We don't want to start from scratch," or "This new setup just isn't fair, the goals aren't realistic."

Managing a team's disenchantment will test your leadership skills. Unless you take the easy way out and disband the group, you'll need to achieve three quick goals:

Convince the team that the changes will ultimately benefit them or the organization.

Urge the team to work with you to revise its mission.

Settle on a new set of accountabilities so that all the members know how they'll be measured from this point forward

The key to managing change is not to over facilitate. Events can unfold rapidly and unpredictably. Trying to control the team's actions or rushing to reassure the group when you're still unsure what will happen next can backfire.

A wiser strategy is to unclog the lines of communication. Alert the team as to what the changes will mean to its purpose and goals. Promptly inform everyone of new developments.

Tip: Send e-mail alerts to team members whenever there's news to report. If you need them to refocus their efforts and deliver "stretch goals" within a tight time frame, explain in the e-mail the circumstances and context so that they see how their contribution affects the big picture. Sending a group e-mail ensures that every team member will receive the same information.

One benefit of weathering change is that you buy some time to establish a new yardstick to measure the team's performance. Don't rush to impose a detailed list of accountabilities. Evaluate team members on their flexibility and overall attitude as much as on their actual work product.

14) TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES: TIE 'BONDING' ACTIVITIES TO CORE VALUES

Next time you're tasked with coming up with a good "bonding" activity for your team, take a cue from today's event planners. More companies have veered away from outdoor team building in the past five years, organized sports and ropes courses, and are trying nontraditional events.

The best events tie in somehow to a company's core values and have a philanthropic element. A few examples:

- Sign up to work on a Habitat for Humanity house.
- Volunteer at a food bank.
- Incorporate an element of surprise by organizing scavenger hunts with puzzles that lead to local landmarks.
- Adopt a park, stream, or other space and have a "cleanup" day.
- Spend an afternoon assembling kids' bicycles, then donate them to children in need.

Tip: Whatever you choose, watch the clock. Longer than two hours, and participants tire of almost anything

15) CREATIVE TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES: DIVERSIFY YOUR TEAM BY JOB, AGE, GENDER

You probably know that a diverse group is likely to yield the most creative work. But you may not realize just how diverse a team should be, particularly if it needs to come up with new, innovative ideas. Diversity guarantees the best project result and usually some layer of innovation.

Your team needs diversity in three areas:

Job function: You need people who can see things differently and not get trapped in their own disciplinary assumptions. People from different disciplines will have different points of view.

Age: Younger employees, or "millennials," for example, come to the workplace with a whole different life experience, especially about technology in their personal lives..

Gender: A team of all men is generally going to work hierarchically. If it's a big team, men are more comfortable taking their part of the problem and going off and solving it. In comparison, a team of women tend to work more communally.

16) FUN TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES: PET PAGEANTS, COOK-OFFS, UGLIEST EARRINGS CONTEST

Liven up your workplace with one of these morale-boosting team events:

- **Pet pageant.** Employees post photos of their pets on a bulletin board. Makeup categories, and then have everyone vote on their favorites. Examples: cutest, funniest picture, best pet/owner look-alike, best pet story.
- **Chili cook-off.** Each department cooks up its favorite chili recipe and enters it into the contest. A panel of "chili experts" selects the champion or everyone votes on their favorite.
- **Awful tie/ugly earrings.** Everyone comes to work wearing their entries. Place a voting box in the office, and then tally up ballots at the end of the day. Bring a camera and post photos of the winners.
- **"You ought to be in pictures."** Give employees a photo of a top executive to take home for their children to draw. (Limit the contest to children age 12 and under.) Employees vote for their favorite drawing. Hang the winning portrait somewhere visible.
- **Create a "spirit team,"** made up of employees up and down the ladder. Example: At General Mills, a spirit team seeks out and identifies activities that build a common culture and encourage positive feelings about the company. A few years ago, the team suggested doing volunteer work with a particular nonprofit. Employee satisfaction surveys show volunteering makes them feel good about their jobs and the organization.

17) TEAM BUILDING EXERCISES: 3 WAYS TO WARD OFF GROUPTHINK

Collaboration works until it starts to resemble groupthink. That's when healthy dissent evaporates, self-defeating tendencies surge, and negative emotions corrode the group's work.

Make sure your team is working more like the Manhattan Project and less like Enron. Three ideas:

- **Model constructive dissent.** Play devil's advocate and disagree with a unanimous decision. Benefit: You'll encourage a reluctant but wise person to speak up.
- **Have a brainstorming group write ideas on unattributed Post-it notes.** Why? No one knows whether an idea came from top brass or a low-level player, so people back ideas with merit regardless of source.
- **Encourage team members to do self-affirmations.** Research shows that simply listing one's own personal skills and accomplishments before meeting with a group enhances one's ability to let colleagues shine.