

## TEAM BUILDING

My memories of teambuilding events involved being whisked off to places like Alton Towers and forced to endure afternoons of cringe-worthy brainstorming activities, where you find yourself utterly inhibited by being sat between the chief executive and the 'brown-nosing' head of sales, in a room with no windows and a few dog-eared pastries. Not really an experience to get the creative juices flowing.

Fortunately today, teambuilding and motivation events are a far cry from this almost Dickensian image. The modern event is about accessibility and inclusion of the workforce, and most of all about inspiring your employees.

You have to balance fun and work, but essentially you have to ensure that no individuals are isolated.

For example, a workshop with mixed departmental teams has to focus on something that everyone can contribute to equally, otherwise it gives an impression that one team is more important or vocal than another. Similarly, not everyone can run 10k or climb a mountain, so don't make them do it.

### **Pleasing everyone**

However, we believe that you can't please all the people all the time. If 85% of the employees enjoy the day then you're happy. Again it's all about balance. By using mixed teams you'll usually get one or two that are happy to perform tasks that others may consider embarrassing, but you'll also get people who are happy to solve set riddles or questions that could get the team more points.

### **Involving the team**

For Sandy Taylor, head of organisation development and change management at T-Mobile, getting an event that works is about getting people involved from the start. "It is vital that staff members are involved in the original 'design' of the event – to show that their opinions are valuable to the company, as well as increasing the chance that they will use the event for their own personal benefit as well as the company's."

Simon Lethbridge, experience director at Jack Morton Worldwide, takes things a step further. "Before designing an event you should ascertain what the existing team dynamics are – what are their strengths and weaknesses?" he says. "What are their expectations? What would you like to get out of this team experience individually as well as collectively? These insights should be combined with clarifying what the purpose of the event is – what do you want your team to be doing differently (attitudinally and behaviourally) as a result of the event?"

Once this has been ascertained, there are three main routes you can take:

**Ice breakers** – for example, group drumming in a plenary session. This is an effective theatrical

technique for loosening people up, but does have its limitations. It's a good choice, however, if your time and resources are limited and can usually be relied upon to stir things up and make the audience come alive.

**Customised activity** – these are off-the-shelf, well-practised solutions. They have been used many times before, but can be given a new twist by being approached in a creative way and can reinforce event messaging if you think about applying them intelligently.

**Tailor made** – this option requires much more intensive planning and can have a greater cost, but the quality of results reflect this.

## **External Help**

Planning all this yourself can be way too much for most companies and so outside help can be a necessity. “For the last couple of years we have used an external organisation for the ‘fun’ part of the day because it’s very important if you want employees to really enjoy it and make it work,” says Campbell. “An external company will be used to running these tasks, so they have a proven formula and have charismatic people to make sure everyone gets involved.”

If you’re still suffering the ‘cringe factor’, then the chances are that you’re simply failing to surprise your audience or that poor technique and delivery is leading to boredom and retreat into non-participation. Teambuilding events need to go beyond the ordinary. This is increasingly important as people’s tolerance and attention levels decrease.

So in short, whether you’re planning fire walking, circus clowning, cooking or even a rodeo, you need to be challenging your audience. Surprise and delight them and you’ll find you are far more likely to get a positive response, a cherished memory and a better return on investment. But make sure whatever you do fits with your corporate image and supports the overall aim of the event. And remember – you can only achieve this successfully by getting to know your audience, finding out their likes and dislikes, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.