

## Is the Rhythm Gonna Get You ?

Alternative Training approaches can be stimulating, insightful and energising. Individuals personal and work skills can be actively developed for the sake of the individual and the company as a whole.

Innovative companies can invest in their people by offering them something new. Something that will help them to interact better with each other or that will action a different approach to their work.

In our bid to route out the alternative-to-alternative training approaches, we think that we have found the “funkiest” yet! Sarah Turvey tells all and explains why new and alternative approaches to training can benefit your organisation. Are you ready for a “Sewa Beats” experience.

Imagine this: you and your work colleagues are seated on chairs in a circle with a large djembe drum, (hourglass shaped, wooden, skin-topped drums originating from west Africa), each between your knees awaiting instructions from two men dancing around inside the circle with drums strapped to their bodies. You are about to spend the next one and a half hours coaxing rhythms out of this drum, the likes of which you’ve never seen before. You are not alone in wondering whether this can really have any relevance to your work or benefit you and your organisation. You hope it might be fun though, and it’s certainly a welcome diversion from your desk.

In fact, research by Charles Kaplan in the USA (2000) has shown that most people not only find such activities fun, but that drumming can also improve their mood and promote group cohesiveness. Kaplan’s study, in which the measured responses of 304 female and male American undergraduates were monitored also indicates the benefits of organisational training that employs rhythmic activities identified as an innovative teaching tool in itself. Kaplan concludes from this research that:

“Mood state and group cohesiveness results... suggest that rhythmic drumming training may increase the understanding retention, and open-mindedness of employees to concepts such as team building, workplace cooperation, improved employee relations, and the overall promotion of corporate initiatives... Beneficial team behaviours include the following: communication between team members; monitoring the performance of fellow team members, adopting a team orientation attitude, accepting team norms, recognizing the value of team membership, and performing in a timely fashion leading to a seamless integration of team functions.”

Planly, the benefits of group drumming may be many and varied. Recognising the need for and advantages of creative training approaches, innovative and forward thinking organisations in the global corporate sector are now looking to activities such a group drumming for another perspective on staff and management development and training. Companies large and small are increasingly motivated by the need to develop their potential as organisations comprising

individuals working together for sustainability and growth in the competitive global corporate culture.

In the UK, Sewa Beats is rapidly developing a reputation for its innovative corporate programmes using djembe drumming activities. The word “Sewa” (the ‘e’ pronounced as in ‘sent’), means ‘Joy’ in the Mandingue language of West Africa. A small company consisting of highly skilled, Africa-trained drummers, Sewa Beats is based in London and works throughout the UK and Europe. Originally stemming from their education work within schools, Sewa Beats identified that their skills could also be employed effectively in the professional and personal development of members of corporate organisations and for the development of the organisational structure itself. However, realising the need to approach adults in a business context quite differently to the children they worked with in schools. Sewa Beats has sought to ascertain what aspects of their performance and musical skills are transferable to aid business professionals develop in their working environment.

As a result, Sewa Beats sessions are now tailor-made to suit the specific needs of different organisations with which they work and can deliver bespoke training programmes including drumming, and to ensure that key learning points are always drawn out so that development potential is maximised.

A lot of Sewa Beats success in corporate work to date and their potential development in this area lies in the ethos behind their approach. Traditional West African societies have long seen drumming as a life-enhancing activity, a shared expression of their community spirit. The drum, as an instrument of communication, is central to each and every festivity and ritual. Music and dance have traditionally been used by indigenous West-African people as tools to release themselves from the masks they wear to hide from the real world around them. Rhythm is an essential aspect of the lives of these people. It is present in the manual tasks many people have traditionally laboured at for long hours each and is believed to nourish the worker, providing the ‘food’ essential for production.

In the UK, government and business leaders suggest that without a creative approach businesses will not survive. Recognition that in our complex and competitive modern world alternative training approaches can be refreshing and insightful, is therefore part of creative managerial thinking vital to the success of business organisations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Such approaches are however not only relevant to organisations that have creative enterprise as their focus, or that employ a largely ‘creative’ staff. It is now understood that all organisations consist of individuals whose personal and work skills should be actively developed for the benefit of the individual and the company as a whole. Even within organisations that are made up of many individuals doing routine tasks, encouraging people to approach their work from different angles and relate differently to one another in their work environment can be beneficial. Innovative companies are willing to invest in their employees. They can do this by offering them the chance to try something new. Increasingly the creative industries, such as music, dance and visual art, are being named as having a valuable role to play in collaborations with businesses. Based on music having been shown to be an effective aid to learning, an integral part of the fabric of many cultures, able to influence brain function and mood state and identified as a particular form of intelligence, music is increasingly being used by trainers.

Many of the issues that staff in Call Centres face may be addressed through sessions such as Sewa Beats provides. Motivation, accelerated learning, multi-tasking, dealing with change, developing active listening skills, generating team cohesiveness and creative problem solving are some examples. Through their fun and practical approach, Sewa Beats are able to draw the session delegates into an experience in which they rediscover skills that may have been dormant for years

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or which the delegates had never had the opportunity to develop. Purely by being involved, delegates are expressing their willingness to try a new approach and giving themselves an opportunity to discover aspects of themselves and their colleagues that they may not have otherwise found. While recognising the value of allowing the individual to find their own meaning in the experience. Sewa Beats is also increasingly aware of the need to assist people to interpret their experience and make connections to their workplace and job tasks. Without such relevant interpretation an experience may not reach its full potential value.

Feedback from sessions given by Sewa Beats to organisations such as Shell International, Transco, Clarks International, Cisco Systems and One2One has been overwhelmingly encouraging. Delegates leave looking energised and report feeling inspired by the amount they have achieved in a short time. Drawn from a large variety of companies. 80% of delegates questioned identified the participatory nature of the sessions as a main benefit, and over 30% singled out team building as another major positive result. Leadership issues, increased confidence, stress management, change management and approaching situations from a different perspective were also areas which delegates named as having been favourably influenced by sessions with Sewa Beats.

Comments by delegates include:

‘I believe the sessions... break down barriers between management and employees... Sessions like these, broaden our interests, gets us involved in something different and puts us in sometimes difficult situations where we have to work something.’

‘Brilliant...I found this course was excellent both for team building, relating and obtaining a better working environment and communicating on a more personal level.’

‘Individuals leading was a very good way of highlighting leadership factors.’

‘It was a fun way to put across very powerful messages in a participative way.’

‘The best thing about this workshop was bringing a new experience and mixing it with traditional business issues. Looking at things from a different angle’

Let’s admit it, we all like having fun. So much the better if in so doing we can enhance our working life and that of those around us. As we have seen, research has identified group drumming as a beneficial technique in the facilitation of team building, improving communication and the encouragement of creative problem solving amongst other things. The benefits of such participatory activity for the creative corporation are only limited by the creativity and inspiration of trainers, facilitators and delegates. It’s up to you to take the challenge.

Sarah Turvey

Sarah Turvey, is currently completing a Masters dissertation through APU (Cambridge UK) about the mutual benefits of employing musicians to enhance corporate training programmes.

For more information on Creative call and contact Centre Training, using Drumming Sessions, Please contact:

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