

A hand is shown reaching up towards a silver carabiner attached to a yellow and red rope. The background is a textured, rusted metal wall. The text 'THE NITTY GRITTY' is overlaid in white, and 'OF TEAM BUILDING' is overlaid in green.

THE NITTY GRITTY OF TEAM BUILDING



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The Nitty Gritty of Team Building

You've made up your mind that you're going to do it; you're finally going to get it right. You're going to have a successful team building experience. But how do you get started? Why isn't there a roadmap on how to host a successful team building event? Well, actually, there is. And it begins with setting goals.

Defining Goals

You shouldn't have a team building experience just because you have heard they're important for keeping a healthy team attitude (even though that's true – they do!). The odds are...your workplace isn't as perfect as you'd like to think it is, and there are a few areas in which you know your team can improve. Once you've admitted that you have room for growth, you're ready to start preparing for your team building experience. Begin by setting some goals and then choose team-building activities that will help your team achieve those goals. But keep in mind you can't just pick any objective; you have to make sure you've clearly defined them.

Qualities of Good Objectives

A well-formed goal should always have certain attributes. Hoevermeyer ([High-Impact Interview Questions](#), 1993) ascribes five particular traits to a good goal:

1. Clear
2. Specific
3. Measurable
4. Realistic
5. Achievable

When people who are trying to achieve a goal encounter confusion, they typically exhaust their energy trying to understand the goal rather than putting that effort into achieving it. Clarity and specificity enable people to concentrate on the actual objective. A goal must also be measurable because if you can't measure it, how will you know if they've accomplished it? Unrealistic and unachievable goals lead to failure and discouragement, so be sure that your goals are reasonable. Hersey and Blanchard (Management of Organizational Behavior) list similar qualities and include the word "relevant" in their description. There are few things worse than pouring effort into something only to find out that it was pointless or unprofitable.

Individual Goals vs. Team Goals

You're doing a team building exercise, not an individual building exercise, so make sure to involve everyone. As obvious as that sounds, it is something that can be easy to forget. If your goals don't require everyone's involvement, it's likely that a few individuals will take control, leaving the others out. Make the goals so that individuals cannot do them on their own. It is important, however, that the team emphasis does not make individuals feel like they can't contribute. It should feel like each team member has individually contributed his or her own unique skills toward reaching the goal. Then, once you've set your goals, get started with the team building. And most importantly, remember to have fun!

Debriefing

When you finish with all of the activities, you're ready for the most important part. This is where everything your team has done begins to make sense – where you help them connect the dots and understand why it was necessary to do all those fun activities. It's the debriefing session, and it's the key to the entire team building experience.

Three Central Elements of Debriefing

1. It promotes an ongoing discussion about the day.
2. It directs team members to unpack what they learned from each activity.
3. It encourages team members to apply what they've learned to their own workplaces and lives.

How to Make It a Success: The Dos and Don'ts

THE SETTING:

DO

- ✓ Meet somewhere calm and comfortable
- ✓ Ensure everyone can easily hear each other
- ✓ Gather in a circle or semi-circle

DON'T

- ✗ Choose a location with distractions or obstacles
- ✗ Gather so closely that people feel cramped

THE QUESTIONS:

DO

- ✓ Encourage thoughtful discussion
- ✓ Listen well
- ✓ Ask open-ended questions

THE "WHAT" QUESTIONS

"What happened today?"

"What was your experience during your team building exercises?"



THE QUESTIONS CONT'D:

THE “SO WHAT” QUESTIONS

“What was important?”

“Why did we choose this activity?”

THE “NOW WHAT” QUESTIONS

“What did you learn?”

“How will you use what you learned today at work and in your life?”

DON'T

- ✗ Talk the whole time
- ✗ Demand or expect a “right” answer

THE PROCESS:

DO

- ✓ Give everyone a chance to respond
- ✓ Promote a low-pressure environment
- ✓ Write down all the answers

DON'T

- ✗ Force people to respond
- ✗ Allow anyone to judge the responses either positively or negatively



As the debriefing session goes along, don't forget that people will be getting tired from the day's events and will not want this debriefing session to drag on. In other words, keep it brief. The length will vary depending on how large the group is and how much they are participating, but, in most cases, 5-15 minutes should suffice. When time comes to end the session, find a way to give it closure so that such a good day doesn't end abruptly and leave them feeling odd.

Measuring Success

Now that you've reached the end of your team building experience, it's time to reflect. Perhaps some of you are dreading this part – the part where you get into all the icky statistics and numbers. Or maybe you're a numbers person, and this is what you've been looking forward to the whole time – a chance to dig deeply into what just happened and mathematically determine how successful your plan was. To the first group of people, you can take a deep breath and be relieved. To the others, don't be too disappointed. It is time to evaluate how well the session went, but it's not time to get out your college math textbooks.

It probably didn't take numbers or statistics for you to see that your team members had a few kinks to work out, so it shouldn't take them for you to see that things have improved. You can't expect the team building experience to transform your workplace into paradise, but, ideally, you should be able to see that the individuals are revitalized and eager to attack the areas causing issues in the workplace. Maybe you're still wondering what exactly you should be looking for in the session. Were the team members doing any of the following?

- Laughing
- Participating
- Talking to each other
- Smiling
- Wanting to continue the exercises

If you see these things happening – good. Those things most likely mean they were having fun, and fun is a very good thing. Fun is, if nothing else, the ultimate measuring stick for a team building experience. Fun creates memories, makes people happier, brings people closer and helps form new relationships.

Here is what it comes down to: You will just know. You know your team members. (And if you don't know them, use the team building as a way to get to know them). When it's all over, you'll know if it was a success. Try not to expect immediate and drastic changes in the work environment, but watch as the days, weeks and months go by and enjoy the benefits of all the work that went into the team building experience!

