



GO TEAM!

Team Building Matures as Management Pursues Productivity

by John Nemo

As early as 1927 a serious interest in workplace motivation prompted studies that explored how employees worked together and what elements of the workplace encouraged productivity. Some of the ideas that emerged from those studies have grown into the concept we call team building, a multi-billion dollar industry today.

The roots of team building

The emergence of a “team” concept in the workplace can be traced to the “Hawthorne Studies” that took place from 1927 to 1932. Led by Harvard Business School’s Elton Mayo, researchers studied workers at the Hawthorne Plant of the Western Electric Company in Cicero, Illinois. The researchers started out studying physical and environmental influences in the workplace,

(continued on page 20)

(continued from page 19)

such as lighting and humidity, and later moved into the psychological aspects—breaks, group pressure, working hours and managerial leadership.

Researchers eventually took six female workers off the main factory floor and put them together in their own special work group. The women were given a manager who was more a friendly compatriot than a demanding dictator. The women were also given rest breaks and free lunch. Productivity soared, and even when perks like the rest breaks and free lunches were removed, productivity didn't lag.

Puzzled, Mayo and his fellow researchers eventually learned something that seems obvious today—workplaces are social environments, and within them, people are motivated by more than economic self-interest. The women in the experiment did their best and most productive work when they felt like they were genuinely cared for by management. Also, being put into a group and working together each day enabled the women to develop social bonds that extended beyond work hours. Their motivation to work hard was fueled by the desire to be a part of this new “team,” and the “team” gave itself wholeheartedly and spontaneously to the study.

Also, by giving the female workers more freedom in how they went about doing their individual jobs and solving problems, researchers found

them to be much happier, motivated and productive. And instead of individual workers needing discipline from a higher authority, it came from the team.

TOP 10 REASONS FOR TEAM BUILDING

1. **To gain dynamic rapport among team members.**
2. **To open the climate for streamlined communication.**
3. **To stimulate creativity.**
4. **To discover new ways of strategizing and solving challenges.**
5. **To surface hidden problems and agendas.**
6. **To appreciate individual differences and strengths.**
7. **To learn trust.**
8. **To welcome and handle change.**
9. **To strengthen teamwork and motivation.**
10. **To learn and have fun at the same time!**

Source: www.funteambuilding.com

Modern applications

The concept of workplace teams has continued to develop over the years to the point that an entire industry has grown around the idea of improving performance by strengthening teams. Doug Stanearth, CEO of Fort Worth, Texas-based The Leaders Institute, conducts team building and personal development programs from California to New York and a number of cities in Europe. Based in Atlanta, Georgia, Larry Lipman has worked with large private companies like Coca-Cola, as well as the federal government, giving team building presentations for more than 15 years. When a company finds itself lacking in areas such as productivity or morale, team builders like Lipman or Stanearth step in.

“Companies want their employees to be motivated from within,” Lipman says.



“Trust is another huge issue. People want to know if they can trust their coworkers to get the job done.”

According to Stanearth, another current issue is competing departments. Though some businesses believe that a competitive work environment brings about the best results, team leaders need to promote a spirit of overall cooperation. “You’ll see department heads being compensated based on the success of their department. And the natural tendency then is to just focus on your department and not worry about the rest of the company as a whole ... if each department helps the other ones, instead of treating them like competitors, everybody gets better results.”

Even though the range of issues varies in complexity, today the information and resources needed to address team building challenges are readily available.

Team building today

Lipman says team building is more than just dragging



employees to a paintball facility or having someone give them a lecture on why it's important to work together. "People learn best when they're moving around and interacting," he says.

A typical workshop for Lipman will start with icebreakers, then move into a self-discovery activity he calls "Journey in the Forest." More physically and mentally challenging activities follow, and before the day is finished, coworkers will be forced to scale walls, navigate mazes and work as a team to solve problems.

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But team building takes many forms, from a one-day retreat or some dedicated time in a staff meeting, to a more substantial time commitment. Stanearth's programs can run for a few days or a week, and average 16 hours of classroom training mixed with activities like treasure hunts or improvisation training from professional comedians. What is crucial is that the team or the team leader recognizes the need to strengthen the group, and finds the tools to do so.

Today's market is crowded with companies and specialists promising to transform employees into more productive teams, but even team building practitioners warn that not all organizations offering these services will produce substantive results.

Rick Brenner, a team builder who runs Boston, Massachusetts-based Chaco Canyon Consulting, says it's very important for a company to do its homework before selecting a team builder. On Brenner's Web site he asks, "A year later, what will people remember from the team learning experience? Will it be the important lessons that were so difficult and valuable to learn? Or will it be the 8-foot paper elephant?"

Depending on the organization's internal and financial resources, the first place to start may be the human resources department to see if a workshop can be arranged using resources from within the company. However, some issues may need to be addressed by someone with an outside perspective.

"You have to be careful who you go with," Stanearth says. "Anything can be called 'team building' these days. But real team building is where you actually get some type of behavior change in the group."

Back in the 1920s the Hawthorne Studies articulated the reason companies are willing to spend billions of dollars each year on team building programs and instructors. Though it may be no easier today to build a strong team than it was 80 years ago, the concept appears deceptively simple: teamwork is productive. ●

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