

Set goals before picking a team-building event

BY BARBARA MARQUAND / CORRESPONDENT

What do rafting down rivers, climbing ropes, inventing new wines and competing in game shows have in common?

They're all activities companies can use for team building.

A variety of companies specialize in coordinating team-building events. They help you plan and provide transportation, instruction and equipment. Before you contact a team-building event coordinator, though, first think about what you want to accomplish. Do you just want people to get to know one another? Or do you want to target a specific problem, such as lagging motivation or distrust between departments?

Secondly, think about your participants and what they would enjoy doing. Consider demographics, their interests and skills before selecting a team-building event.

Physically demanding challenges, such as ropes courses, can build trust among team members and boost confidence by helping people stretch their boundaries and do things they never would have thought possible. But physical events aren't for everybody.

"You don't want to take a team of senior citizens who aren't athletic on a strenuous outdoor activity," says John Gill, president and founder of Escape Tours Inc. in Sacramento and San Francisco. His company takes groups on a variety of outdoor adventures, including biking, hiking, wine tasting, ropes courses and kayaking for half-day to four-day events.

Make sure you choose an activity that everyone will be able to do without getting discouraged. The last thing you want is for team members to feel alienated because



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A simulated game show, with questions that relate to work, is one way to build team spirit

they aren't able to keep up with the group.

Sometimes just a day of fun outdoors can work wonders. Gill recently took a group from a Bay Area high-tech company on a one-day sea kayaking trip, which included instruction. The company wanted team members to get to know one another so they could work together well. On the way to the event, everyone on the van was quiet and a little unsure, Gill recalls. But after a day of kayaking, it was a different story. "On the way back, they were giggling and laughing and talking about all the good times that were had," he says.

Outdoor activities don't have to be athletic. "One of my favorite events is a photo scavenger hunt," says Bryan Quinn of Bryan Quinn Productions in Sacramento. Quinn gives teams Polaroid cameras, a book of clues, and then sets them loose in an area, such as Old Sacramento or the Capitol building. They must decipher the clues to find and take pictures of particular things within a time limit.

Quinn's company also stages games with challenges based loosely on reality

television shows, and he produces The Ultimate Game Show — loose re-creations of almost any game show on television. Game show questions can be based on trivia or company information. A game show with questions based on sales training materials, for instance, can help an organization accomplish two objectives: build team spirit and reinforce training.

Team building can be extravagant or simple, says Hunt Drouin, owner of Capital Event Management, which coordinates team-building and special events. Among his favorite activities is a wine-blending event. He takes a group to a winery, where participants are divided into teams and given materials to create their own varieties of wine. Then they create commercials and are judged on taste as well as marketing.

Another popular event of Drouin's is a boat-building competition. Each team is given the same materials and in a limited time must construct a boat and then test it on the water.

"One of the most important things is to get out of the office," Drouin says. "It helps to get people off guard. A team-building event should never be in a conference room."

Once you have chosen a team-building partner and selected a suitable activity that meets your budget, pick a date and market the event to employees. But don't call it a "team-building" event, a term likely to elicit groans.

After the event, keep the momentum going, Drouin says. Follow up with a short survey of participants, and do a simple activity to remind people of the fun they had, such as an ice cream social or a slide show of the pictures that were taken at the event.