

Why “ Teambuilding ” Doesn’t Work

Are you wasting valuable training and operational dollars?

We’ve all been there before. A senior management meeting, message or conference includes a fun ‘ teambuilding’ event where everyone gets engaged in some team activity or challenge.. And every year people look towards it with mixed feelings as they, and large numbers of colleagues participate in activities from laser shoot-em ups to go-kart racing and rah-rah events. A week later, managers are wondering why their teamwork is still mediocre. The truth is that almost every dollar spent on these feel-good programmes has an extremely low return on investment.

People who are in a decision-making position in your company that sees them buying services of such team events/programmes, will continue to waste your company’s funds and here’s why:

- 1) **the vast majority of decision makers fail to distinguish between teambuilding processes and outcomes, and team bonding events.** The latter produce very little real ROI except provide some pleasant distraction for your staff for a day and some very temporary heightened sense of well-being. Their decision to buy into such a programme is largely focused on what games and activities that will be provided and at what price.

Some even opt for potentially destructive activities like combat simulation or paintball events where latent grudges and ill feelings can surface. Actual teambuilding programmes are geared towards producing a certain outcome e.g. enhanced intra-team communication, and use the actual experiential activities merely as a platform from which group learning and “ ah-ha’s “ of the day can be transferred back to the workplace by experienced facilitators trained in experiential learning methodology

- 2) **the vast majority of buyers of teambuilding programmes have also not done any quantitative employee or team climate-study.** Unless they know what their team is like in terms of contextual strengths and weaknesses in terms of specific team behaviours before a programme, how can any teambuilding programme be meaningfully designed for outcomes? At Everest Motivation Team, we use a 56-question online tool, which measures eight key team competencies. After a programme is designed and executed, we follow up with another online staff questionnaire to see which areas the programme has impacted. The qualitative and quantitative results represent the client’s ROI.

It amazes us how so few potential clients actually care about how their dollars are being translated into future positive team behaviours that help the bottom-line.

- 3) **The vast majority of decision-makers only want to see a team event as a one-off, and never integrated into a greater plan of leadership or team development.** In short, they are committed to a great day out, and less to sustainable results. Ever heard of a great team that was created in a day? Look at your spending on “ teambuilding” compared to sales, communication and

such skills-based training costs. Without the platform of what we call **Specific Observable Behaviours (or SOB for short)**, few of these training measures are sustainable as poor team behaviours hobble them in the medium term. Teambuilding is a process, not an event.

Unless your staff really need a team bonding experience like going for a bowling session, karaoke, what they might really benefit from instead is attending a fun, teambuilding programme designed to help them back in the workplace.

Here's how you tell the difference:

Teambuilding	vs. Team bonding
Medium-to-long term commitment	Short term commitment
Duration can be a day's learning session at a time, over a few months	Half to one day, ad hoc programme
Outcomes focused	Activity focused
Structured, fun, learning environment Tailored to particular group	More fun and noise, generic debriefs
Higher budget allocation with ROI tracked, post-session follow-ups	Lower budgets, no return on investment expected
Higher level of skilled facilitators familiar with experiential learning methodology	Overseen by 'instructors' familiar with activity mechanics but with little coaching or debriefing skills
Delivered by specialised providers with organisational development, coaching and HR skills	Delivered by event management firms, recreation staff of resorts/clubs, and 'instructors'
Fully-briefed consultants design and execute to outcomes	Clients desire involvement in actual mechanics of activities

Ultimately, companies and clients will decide what they want and how much they want to spend. The important thing is knowing the difference between what they want and what they need. In our experience, most potential clients can't tell the difference, and confuse the results they could get from a team bonding experience vs. the benefits of teambuilding to specific outcomes.



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