

HOME HOW TO HOST TEAM BUILDING EVENTS THAT ACTUALLY WORK

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You wouldn't be where you are today without your team. They've stood by you through the ups and the downs, the early-morning meetings and the late-night phone calls. They're the backbone of your whole operation—but do they know it?

Team building events are a fun way to show your employees that you appreciate their hard work, but that the benefits don't stop there. When these "corporate field trips" are done right, they'll also bring your team closer together, get everyone on the same page and create some pretty fantastic networking opportunities for everyone involved.

So, what makes a great team building event, and how can you ensure that the fun and games will benefit your company in the long run? For the answer, we turned to some professionals in the team building industry. Here's what they had to say.

Set Measurable, Attainable Goals for Team Members

A great team building event is more than evening cocktails at a local bar. For it to be effective (read: worth your investments of time and money), you'll need to be sure that everyone benefits from the activities.

[Zachary A. Schaefer, Ph.D.](#), is the Assistant Professor of Applied Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, and the founder of Spark the Discussion, a popular consulting firm. He suggests setting goals for individuals, not just the event itself.



"I helped coordinate a professional baseball team outing for a multi-unit restaurant who was interested in building rapport and increasing trust among its staff members and

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breaking down departmental differences,” he says. “We set up goals that each member had to achieve, such as learning two non-work-related facts about five different team members and brainstorming ways to help the company brand.”

When you’ve got a measurable goal for your team building event, it’s easy to see what’s working (and what isn’t).

*We set up goals that each member had to achieve –
Zachary Schaefer*

Keep the Teamwork Fun (But Also Functional)

Your employees have busy lives, and as much as they want to interact with your company and their colleagues, they’ll probably have little patience for “fluffy” team building exercises.

Tim Toterhi, founder of [Plotline Leadership](#), has facilitated large-scale team events across the globe. His advice? “What works and what doesn’t depends a lot on the culture of the company and the subculture of the team.”



Toterhi suggests providing rich content that your employees will find valuable and entertaining, but be cautious to keep your event practical, too. On the subject of hiring a facilitator for your event, he says, “Having a facilitator can help the flow of your session—threading messages from sessions to session—but run screaming from anyone who suggests a “trust fall” or any other touchy-feely technique from the 1970s. No need to give your attendees the creeps.”

Marian Thier, an executive coach at [Listening Impact](#), works with leaders and teams to maximize everyone’s potential. An award-winning author, she’s got one set-in-stone rule when it comes to team building events: “Fun, not frivolous. If the event does not provide lasting collaboration, learning about the value of diversity of skills, and increased commitment to the organization, it’s a waste of human and financial resources.”

Finding the balance between fun and fluff isn’t always easy, but when you concentrate on what your employees want and what your company hopes to gain, you’ll be sure to hit on the right idea.

*run screaming from anyone who suggests a “trust fall”
or any other touchy-feely technique from the 1970s –
Tim Toterhi*

Make the Most of Your Team Building Budget

It’s no secret that team building events can be costly, especially if you’re looking at week-long retreats or frequent day trips. When planning your next event, you need to factor in your bottom line.

Holly Bennett is the PR Associate and Company Event Planner for [Toronto Vaporizer](#). She plans events for her 16-person team every six weeks. Her team decides as a group on the location for the next outing, then Bennett does the legwork to make sure she’s getting the best deal.

“I always inquire about group rates/discounts and will find the best combination of the right location, at the right price, with the best reviews from other groups who have been there. For example, for laser-tag, I found three great locations and then cross-referenced with management for their opinion on which place would be best for us.”

Remember to evaluate how often you'll be hosting these events. If it's a once-a-year deal, feel free to spring for the pricier locations. However, if you (like Bennett) enjoy more frequent exercises, you'll need to keep costs to a minimum.

find the best combination of the right location, at the right price, with the best reviews – Holly Bennett

It's About the Team, not “Business Talk”

Some of the professionals we talked to cautioned against making your team building event too business-y. This is a chance for your team to let their collective hair down, not a Monday morning meeting. When business talk is off the table, everyone will be more willing to connect on a personal level which, in turn, makes your team stronger than ever.

Arthur Zilberman owns [LaptopMD](#), a company that offers IT solutions to Fortune 500 companies. He likes to plan events that foster personal relationships. “Often we'll have social events that help us get to know each other better,” he says. “Our No. 1 rule: No talking about business! At LaptopMD, we've built friendships that tap into a deeper bond.”



Lauren Witte, Associate Director of Marketing at the law firm [JacksonWhite, P.C.](#), agrees.

“I think the primary purpose of team-building exercises is to connect with your colleagues in a non-work-related environment, so it's best to keep work out of it,” she says. “Take your mind away from office responsibilities and focus on getting to know your team on a personal level.”

Witte believes connecting people on a personal level will help them better work together professionally.

“Building connections with other members of your team leads to building trust, and when people can trust each other, they can work together more effectively.”



Our No. 1 rule: No talking about business! – Arthur Zilberman

Think Outside the Box of Ho-Hum

The internet is full of team building “suggestions,” from the ill-fated trust exercises that Toterhi mentioned earlier to the bland: “This is really a business meeting, but, hey, we’ve got cocktails!” mind-set adopted by so many confused companies. However it takes some creative thinking to build an event that gets everyone on board.

Bryan Mattimore, the co-founder of [Growth Engine](#), knows a thing or two about originality. His clients don’t just ask him to facilitate a team event; they actually want him to create one!



One of his favorite team building events involves getting the whole company together to write (and perform!) a song. While he’s been hired to facilitate for many big-name corporations, one of his most memorable Write a Song Together events was for consumer goods giant Unilever.

“For Unilever, we had 18 brand teams (of about eight to 10 people each) each write a song for their brand...and then perform it in front of the entire audience of 160-plus people that night over dinner. My favorite performance was the brand manager, strutting like Mick Jagger, singing the tune ‘Satisfaction’ with the new lyrics for his Caress brand, ‘I can’t get no Caress action!’”

Now that’s some ingenuity!

we had 18 brand teams...each write a song for their brand...and then perform it – Bryan Mattimore

Support the People Who Got You to Where You Are

At its heart, a team building event isn’t about the corporate big-wigs or the numbers written in black on the financial ledger: it’s about the people who helped you get where you are today. It’s important to recognize them at any company event, but when you’re looking to build your team up, it’s even more crucial.



Michelle Burke, Marketing Supervisor for the HR firm [WyckWyre](#), understands that team building isn’t just a once-a-year event.

“Our company has a yearly boot camp—a one-week trip to revamp the company as a group while exploring a city and its restaurants, bars, stores, etc.”

While that’s certainly a benefit any employee would love, it’s the little things that matter most. Burke continues, “Our customers also have programs in place to keep employees engaged, which is a benefit we promote to our applicants. Many customers have weekly meetings, monthly birthday celebrations, and employee meals and parties to keep employees engaged and satisfied at the workplace.”

Todd Cherches, owner of [BigBlueGumball](#), a business specializing in team building workshops, has more to say on the subject. “My philosophy is that team bonding needs to come before team building.” In brief, this means that before focusing on the work, we need to focus on the people. That includes doing engaging, interactive, and fun—but not cheesy or clichéd—team activities that help colleagues connect through getting to know one another better. We have a variety of different innovative exercises we draw upon to achieve this objective, and we customize the activity to each specific group based on a range of variables.”



At the end of the day, the week or the fiscal year, your employees are the people who got you here. Show them a little love, and reap the rewards.

*team bonding needs to come before team building –
Todd Cherches*

The Bottom Line on Team Building

Team building events are important for any company, big or small. Showing your employees how valuable they really are does wonders to promote morale, employee satisfaction and engagement. We’ve given you the scoop from the professionals; now it’s your turn. In your opinion, what makes a great team building event? Share your stories with us!

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