

End of Year Team Building: Part II

Details

Written by Prof. Scott Bellows

Mbugua struggled during long staff meetings as well as strategic planning retreats to keep his employees engaged and interested in discussions. He felt that the yield from staff members did not exceed the costs of holding meetings and retreats if employee boredom blocked meaningful progress.

Inasmuch, we continue last week's discussion on end of year team building that highlighted four components during a team retreat. The first two discussed encompassed team cohesiveness and team learning. The remaining two sections involve icebreakers and team appreciation all while remembering that team building fosters and molds teams to hold the norms that you, as their executive, desire them to behave around.

Icebreakers essentially warm up the group before longer less-interactive sessions. Icebreakers usually generate excitement, movement, or rowdy talking. Psychologically, the human brain is not designed to pay attention to monotony. So icebreakers serve to jolt participants' minds to listen, lessen boredom, or refocus a team towards greater participation.

If blessed with plentiful outdoor space, you could divide your team into two, place a rope down the middle of a playing field, and require participants to do life size renditions of paper, rock, scissors whereby teams all display a unified decision at once, such as "rock", and the losing team must run to a safe area before getting tagged by the winning side. Alternatively, place several rope circles on the ground or folded tarps and require different sub-teams to stand on or in the space. Gradually tighten the space so that team members must hold on and lift each other to all fit within the shrinking area. If they step outside the space, that team loses.

If indoors, you might consider the animal game where every participant chooses an animal and creature symbol representing that animal. If someone chooses a giraffe, as an example, then their symbol might be their hand in the air to symbolize the long neck of the animal. Then, someone starts off the game by doing their symbol first and then they must look at another participant and do their symbol. Any mistake in the order of their own symbol followed by the other person's symbol, or mistake in the symbol, means they are out of the game. Teams laugh consistently at their mistakes as it proves difficult to remember

everyone's representative animal selection.

If forming a new team with new employees, then the name and symbol game may prove appropriate. Place members into a circle. Start off as the leader and say your name and a symbol, like perhaps a soldier's salute. Then all participants must say your name and simultaneously salute. Then the next person in the circle must say your name and symbol and then say their own name and symbol followed by the whole group repeating the latest person's name and symbol, which might be a jump into the air. Then the game proceeds to the third member and continues through the whole team. Later participants have it more difficult since they must remember everyone's name and symbol reciting them in order before stating their own name and created symbol. Research shows repetition helps reinforce memory and name recognition helps a team psychologically form faster.

Finally, the game mingle-mingle proves a popular and fairly common corporate icebreaker game here in Kenya. Participants must stand in a field or a large room whereby they are told to walk amongst themselves, hence the term "mingle". The facilitator yells out a number, then all the members must quickly get into groups comprising that number of people. Any participants unable to find the right number of fellow players or forms with the wrong number of individuals, then they get removed from the game. If the number four gets called out as an example, then participants run together to form groups of four or face elimination. Once the losing individuals are removed, then participants must mingle about the field or space until a new number is announced. Spice up the interaction by also requiring all those wearing a certain color, or in a particular department, or with the same birth month, to join together faster than other sub-teams.

The final component during team building sessions involves team appreciation. Great leaders desire their teams to value each other, celebrate successes, overtly foster togetherness, and recognise accomplishments. Some facilitators require everyone in the group to stand up and say something positive about the person sitting to their immediate right, for example. However, more interactive and less forced ways often work better.

Some options include stapling papers on the back of the shirts of every participant. Once all papers stand on everyone's backs, announce that everyone in the room must write something they appreciate about every other member by placing it respectively on each person's paper. Give them a time deadline, such as five minutes for small teams or ten minutes for larger teams. Then loudly proclaim "ready, set, go". You will see employees rush, jump, and run around writing appreciative comments of affirmation on every other employees' papers. Periodically give them time updates, such as "three minutes remaining", etc. The time aspect makes them hurry and laugh hysterically trying to appreciate all their colleagues before the time deadline runs out.

Upon the conclusion of written appreciation, each employee must pair up with another member and

remove the other person's paper. Then without showing the employee their own paper, the other employee must read the others' papers to them out loud. All pairs do it at the same time and the room gets quite noisy, but impactful by having positive comments from all one's colleagues read to them. After hearing the comments, the pairs give the papers to the owners to keep. You will often see staff reading their papers privately throughout the rest of the retreat amazed at the positive opinions that others hold of them.

Some facilitators try to achieve a similar outcome as the above, but in a quieter slower pace by placing envelopes on a wall in the meeting hall with each envelope containing an employee name written on the outside. Then staff are encouraged to write positive messages of appreciation to colleagues and leave the notes in the envelopes to the corresponding employee name.

You may also arrange for staff to vote on the most outstanding employee for different desirable traits or norms that you seek to emphasize. As an example, if your departments appear fragmented and operate in silos, then have staff vote during the retreat on the most outstanding employee who crosses bridges between departments. Recognize that employee publicly during the retreat.

Please refer to "End of Year Team Building: Part I" for the scientific aspects to watch out for during such team interactions. Discuss team building techniques with other *Business Daily* readers through #KenyaTeamBuilding on Twitter.

In next week's edition of *Business Talk*, we explore "The Value of Smaller Banks". All previous Business Talk articles are available on our [website](#).

Professor Scott serves as the Director of the New Economy Venture Accelerator (NEVA) and Chair of the Faculty Senate at USIU-Africa, www.ScottProfessor.com, and may be reached on: info@scottprofessor.com or follow on Twitter: @ScottProfessor