

THE FACILITATORsm

Real-world team building... it's not make-believe!

By Dan Hogan
(Dan.Hogan@LordandHogan.com)

Most people value teamwork, but too often well-meaning leaders sidestep real-world team building.

Real-world team building is not an experiential exercise, a drum circle, or happy hour and dinner. These activities are very important but are not valid substitutes.

Real-World or Make-Believe

Real-world team building is performing and practicing real team *work*; make-believe talks about teamwork. Real-world is direct and resolves a team's tangible work issues; make-believe is indirect and teaches teamwork concepts. Real-world looks at and addresses current work processes and/or interpersonal friction; make-believe studies other team successes in hopes to learn. Make-believe is education; real-world is education and application.

For instance, take performance feedback as a team building exercise. In a real-world session, team members give each other performance feedback, both positive and constructive. A

make-believe approach would entail a literature search of feedback methods, a presentation, and a plea for those methods to be used.

In the real-world feedback session, team members do their real work (i.e. address interpersonal friction) but in the make-believe session, people sidestep or just talk about doing their real work.

The real-world approach is the hardest and is usually difficult for those team members who resist the reality and necessity

of performance improvement. The make-believe approach is easy and safe because it lets everyone off the hook — for the time being.

Labeling other approaches as make-believe is unfair; however, it is truly wishful thinking, thus make-believe, to expect real-world results from indirect approaches.

These other approaches — such as picnics, lunches, dinners, games, ropes, testing, certain training, lunch & learn's — are very important for building closer interpersonal

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bonds, and are extremely valuable when used as continuing education.

Think of it this way. Will professional sports teams go to dinner to improve teamwork? No, they go practice; so should work teams.

Four Tactics

1. What: Business Objectives

Don't take for granted that all team members are clear about and/or are in agreement with the team's objectives. It's estimated that 50% of all work teams are misaligned in this regard.

Specific and time-bound objectives must be established either by the team's sponsor, team leader, and/or the entire team.

2. How: Strategy - Business & Team

Here you have two interlocking strategies:

- a. How to achieve the team's objectives,
- b. How to build a high-performance team.

Don't be surprised if people are misaligned on both of these as well. For example, a leadership team had to discuss and agree on how to reduce millions in operating expenses. Half the team argued for layoffs because, they said, it was a reality of life (the easiest solution). The other half wanted to find creative ways to reduce costs to avoid layoffs (the hardest solution) because when the economy turned around, they would have a loyal and experienced workforce.

Their emotionally-immature bickering lasted for several hours. During breaks, many leaders pulled me aside to share their frustrations with other team member attitudes and behaviors including the lack of decisive leadership from their boss. What was painfully obvious was this team did not have an agreed-upon strategy for building teamwork -- particularly with respect to conflict resolution.



As the facilitator, I persuaded the group to take thirty additional minutes to come to consensus, and if they could not, the fallback would be to go to the boss to make the final decision. They actually took an hour, and the boss still had to make the final decision.

Within one year they achieved their cost reduction goals, mostly

through layoffs, and it's my understanding that morale is very low and they are losing key talent.

3. Who: Roles & Performance Expectations

As with the other tactics, don't be surprised if team members are out of alignment in this area, too. Set aside some time for your team to answer these three "roles" questions:

- a. What do you need from me that you are getting?
- b. What do you need from me that you are NOT getting?
- c. What are you getting from me that you don't need?

As for performance expectations, it's essential that team members give each other feedback in order to ensure people are doing the right-things-right. It's estimated that 90% of all teams do not have a consistent or structured peer feedback process. If your team does not, please consider it.

4. Pact: Action Agreements

“To say these words means nothing; to live these words means everything!”

When a team clarifies its objectives, strategies and roles, they have only completed 50% of their real-world teambuilding. The other 50% is for each team member to do their work.

Therefore, it's prudent to create Team Action Agreements that will increase the likelihood that team members will not just “say” the objectives, strategies and roles, but will actually live them! (Read about this powerful teamwork tool at www.lordandhogan.com or in the Spring 2003 issue of *The Facilitator*).

If implementing a real-world team building session is right for your team, then I recommend the “Less-is-more” strategy which means you implement small real-world team building exercises, and in time, the team will expect it and demand it. œ

A Certified Professional Facilitator, Dan Hogan and Lord & Hogan, LLC help you develop people and teams that work — through the use of customized solutions, personal mastery training and assessments. Check out www.LordandHogan.com for more information.

A Word about Resistance

People who resist engaging in real-world team building have:

- a) had a bad experience with make-believe training, or
- b) they have something to hide.

A simple solution for the person with the bad experience is to get them involved in developing the strategy for real-world team building.

However, there is not a simple solution for dealing with the other person. Consider this - “people do not change until the cost of not changing is higher than the cost of changing.” That means if you want them to engage in real-world team building, you will need to increase the benefits for changing or increase the consequences for not changing.

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The Facilitator
P O Box 670705
Dallas, TX 75367-0705
Phone: 972.243.1356
Fax: 972.243.1357
Email: snurre@TheFacilitator.com
www.TheFacilitator.com