



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Teambuilding

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Welcome

Before the month's events even revealed themselves, I had decided this May issue would be on teambuilding -- a salute to my inaugural issue 5 years ago. It was a fortuitous decision that was reinforced by a recent experience.

This past weekend I was at Ryan's college graduation (my stepson) at the University of Arizona. The commencement speaker, Robert Sarver, owner of the Phoenix Suns Basketball team, offered several concrete suggestions to the graduating seniors. He said that one difference between college and the real world was that in college you worked for individual results. In the real world you had to be part of a team.

This struck a chord with Ryan and reinforced what he learned in the Eller College of Business. And it markedly contrasted what many of us (older folks) learned and experienced in business school and the business world over many years.

And so experiential teambuilding is on the agenda because:

- Our work and organizational structure necessitate it
- Experience is a great teacher of team concepts
- Collaboration is here to stay

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

PS And speaking of experiences - details on my skydiving experience are in Freebies

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Experience It

Having written about teambuilding in two past issues (Request the May 2000 and January 2002 back issues [Teambuilding Back Issues](#)), I wondered what new slant or perspective I could offer.

During a conversation with Dr. Tracy Weber of Kaleidoscope Learning Circle (989-652-9112 or

[http://www.myklc.com Kaleidoscope Learning Circle](http://www.myklc.com/Kaleidoscope_Learning_Circle) we talked about her equine (yes, horse-based) teambuilding and the link to experiential learning. Coupled with the experiences and conversations around Ryan's graduation I had the new slant I needed.

"Experiential learning" can apply to any kind of learning through experience. Typically, experiential learning refers to a model of learning - a structured learning sequence.

Who can describe any experiential learning model?? Yet who among us wouldn't say that many of our great lessons and insights have occurred through experience. Whether accidental or unintentional, we use the words "learned from experience" to describe something we will never forget.

Ryan commented to me about his growth and learning during 4 years of college -- and he specifically mentioned that his learning did not just stem from the books. I can cite many critical business lessons that I learned - all from experience. These past mistakes offer me strong memories that I call up time and time again to make sure I don't repeat the same behavior.

The use of experiential learning offers great potential for meetings and for teambuilding. And this issue will explore this idea to help your next meeting be more innovative, more productive and with a greater impact.

Importance of Team

Ryan graduates with a firm belief in the importance of teams. He has experienced a business education centered around group work, he went through classes in a small cohort - a group of 6 people. His cohort worked in an environment where student's provided professors with feedback on individual team players, and the group's performance as a whole.

Yet many people in the business world grew up in business with a winner take all mentality. We have been reared in a system that associates teamwork with "play" and individual accomplishment with the "real world" of work. Contrast your school experience where (likely) collaborating with other students was usually considered "cheating" to Ryan's experience.

Most of us then entered the workplace and found yet another individual achievement system, so that the combination of our school life and work life have left most of us ill-equipped to really appreciate and understand the intricacies of team behaviors and collaboration.

What has changed? In 1982, trend forecaster John Naisbitt predicted in Megatrends that we would see much greater participation in workplace thinking and a general disintegration of hierarchies as networking would speed information between those with a need to know. He observed that "In an information economy, rigid hierarchical structures slow down the information flow—just when greater speed and more flexibility are critically needed."

Naisbitt saw and predicted what would happen to the world of "work". Teams are now more important because:

- Fewer middle management positions exist
- Organizations are larger, global more complex requiring more integrated solutions that cross over from one department or area
- Future improvements in processes, products and services require holistic views
- Given the nature of organizations (think "outsourcing", "supply chain management"), people must work with others who are not part of the organization

Team Experiences

Ideally to benefit your organization, teambuilding should strive to be more than a "get to know you" activity. Building a relationship is not the same as building a team. There is value in people expanding their network. Knowing someone's name is an important start but it alone will not create teams.

Teambuilding should allow a group to gauge its own effectiveness and improve it's performance.

To assess itself, a team seeks feedback to find out both:

- Its current strengths as a team
- Its current weaknesses

To improve its current performance, a team uses the feedback to:

- Identify any gaps between the desired state and the actual state
- Design a strategy to close those gaps

Teambuilding is a process of building awareness. Especially in a competitive business world, teambuilding helps people to understand that they are greater collectively than individually. Teambuilding is understanding that superior decisions can result when collaboration occurs. Teambuilding is creating an appreciation of other's strengths, weaknesses and perspectives.

This awareness is best built through experience. In order for any teambuilding activity to have a significant impact in our lives and in our organizations, the team members must develop their own personal awareness. And then they must develop team skills through practice.

Experiential team building enables us to practice using team skills in various situations so they become readily accessed behaviors and tools that can be employed back on the job.

Experience into Action

I am hard pressed to think of any teambuilding activity that is not fundamentally experiential -- meaning that it is activity based. The most effective teambuilding is a catalyst to leverage a fun experience into a meaningful learning experience.

You may have a manager who thinks that teambuilding is just fun and games. You may be asked to prove the value or ROI (return on investment) of teambuilding. You may need to address serious team problems.

How do you make an activity transcend a networking activity into a teambuilding experience? Effective teambuilding that will impact your bottom-line must include:

- Assessment
- Thoughtful and Appropriate Recommendations
- Skillful Facilitation
- Consistent Follow-Through

The experiential learning occurs in teambuilding events when people have the opportunity to complete the experiential learning cycle which includes the following steps:

- Reflect on what happened
- Use the experience to draw parallels to what happens back "home" in your organization
- Hear the perspective of an outsider attuned to effective team processes
- Practice new behaviors in a safe setting
- Reflect on what happened
- Use the experience to draw parallels to what happens... and so on and so on.

That is the cycle - the circle of experiential learning. If an activity doesn't include at least two rotations through the circle of experiential learning, you are not maximizing the opportunity inherent in the teambuilding. (Or you are not truly doing teambuilding.)

Why Experience = Effective

Why is Experiential Learning is so effective?

Primarily because it builds upon a model for the way adults learn best. Experiential learning provides application,

involvement, and challenge for its participants.

In the teambuilding world, experiential based teambuilding also promotes:

- **Forming Relationships Quickly** - Participants interact working toward a common goal. The communication, collaboration and effort that are required to arrive at the desired outcome develops relationships quickly. People may get to know each other better in this environment than over an entire year of normal working conditions.
- **A Mirror** - The group projects their problem-solving skills, project management ability, and leadership style onto the experience. The experience provides a unique opportunity to catch participants doing what they typically do. The learning arising from this can be profound and revealing.
- **Quick Cycle Time** - The elapsed time between the challenge and the outcomes is compressed, so the consequences of decisions can be easily examined and improved.
- **Safe Environment** - Teams are able to experience chaos, disorder, crisis and changing requirements for success in a safe environment where the consequences for failure are limited. The team can develop strategies and best practices for managing these issues both in this environment and back at work. Individually, participants can try on new roles and make mistakes with no danger or cost. Each person taking a risk also pushes others to take on something outside of their comfort zone.
- **Kinesthetic Learning** - For those that learn best by doing, they have a great anchor for the learning. Other learning types experience the learning along physical, mental and behavioral dimensions.
- **Common Language** - The teambuilding experience provides a common language, experience and story, which can be related to the work environment. The experience can provide a short cut in communicating. The experience, the outcomes, and feelings can serve as a catalyst for continuing the theme back on the job.
- **Diversity of Strengths** - One of the paradoxes of teams is that people find more cohesion in a group of people like themselves. Yet the strength of teams is found in their diversity. Teambuilding can require a variety of skills. Ideally, input from all team members is required to produce the desired outcomes. One person cannot possibly succeed alone and so the interdependence of the team is highlighted along with the importance of diversity within the team.
- **The Unfamiliar** - The unfamiliarity of the situation places people in a state of dis-equilibrium. The unfamiliar creates more openness to change and discussion. Rather than talking about "work" you are talking about the "theoretical situation".
- **Insight** - In the experiential environment, new light is shed on the teams process and the group is asked to step back and evaluate their performance. The review is about themselves, their leadership, problem solving skills, teamwork, communication and managing change.
- **Fun** - This environment provides a highly enjoyable way to learn about and develop team and group process skills. Fun is a powerful aspect of effective learning with participants becoming more open to the experience and creative.

These points are drawn from the Experiential Learning Research of corporate psychologists Dr John Luckner and Reldan Nadler.

Teaming Up

Teambuilding can help:

- **Create a shared mission or vision** - It is very important for group members to have common goals for group achievement.
- **Build cohesiveness** - either task or social cohesiveness. Social cohesiveness is the bonds that link group

members. Task cohesiveness is the way in which skills and abilities of the group members mesh to allow optimal performance.

- Develop roles and norms - Teams go through the stages of Forming, Storming, Norming before they reach Performing. All groups develop a set of roles and norms over time. Norms are the rules governing the behavior of group members.
- Communication - Effective interpersonal communication is vital to the smooth functioning of any group. Active listening exercises, practice in giving and receiving feedback, and practice in checking for comprehension of verbal messages are all aimed at developing skills. Teambuilding even when focused on another issue will enlighten the group about their communication patterns.

Teambuilding is not a silver bullet for fixing all problems within dysfunctional teams nor will it guarantee that teams will begin "performing". However, teambuilding exercises can be helpful in developing effective teams. In the January 2002, I published a list of 20+ highly desirable traits of teams. Request the back issue to see more detail on how teams can perform. [January 2002 Back Issue](#)

Team Resources

Consider adding these resources to help you build teams:

[99 of the best Experiential Corporate Games We Know!](#) By Simon Priest, Sam Sikes, and Faith Evans

or

[Games That Teach](#): Experiential Activities for Reinforcing Training by Steve Sugar

Or

Teamwork and Teamplay : Games and Activities for Building and Training Teams by Sivasailam Thiagarajan and Glenn Parker

Freebies: The Experience

Freebies

The best teams are the ones we experience! Peter Grazier writes about how celebrations and events have an inherent teambuilding quality. He writes, "Through the years that I have been working with organizations, I have always been fascinated by the power of events and celebrations to pull people together. Since we spend our days working together and focusing on the business at hand, the work becomes our primary medium for interaction. As such, its character is formal, serious, important, necessary, technical, and administrative. And, as we reduce payrolls, it also has become hectic, pressured, and demanding. We all accept this as part of the work climate.

When there is an organization event or celebration, however, the character changes somewhat. It gives people time to pull back, relax, celebrate what has been accomplished, and look at each other as fellow humans bound together by a common purpose.

From a team building perspective, it allows for greater interaction between people separated by functional boundaries. This interaction then gives us the opportunity to see our colleagues from a different perspective, breaking down what may have been hidden barriers to open communication."

More Freebies: What should be included in experiential teambuilding. Email me and I will send you a template for experiential teambuilding. [Sue Tinnish](#)

Totally Fun: If you are interested in seeing my skydiving experience, please log onto my first attempt at blogging. I wrote about blogging and the implications I believe it holds for meetings in April 2003. Now that Fortune Magazine cited Blogging as it's #1 Technology Trend in 2005, I decided to experiment a bit. A few photos are posted on the blog of Ryan and my first skydiving experience. I should have posted them in reverse order so that you would see the chronology of the event - remember this is my first attempt. Go to: <http://suetinnishjumpingoff.blogspot.com/> or try this link

[Sue's Jumping Off...](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

I am involved in organizing [AmaZing Meetings - Discover the Magic](#) for the International Association of Conference Centers. If you want to hold AmaZing Meetings, you will want to attend this one day event on [Thursday, May 26, 2005 at the Eaglewood Conference Resort & Spa](#). Registration is now open on the web at: https://programs.regweb.com/iacc/IACCLearningN_0526

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see Bob Higa, Magician and Master of Ceremonies ([Bob Higa](#)), and me talk about AmaZing Meetings!

Finally, my subscriber base only grows through word of mouth of my subscribers. I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

[Register for AmaZing Meetings](#)

T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues [Back Issue Request](#):

May 2000: [Teambuilding](#) and (Freebie) New York Times Reprint On Teambuilding
June 2000: [Green Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Resource List Of Exercises
July 2000: [Values](#) and (Freebie) Meeting Analysis
August 2000: [Minimum/Minimal Meetings](#) and (Freebie) Web Winners
October 2000: [Evaluations](#) and (Freebie) Sample Evaluation Questions
November 2000: [Politics](#)
December 2000: [Toys](#) and (Freebie) Brainstorming Ideas

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December 2003: [Deja View](#)

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March 2005: [Sarbanes-Oxley and Meetings](#)
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