

ONCE MORE WITH FEELING

Overcoming workplace cynicism and terminal embarrassment is essential if team-building events are to be effective. Sarah-Jane North looks at how to inject passion into the proceedings.

Mention the words team building to any group of hard-pressed, stressed out employees and their hearts will probably sink. Tell them they are going on a team-building exercise and their thoughts will undoubtedly be filled with images of their exhausted selves being ordered to climb another mountain, swim across another lake or count the number of pebbles in the park.

Although a level of cynicism towards teams building has crept into the minds of many employees. Employers are more keen than ever for their staff to be able to work well and efficiently together. As a result, the enthusiasm for team-building courses has not waned and training providers are expected to evolve courses and strategies that not only overcome employee cynicism, but prove to the bosses that team-building exercises are still worth the investment.

“Cynicism is the cancer of successful teams”, says Simon Wilsher, managing director of training company The Wilsher Group. “You have deal with it directly. Passion is one of the constants of good teamwork. The best teams are passionate about their cause – whatever it is they are building together – but passion is not a terribly British commodity: people here have a fear of being overtly emotional.”

If we British are too introvert, how then are teams of cynical employees to be persuaded to take advantage of the lasted crop of team-building tools, which swatch the emphasis from the endurance of outdoor pursuits to the creativity of theatrical productions and musical ensembles? The key appears to be secrecy.

“We ask clients not to tell participants beforehand what they will be doing, otherwise they might run away for fear of embarrassing themselves.” says Wilsher of the Inspirational Team Work programme, which requires trainees to take part in music workshops, culminating in an onstage performance. The aim, he says, is to break down communication barriers and build trust and confidence. Telecommunications giant Orange, the Virgin group of companies and credit giant Visa are said to be among the programme’s fans, with Visa so far putting around 300 people through the experience-almost 70 per cent of its workforce.

“Some people’s faces light up when they realise they are not being made to climb a mountain, others’ drop because they believe they have no rhythm.” says Doug Manuel, proprietor of Sewa Beats, describing typical reactions from participants at the start of his drumming workshops. “The cynics believe they are being asked to do something they don’t know how to do. You have to win them over with encouragement that they do have the skills and eventually they realise they are playing an integral role in creating something.”

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EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

Theatrical training company CragRats may not require participants at its events to tread the boards themselves, but the trainers do expect an emotional response to the drama unfolding on stage. CragRats is the largest employer of professional actors in the UK and performs so around a million people every year. It aims to address key issues within teams and companies using dramas and theatrical techniques.

“We do the acting, they do the reacting”, explains marketing manager Dermot Walch. We covers emotional issues, beliefs and attitudes. Our productions will perhaps show the repercussions of team members not following through in their agreed roles of will draw out how teams of people in a company interact with other department and the effects of their actions. We use drama to create an emotional attachment to issues, to pull on people’s heartstrings, which is vital if you want them to carry the training they have been given.

Does this new emphasis on creativity in team-building events mean employees can hang up their walking boots and put away their compasses? It would appear not. Despite outdoor team activities receiving some bad press recently – specially following a TV documentary in which mutinied att being put though a particularly tough , military style course – and firms questioning What there such training achieves anything, outdoor events remain as popular as ever. However, they are now offered an just one element in a range of training options.

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