THE CATALYST

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Team Building Events Don't Work

Have you ever attended a team building event only to return to work and encounter the same team issues that existed prior to the event? So, why didn't the experience and bonding from the event stick? Why did it have an impact while you were there but little or no residual effect?

Were the participants not committed? Were the event activities lackluster? Was it just "too little, too late" for your team? The answer to all of these could be 'yes.' More likely, though, it's because team building events don't work.

Now, don't get me wrong. I think team building events are great and can be a powerful step towards greater team effectiveness. They are not, however, a silver bullet or magic solution. Building a team is a process not an event.

Are you looking for a one-day silver bullet or are you willing to look deeper at long-term solutions for the challenges your team is facing? If the latter is true, then keep reading.

When I get requests to facilitate a team building event, I begin the process by asking questions. Here are some questions you can ask yourself to begin the process of team building.

• What do the words "team building" and "teamwork" mean to you and in your organization? Teamwork is one of those innocuous terms that mean very different things to different people. Sometimes performance management issues are confused with a general lack of teamwork and team building will not usually help you solve individual performance management issues.

• What are the current challenges that the group is experiencing?

• What is the source of these challenges, and are they truly teamwork issues?

• What are the environmental factors that may be contributing to the team's current situation (company culture, dept. culture, the management and leadership style for the team, etc.)?

• What behaviors constitute teamwork for you or your organization?

• What are the specific behaviors that you want to see displayed?

• How will you know the team building was effective?

A day or two of team building is a great START and can definitely give the team a kick "in the rubber parts". Team building exercises get people thinking about the other individuals in the team and their strengths and weaknesses, they can build more cohesiveness and trust in a relatively short period of time and they can help individuals to consider what behaviors are most effective for optimum team performance.

Recently I facilitated a team building event that utilized the DISC Behavioral Assessment to help participants understand, appreciate and begin to work better with the different styles in the team. One of the participants said, "This is all well and good, but how do we keep what we've learned here going? How do we keep ourselves from slipping back into the same behavior?" I gave a hearty 'AMEN, sister'! This person was seeking a process, not an event.

If you really want to create a highly effective and performing team you must consider a long-term team building plan. Teams aren't just created over night or via a one- or two-day offsite event...it's a process. So what can you do as leader to improve the cohesiveness AND support its evolution to a High Performance Team (HTP)?

Top 10 Ways to Support Your Team

Here are 10 ways to "keep the music playing" and lead your team to higher levels of performance.

1**. Keep it regular.** Make room for regular, ongoing team building in team meetings, along with your other business agenda items. As a leader, rotate responsibility to other team members to facilitate the team building activity and increase "buy-in".

2. **Set direction; don't give directions.** Trying to tell everyone what to do is micromanaging, not leading. Ask yourself the question: "Is what I'm doing helping the group to succeed?" Ask the group, too. If the answer is no, stop!

3. **Ask questions.** Time needs to be built into your processes to ask questions and determine merits of all ideas. Explore with real curiosity the link between members' actions and the team's goals. Keep an open mind. Sometimes what looks like insanity may make a great deal of sense.

4. **Align your team.** Once goals are clear, help everyone match their part of the job to the goals. Commit to it in writing. With the team, create a Team Charter outlining the appropriate behaviors the team will engage in and post it during meetings or in the teams' work area. Remind the group why it exists. A team's charter can sometimes get lost.

5. **Train the team.** Hold periodic skill development training on topics that impact team effectiveness like conflict management, peer accountability, project management or receiving and delivering feedback. Issues like these have a direct impact on a teams' effectiveness.

6. Get out of the way. Stop being dazzled by your own brilliance. Keep your ego in balance. Let go of your self-esteem and self-importance and trust the power of teamwork.

7. Choose your battles wisely. They're a poor use of time. Ask yourself if it is a wise use of your time. Will the benefits of solving the problem outweigh the costs? Issues that seem critical now often aren't in the long run.

8. **Spend time with your team.** There are tangible benefits to learning what motivates your team, how they approach problems and developing a relationship with them. You'll learn how to support them much better spending time with them than by being aloof and alone in your office.

9. **Special events.** As long you're also committed to an ongoing team building process, special events are a great way to give the team a "booster shot" and sends the message to team members that what is accomplished is as important as how it's accomplished. These don't have to be full days, and they don't have to be focused only on team building. Team building can be mixed in with other agenda items to create a balanced and valuable team development event.

10. **Continue the conversation after team building event.** Plan follow-up events, discussions, reports or meetings and consider these parts of the team building event. See #1…IT'S A PROCESS!

By approaching team building as a process, not an event, and actively leading that process you'll positively impact your teams' effectiveness and ability to produce results. .

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Schedule of Public Courses

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Course Title	Date(s)	Time	For More Information/Registration
The SHRM Learning System – Preparation for the SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP Exam	February 11-April 29, Every Other Saturday	8:30 am – 4:30 pm	901-321-3562 or dlaird1@cbu.edu or www.cbu.edu/shrm
The Accountability Experience	Spring 2017 TBD	8:30 am – 5:00 pm	Register Now
The Coaching Clinic	Spring 2017 TBD	8:30 am – 5:00 pm	Register Now

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A Message from Bill Burtch
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