

[WORKPLACE WELL-BEING: DION KLEIN]

Teaming up for work and play

Team-building

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THE OLD saying "Rome was not built in a day" holds true for successful companies, sports teams and government departments. Many success stories have similar underpinning foundations responsible for their milestones — the people involved worked together for an extended period of time. They not only worked together as fellow employees, but they also bonded by knowing a little bit about each other, their personalities and their lives.

In today's environment one cannot separate work and life; as I have highlighted in previous articles. Sport offers the best example of success. Locally, the Canberra Capitals and the Brumbies have made championship berths after many years of the team working together on and off the field. We have also seen previous championship teams lose their starting line-up and having to go through a period of the new players getting to know each other before eventually finding themselves at the championship level after a couple of seasons.

Though Australia is known for its great sports teams, it is still difficult to find workplaces that truly exemplify teamwork. Bigger government departments and systems tend to be fragmented due to sheer size and the large number of staff. This in itself is a challenge in creating a sense of a team-drive entity and workforce.

What is team-building? It is a term that is used in many situations, especially when a department is in crisis. For some it may mean kicking off new project teams, incorporating different methods or cultures, or literally building teams. Other may find it synonymous with leadership training or people-skills development. Team-building is a relationship-building exercise; creating a work culture that values collaboration. Having a good relationship with people takes interaction over time. It is not a one-day or weekend event.

Organisations cannot send their staff to a one-day or weekend retreat and expect that by Monday morning they will have employees feeling warm-and-fuzzy, working as a team, and resolving conflict (or, better yet, having no conflict). The staff may have learnt and experienced the foundational tools to work better as a team, but there have to be short-term and long-term programs that continuously encourage staff to work together. These initiatives may not only take the form of work-related projects.

Primary and secondary physical education



Champion side: the Brumbies know the benefits of teamwork.

curricula include goals such as developing team-building skills by working with others through physical activity. Sometimes we, as adults, forget this basic skill and need to be retrained. Group fitness and physical activity (and not necessarily through sport) is a great way to build teams in the workplace. Another goal in the curriculum is to work cooperatively with others to accomplish a set goal in both competitive and non-competitive situations (e.g., baseball, choreographing a dance). A similar goal can be achieved in the workplace using innovative programs (e.g., in-house challenges, employee-cast plays or choir).

Long-term activities (minimum 6-8 weeks) are ideal to allow employees to get to know one another. Team-building through health and fitness activities has been proven locally but elsewhere such as in Britain, Africa, Canada and the United States. Anecdotal evidence from previous ACT Corporate Health and Fitness Challenges indicated that even a four-week program which allowed employees to participate in group exercise increased team morale and gave the opportunity for people to "walk and talk" about things not related to work. Staff found out personal aspects of each other

thereby allowing friendships to form. Sometimes conflicts were resolved just from walking together as a group over the four-week period.

Another activity gaining global recognition is "drumming" in the workplace. Every person is given a drum or a percussion instrument and the participants sit in a circle. A facilitator leads the group in the drumming activity. A sense of team spirit and feelings of well-being are experienced by the employees. As noted by one company, participants come to feel better about themselves and the group; they become more confident and comfortable working with others toward common goals (www.villagerhythms.com).

Appropriately structured team activities can enhance group dynamics, decision-making and creative problem-solving which will have an impact on employees long after the event is over. These skills will carry over into their personal lives and possibly other working environments.

Team-building is an ongoing event. Do not forget to include play and fun in building your team. Teams that play together, have fun together, work together much more efficiently and effectively than those that are stuck in the drudgery of work.

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TEAM SPIRIT

Effective team-building events can:

- Reveal leadership qualities
- Offer a common ground to foster social interaction
- Boost confidence
- Build team spirit
- Improve fitness and well-being in the workplace
- Enhance employee relations and communication throughout the department

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