

Stop the Make-Believe: Engaging in Real Team Building



Most people acknowledge the value of teamwork, yet well-intentioned leaders often fall short when it comes to implementing truly effective team building.



Real-world team building isn't about trust falls, drum circles, or purely social gatherings like happy hour. While these activities can have their place, they are not substitutes for addressing the actual work of a team.

Real-World vs. Make-Believe: A Critical Distinction

Real-world team building involves actively performing and practicing *real* teamwork, directly tackling a team's tangible work challenges.

"Make-believe" team building, on the other hand, often talks *about* teamwork in abstract ways.

- Real-world approaches are direct, resolving current work processes and interpersonal friction.
- Make-believe methods tend to be indirect, studying general teamwork concepts or hoping that insights from other teams will somehow transfer.
- Real-world team building is education *and* application, whereas make-believe is often just education.

Consider performance feedback.

- In a real-world team-building session, team members give each other specific, actionable feedback – both positive and constructive – related to their actual work.
- A make-believe approach might involve a theoretical discussion of feedback models without any real exchange between team members.

The real-world approach can be challenging because it requires individuals to confront and address areas for improvement. Make-believe approaches can feel easier and safer, as they often avoid direct engagement with difficult issues. While social events and certain training have value in building interpersonal bonds and providing continuing education, expecting them to yield real-world team performance improvements is often wishful thinking.

Think of it this way:

- Professional sports teams **don't go out to dinner** to improve their teamwork on the field.
- They practice. Work teams should adopt a similar mindset.

Four Key Tactics for Real-World Team Building

1. **Clarity on Business Objectives:** Don't assume everyone on the team is aligned with the team's goals. Misalignment is more common than you might think. Specific, time-bound objectives must be clearly established and agreed upon.
2. **Integrated Business and Team Strategy:** This involves **two** crucial, interconnected strategies: A) how to achieve the team's business objectives and B) how to build a high-performing team. Misalignment here can lead to unproductive conflict and poor decisions. Real-world team building facilitates the difficult conversations needed to achieve strategic alignment, including developing strategies for conflict resolution.

3. **Defined Roles and Clear Performance Expectations:** Ensure all team members understand their roles and what is expected of them. Create space for the team to discuss:

- What do you need from me that you **are getting**?
- What do you need from me that you **are not getting**?
- What are you getting from me that **you don't need**?

Furthermore, implement a consistent process for peer feedback to ensure everyone is performing effectively.

4. **Actionable Work Agreements:** Once objectives, strategies, and roles are clarified, the real work of team building is only half done. The other half involves ensuring these agreements are lived. Creating Team Work Agreements increases the likelihood that team members will not just acknowledge these elements but actively embody them in their behavior.

Why Real-World Team Building Delivers Real Benefits

Real-world team building, like Right-Minded Teamwork[®], directly addresses the issues that hinder performance. When teams engage in this way, they learn to accept, forgive, and adjust their attitudes and behaviors in real time when challenges arise. This allows for successful recovery and paves the way for productive teamwork by resolving the underlying problems.

This approach moves beyond surface-level activities to a custom-designed workshop where team members discuss and resolve their actual teamwork challenges, resulting in practical **Work Agreements**. These agreements define how teammates will collaborate to achieve business goals while respecting shared values. In real-world team building, both the team and the facilitator are accountable for a successful experience.

Moving from Worst to Best in Team Building

Many activities masquerade as team building, but their effectiveness varies greatly:

- **Worst of the Worst:** Horrifying or foolish activities that are counterproductive.
- **A Little Better:** Social events like happy hours or bowling can build camaraderie but aren't true team building.
- **Hit or Miss:** Experiential play or games might be fun but often lack direct application to real work.
- **Can Be Helpful:** Educational and training events can provide knowledge but don't always translate into changed behavior.
- **Best of the Best: Real-World Team Building:** Custom workshops focused on resolving real teamwork challenges and creating actionable Work Agreements.

Addressing Resistance

Resistance to real-world team building often stems from past negative experiences with ineffective "make-believe" training or a reluctance to address underlying issues. For those with bad experiences, involving them in the strategy development can be helpful.

For others, it's important to recognize that

*change happens when the **cost of not changing outweighs the cost of changing.***

Highlighting the benefits of real-world team building and the consequences of inaction can be crucial.

Ultimately, real-world team building unites teammates in achieving common goals by directly addressing the challenges they face in their daily work. This focused and practical approach is the most reliable path to building high-performance teams.

To Learn More

Visit RightMindedTeamwork.com and search for:

- Right-Minded Teamwork in Any Team: The Ultimate Team Building Method to Create a Team That Work as One.
- Design a Right-Minded Team-Building Workshop: 12 Steps to Create a Team That Works as One.

About the Author

This article was written by **Dan Hogan**, an Author and **Certified Master Facilitator** with over 40 years of experience in team-building facilitation.

Dan has worked with more than 500 teams globally and is the author of eight how-to books on team-building processes and methods.

Dan specializes in creating practical, real-world solutions to help teams achieve sustainable and meaningful results.

His unique philosophy, **Right-Minded Teamwork**, emphasizes clarity, collaboration, and achieving desired outcomes. You can use all the Right-Minded Teamwork tools and processes in your practice. Check it out soon.

To learn more about Dan and explore his work, visit [Right-Minded Teamwork](http://RightMindedTeamwork.com).

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