

Musical lessons in management

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Learning to drum could also improve your business skills.

(CNN) -- If you've mastered raft-building and rock-climbing and the mention of paintball triggers Vietnam-style flashbacks, then you might be ready for the latest challenge in team-building exercises.

Sewa Beats, a Swiss-based management training company, believes the best way to teach executives how to do business is to teach them traditional African drumming.

Corporate training has come a long way from the days when staff would sit in classrooms and doze off in front of pie charts while being lectured in the dry subtleties of management theory.

But Sewa founder Doug Manuel says that drumming allows participants to develop useful business skills, such as teamwork, cooperation, creativity and delegation -- and have fun at the same time.

"Training courses traditionally were where someone was standing at the front of the room with a flip chart, and that's not how people learn," said Manuel.

"We learn by doing, we don't learn by someone standing there and telling us how things should be."

In a typical training session each participant is equipped with a typical African drum called a "Djembe." They then form a circle, with each individual learning simple beats which are then brought together to create a more complex composition.

When a group has mastered the basics of drumming they are also taught to lead each other in developing their own compositions.

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Sewa Beats – Press Book – Page 1/2

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Sewa has already drummed up an impressive list of converts to its methods with Shell, Orange and Coca Cola among its clients.

Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk is one of the latest companies to sign up, with CEO Lars Sorensen among the employees taking part.

"Our kind of leadership and the philosophy of the company is a more holistic view on business," said Sorensen.

"The business takes a larger role in society and that means as business people we have to take a holistic view of ourselves, that we're more than the brains and the medicines we're making, we're body and soul as well. That's what I think we can get from this."

But not everybody is impressed by the holistic approach to management training.

Management Today editor Matthew Gwyther warned that African drumming was merely the latest example of a trend towards increasingly "gimmicky" training methods that has also seen companies sending their employees on bread-baking and stand-up comedy courses

"One is very tempted to say it's all very Emperor's New Clothes," said Gwyther.

"I just hope that if they're being flown in from all over the world at the enormous expense of the company and their shareholders they're doing something else as well as sitting down playing their tom-toms together."

Nonetheless, Gwyther recognized that companies could no longer get away with boring their employees with training days at country hotels.

"The truth of the matter is that if people are bored then they learn absolutely nothing," he said.

"Companies have got to come up with something that is more stimulating and more interesting because their staff are just bored senseless by the traditional way of doing it."

<http://www.cnn.com/2005/BUSINESS/03/08/corporate.drumming/index.html>