

Putting mateship to work

Team-building used to be about pain and boring seminars. These

days it's all about enjoyment, writes **Amanda Horswill**

THERE may be no "I" in "team" but expect there to soon be more fun. Corporate trainers say employers are realising the best way to stop staff from leaving is to help them feel part of a positive, friendly team.

Business is brisk, trainers say, as an increasing number of companies ask them to stage team-building exercises. Forget about the boring seminars of old as the latest trend is to fun, exciting and unconventional activities more about sharing laughter than workplace chores.

Filmmaking, drumming classes, singing in a choir, entering burning buildings, rowing – it's a case of anything fun goes.

Corporate training company Dimensional Thinking's Craig Wallace says people have done the boot camps, *Survivor*, Skirmish and go-kart racing time and time again but there is much less call now for the "hard core, physical stuff".

"Now they're asking for fun and entertainment. They want different and quirky programs. They want us to get to know them and surprise them," Wallace says.

"There is also a trend towards people asking for 'carbon neutral' or sustainable environment programs.

"We ran a program earlier this year where 400 people from one company

planted 5000 trees in an hour and a half and then donated \$10,000 to Coastcare.

"With the Gen Y-ers and younger generations asking what the social and environmental policies of their prospective employers are, I think many companies will see traditional team-building events as a way involve everyone in a real project.

"I think that this will be the biggest growth area for team building in the future."

Wallace says that innovation goes two ways.

"As part of a team-building event, one of the challenges was to find something tacky and fake and bring it back to the conference venue," he says. "Teams were given a budget and one team used it to pay for an Elvis Presley busker they found on the street. They bought him back to the conference room and he then put on a show where our group sang and danced the house down.

"Needless to say we ran out of time to finish the team-building event and, to this day, I think the organisers still think I organised Elvis as the 'wow' factor they'd asked for."

That type of "teamwork outside of work" experience is what most companies are looking for, says business event organiser Great Expectation managing director

Margaret Booth.

"They now want something fun and entertaining that has good practical skills as well," Booth says.

"Now it's about looking at each individual organisation and working out what outcomes they need for their business.

"Sometimes team building is used to boost communication between departments so that people can mingle and get to know each other better. It might also just be for those in a leadership role so they can meet other leaders who they do not come into day-to-day contact with.

"Other companies want to see how their staff works under pressure."

Booth says one recent conference featured a choirmaster who demanded conference attendees write a song and then perform it at a formal dinner.

"There was quite a bit of pressure involved getting the words together and for people to agree on a common outcome," she says. "It's a pretty left-field idea for team building but, when people have done it, they say they loved it. Some people you would never expect to sing in front of a microphone just shine like stars.

"When they go back to work, some people even walk around the office singing their song. It's that memorable."

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Dr Phil Jauncey



WORKOUT . . Team 8's Bo Hansen, above, and a Dimensional Thinking team building challenge in progress, opposite page.

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Performance psychologist and mental skills coach Dr Phil Jauncey says the business world is no different from sport.

Teams score more points when their members work towards a common goal.

He says more often than not, workers have a good relationship with those people in their immediate vicinity or department. Problems arise if departments do not integrate.

"Everyone relies on other people in their working life," Jauncey says.

"You need to have a good line of informal communication with others. If you talk to people outside your department to get something done and they are not friendly and you can only talk to them formally, you feel you don't have the support you need to do your job.

"Everyone has to be on the same page.

"When they are, everyone feels they can sacrifice a little bit of their own goal to get to where the company needs to be. Otherwise, staff think: 'Why should I sacrifice my resources to make sure your job gets done?'"

He says teaching workers the art of

sacrifice for the common good is possible through team-building exercises.

For example, he asks teams of workers to build canoes from logs. If teams work together, their canoe floats. If not, they get wet.

"Team building is not just about getting people to talk.

"Everyone knows how to talk," he says.

"It's to teach them that pressure is good, because it means that the current strategy is not working.

"If I can't see a problem, I can't fix it.

"It's being able to say: 'I would like to get this done. How can we get it done?'"

Olympic medallist Bo Hanson says some employees need to be shown what teamwork looks like so they can re-create it at work.

Hanson's national Team 8 program uses rowing to get workmates pulling in the same direction.

"Rowing is one of the few sports that requires the highest levels of team cohesion," he says.

"Each person in the boat is totally reliant on the other team members and therefore must learn to trust and respect the unique

skills and personalities of the whole team.

"When the rowing team is in synch with each other, everyone can feel it and that feeling becomes a strong anchor for when each team member returns to work and reflects on their rowing experience.

"They are better able to appreciate what great teamwork feels like, looks like and sounds like and, as such, is in a position to re-create this more often at work."

He says all the team building in the world will not fix serious company-created flaws.

"Problems that require more than team building are when there are obvious underlying structural issues with how the team is formed and supported within the organisation," Hanson says.

"The environment that the team exists in must be supportive of a team structure. There could be significant skill development issues with individual team members that prevent the team from achieving.

"Whatever issues a team-building program is trying to address, it is critical that the organisation is supportive of helping the teams to make the changes necessary to better performance," he says.



Team rewards

**Craig Wallace,
Dimensional
Thinking, says
team-building
exercises can:**

- » Create positive work culture**
- » Raise awareness of issues**
- » Support key messages at a conference or ongoing program**
- » Allow ideas/concepts to be expressed and learnt through experience and in a safe environment where risk-taking can be encouraged because the consequences are learning**
- » Be a removal from the day to day**
- » Be bonding through a shared experience in a different environment**
- » Be motivational**
- » Allow people to see other sides of work colleagues, especially talents in other areas**
- » Produce respect and awareness of others**
- » Be entertaining, rewarding and a celebration**