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Our Top Ten Team Building Exercises

You've recruited the individual members of your team. You've established your goal. You've developed a plan and a timeline. Now the trick is to get all those unique individuals working together toward the same goal. Given the varied personalities, communication skills and personal agendas individual members bring with them to the team, getting your team to work cooperatively can be a challenge.

In the most productive teams, members are individually and cooperatively focused on reaching the team's goal. Members understand the interdependent nature of the team: that their individual work depends upon and affects the quality of others' work and, ultimately, the ability of the team to reach its goal. Members respect, [Provigil pharmacy](#) appreciate and recognize each person's unique contribution to the team's efforts, but place the greatest emphasis on cooperative achievement of the team goal.

Experiential team building was all the rage not long ago. The team would travel offsite for a "fun" day of rope games and unusual problem solving, typically at an outdoor education center. Unfortunately, too often there was little follow-up and any lessons learned never made it back into the workplace. Today, the emphasis has shifted to in-house team building exercises that can be accomplished at the beginning of a meeting.

Follow these key steps to plan a productive team building exercise:

1. Keep it simple. It should be quick and easy to set up in a typical meeting room.
2. It doesn't need to be expensive. You can get a lot of mileage out of basic office supplies or a few items from your kitchen pantry.
3. The exercise should be geared for normal office clothing or team members should be told ahead of time to dress appropriately.
4. People have a hard time relating to large groups, so divide the team into small units of 2 to 4 or 6 people. By breaking down barriers and creating partnerships within these small groups, team members will be better able to relate to the larger team.
5. Instructions must be easy to understand, especially by any non-native English speakers in your group.
6. Limited instructions may be part of the team building exercise. Forcing people to figure out what to do or how to do something helps team members identify skills and abilities in themselves and their peers that can help them define their roles on the team: leader, facilitator, problem-solver, communicator, etc.
7. The exercise should engage all members quickly.
8. It should present a problem that has multiple solutions to allow for creativity, but that can only be solved through collaboration and cooperative action.

9. You can increase the difficulty level of any exercise by adding a complication such as “no talking,” or by speeding things up by asking, “How can you do it faster?”

10. At the completion of the exercise, it is crucial that a facilitator, often the team leader, lead the team in reflecting on what happened, the choices made, and how they interacted with each other. Team members should discuss what they would do differently next time. Reflection is critical to identifying and reinforcing learning.

Try these team building exercises to get your team off on the right foot.

1. Scrambled Jigsaw. Before the team arrives, place a jigsaw on each table. To manage the time element, use large-piece children’s puzzles of 100 pieces or so. Remove 5 pieces from each puzzle and move them to another table. As the team arrives, divide members among the tables. Instruct teams to fully complete their puzzle, by any means, in the shortest amount of time possible. As puzzles are completed and teams realize pieces are missing, they will be forced to negotiate with other teams to complete their puzzle. This exercise promotes flexibility, communication, negotiation and cooperation.

2. Creative Assembly. Purchase 3-D punch-out wood dinosaur puzzle kits. Divide the team into groups of 2 to 4. Without comment or instruction, give each group the unpunched puzzle pieces, one complete puzzle per group. Do not let the group see the boxes, pictures or instructions or in any way identify what you have given them. Instruct each group to assemble its project, telling them they can only use what is in front of them. You’ll get some interesting and creative constructions, a lot of laughter and some good natured frustration, particularly with the winged dinosaur kits. When time is up, ask each group to describe its construct. In this exercise, creative thinking, brainstorming, problem-solving, cooperation and consensus will certainly get a workout.

3. Slight of Hand. Divide team into groups of 4 to 6. Hand each group 4 tennis balls. Tell them each person must handle all 4 balls in the shortest time possible. Do this several times, each time asking, “How can you do it faster?” This exercise will progress from the obvious passing of the balls down a line, to around a circle, to some interesting ball drops and hand swiping. Your team will practice cooperation, quick thinking and creative problem solving in this exercise.

4. Going Up. Divide team into groups of 2 to 6. Give each person one 8 1/2” x 11” sheet of paper and one 5” strip of masking tape. Instruct each team to build the tallest possible free-standing structure. This exercise promotes cooperation, creative thinking, problem-solving, consensus, leadership and division of labor.

5. Gnome Dome. Divide the team into groups of 2. Give each group 20 gumdrops and 12 toothpicks. Instruct each group to build a dome. Problem-solving, creative thinking, cooperation (and possibly snacking) will be practiced during this exercise.

6. Poisonous Web. Stretch a piece of rope across a door frame, securing it to the frame or connecting wall with duct tape. You’ll need two pieces of rope, one 3 feet off the ground, the other 4 1/2 feet off the ground. You are creating a “window” 18 inches wide that you describe to the team as a “poisonous spider web.” The team must work together to get all members through the opening without touching the ropes. They must go through, not under or over the ropes. If a team member touches either rope, the entire team must go back to the beginning and

try again. This exercise builds cooperation, leadership, creativity and problem-solving. It also forces team members to trust and depend on each other.

7. Hang Ups. Hand each person a wire coat hanger. Tell the group they may work individually or create their own groups. Instruct them to make something useful from their coat hanger. Set a time limit of 5 to 15 minutes. Ask each person/group to describe his “tool” and its use. This exercise will indicate which of your team members are natural leaders or born socialites as well as which are more shy and may need to be drawn out when working with the group.

8. In the Picture. This is another puzzle game. Divide the team into groups and give each one a jigsaw puzzle from which you have already removed one piece. Each team will complete a puzzle with one missing piece. Ask each team what this represents in terms of the team. You’re aiming for discovery of the importance of each individual to the successful accomplishment of the team’s goal, but you may get some interesting responses about proper planning, supply officers and quality control.

9. All Aboard. This is another physical game. Depending on the size of your team, place a 1-foot to 3-foot square of cardboard on the floor, or mark off a square with masking or duct tape. Draw numbers, one for each team member. In order of the numbers drawn, team members must stand in the square. As the number of people in the square increases, members will have to work together and get creative to get everyone aboard. This exercise practices cooperation, problem-solving and leadership.

10. Bridge the Gap. Divide the group into teams of 2 to 4. Give each group a small ball of modeling clay and 12 toothpicks. Instruct them to build the longest cantilever bridge they can. Award points for speed of construction, length of bridge, ability to stand without tipping over and ability to hold weight (to measure this, stack quarters until the bridge tips or breaks). Team members will practice creativity, problem-solving, consensus (and manual dexterity).

To be successful, teamwork must be more than a method of dividing up the work to get the job done. Teamwork must embrace a cooperative attitude of mutual respect, shared responsibility and open communication. Teamwork recognizes each team member’s individual contribution to the team in the context of the interdependency of those efforts in cooperative pursuit of the team’s goal.

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