End of Year Team Building

Details
Written by Prof. Scott Bellows

Mbugua retained a proud tradition at his manufacturing firm in the Athi River Export Processing Zone. He held an annual team building retreat to show his employees how much he valued them. He desired a well functioning performing team.

Mbugua hired an international consulting firm to run his team building retreat this year. The firm’s fee plus travel and accommodation for the staff cost him a meaningful sum of money. Once onsite at the Ole Polos Kisamis area cottages, the consultants took over and had the staff run around playing games. Mbugua observed that the staff greatly enjoyed some activities and not others. Overall, though, he felt pleased that his investment in the event could reap benefits at his manufacturing facility.

However, following the retreat, Mbugua noticed team interpersonal relationships started to deteriorate. Staff appeared more irritable with each other. Trust between coworkers diminished and staff began viewing management as incapable of bringing order and firm performance.

Unfortunately, Mbugua fell into the trap of so many briefcase consultants and non-tailored international consulting firm team building solutions. Instead of enhancing team cohesiveness, the retreat entrenched already existing divisions, grudges, and cliques. Staff returned to work demotivated and frustrated.

Now that the end of year is upon us, hundreds of Kenyan firms are engaged in the perennial ritual of team building. From Coastal resorts, Lake Naivasha retreats, Maasai Mara camps, to OlePolos area tented camps, Kenyan getaways receive a plethora of corporate bookings this time of year for team building activities.

In follow up to the Business Talk column in the 8 November 2013 Business Daily that detailed actions managers must take before and after team building, let us exam techniques to utilise during team building activities. Team building retreats present unique opportunities in powerful ways, unavailable in an office setting, to shift, introduce, or solidify team norms that you, the executive, require for your groups. Proper team norms enable your team to move through the five stages of team formation as desired: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.

One may breakdown the components of team building into the following four sections: icebreakers, team
cohesiveness, team learning, and team appreciation.

Most team building consultants focus mainly on team cohesiveness games that require plentiful amounts of teamwork. Essentially team cohesiveness builders organise groups around accomplishing a particular task that a single individual could not complete alone. Outdoor activities could include team ropes courses or physically built elements for an expensive retreat. Low cost alternatives encompass playing capture the flag, relay races with water balloons or team legs tied together, or tug of war. Introduce complication by utilising Easter egg hunt-style searches for hidden objects on the property, accomplishing mazes blindfolded, and solving life-size puzzles.

Indoor alternatives comprise trust falls where participants catch each other in pairs, then groups of four, then groups of eight according to who works together in the office. Also, teams can gain extra knowledge of each other through “two truths and a lie” whereby participants choose two facts about themselves and an untrue statement. Team members put forth their three statements in random order and the others on the team try to guess how well they know their colleagues by uncovering which statement was actually a lie. Always remember to debrief with your teams to ensure that the desired team roles get realized by the participants. Trust falls frequently bring out interesting debriefs related to the workplace.

In order to avoid potentially negative outcomes from the team building, read the above mentioned earlier Business Talk article on how to prepare for the retreat. Place members into mini-groups based on diversity of age, gender, ethnicity, geography of origin, personality, and team role behaviour. Then, knowing the type of team members comprising your groups, determine some of their biggest weaknesses that you desire to mitigate or correct.

As an example, if an employee often over talks, bosses others around, or fails to listen at the office, then during the team building, do not let the offensive behaviour deepen existing divisions. Require that employee to be altered by an imaginary affliction in the team cohesiveness game whereby they cannot speak. Then make their portion of the joint activity highly dependent on listening to the instructions of other team members. You might place a blind fold on them such that listening becomes imperative, all the while forbidding them from speaking in the activity. Alternatively, an overly meek participant should be placed in positions of authority or required communication in activities to bolster confidence and increase self efficacy that they can indeed lead or communicate assertively. Remain mindful of how the participants react to roles and imaginary game afflictions.

Team building should also incorporate learning. Many subjects from team roles, personalities, team dynamics, organisation citizenship behaviour, and so on prove pertinent for retreat learning. Unfortunately, assuming your employees listened to 100% of the training, by thirty does following the retreat, they would only retain between 2% and 3% of what they learned. So make learning sessions

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fun. Do not hurl too much information at your staff. Give them memorable bite size chunks of learning. Also make the learning fun by requiring participants to perform skits based on what they learned including the right way and the wrong way of implementing the learning in the workplace.

Additionally, employ scavenger hunts at the conclusion of the training component. Hide clues around the resort and get the hotel staff in on the game. Make your employee participants answer questions based on the learning in order to get the next clue that enables them to run and find the next question and clue hoping to finish first. Many good facilitators also incorporate prizes for employees who remember pieces of the training. The skits, scavenger hunts, and prizes bring humour and reinforce the team norms that you want installed.

Stay tuned next week as Business Talk delineates the remaining two components of team building: icebreakers and team appreciation. Discuss team building techniques with other readers through #KenyaTeamBuilding on Twitter.

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In next week's edition of *Business Talk*, we explore “Further Team Building Techniques”. Read current and prior *Business Talk* articles at [http://www.usiu.ac.ke/on-campus/blog](http://www.usiu.ac.ke/on-campus/blog).