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## **Building Great Teams**

### **Outcome-Focused Team Building: What ... No Tests, Ropes, or Safety Nets?**

Authors: Lonny Stanford, M.S. & Lynn D. Johnson, Ph.D.

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“I’ve got this problem with Bob, who has a ‘Blue’ personality. I’m a ‘Red’. I know I could respond to Bob in the most productive manner, if only I had my workbook from the team building seminar I took last month. How can anybody remember all that stuff anyway?” Sound familiar? Team building can become either a waste of time and money, inspiring yet not of much use in real work situations, or both inspiring and practical in its application to the corporate environment.

Chances are your organization has invested, or plans to invest, in team building services. Often times this is in response to recent organizational change, people problems in the workplace, or low productivity. Too often, the team building investment falls into the category of being inspiring yet not of much use at work. Personality tests aimed at fostering better communication and ropes courses developed to promote trust and leadership make for fun and interesting experiences, but have little utility in the real world.

#### **Why Not Personalities?**

Team building designed around personality tests is not only time consuming and costly, it also lacks strength in real work application. Many popular personality tests tend to be unreliable and often end up reading as horoscopes might read. It is true that personality does affect the way we handle problems and adapt to stress, but many of us carry many personalities with us to fit each situation. The way we adapt to stress at home may look quite a bit different than at the workplace, or when we are in social situations. Our ability to adapt to different situations is phenomenal.

In order for team building designed around personality tests to work, we must try to remember every team member’s personality type and respond to them in specific ways in various situations. Besides, when teams are working well, it seems personality does not play a role how team members communicate. It is only when difficulties arise that we see others’ personalities getting in the way.

#### **Why Not High Adventure?**

Ropes courses can have a profound and inspiring effect on the ability of teams to cooperate, trust each other, and accept leadership. However, these courses do not address the real problems in the workplace that need to be solved. Psychologists have known for decades that trust and cooperation is developed and nurtured through emotional support, working to solve problems, and celebrating success. Rarely do we see a psychologist build trust by blindfolding the client and asking them to fall backward or climb and traverse a series of ropes. Yet, we see corporations spending thousands of dollars toward fun and interesting, but unproven, techniques that do not transfer well into the workplace.

We encourage high adventure so long as it is paired with a real-world component. How will you develop a carry-over to the workplace? If you don’t have a strategy, the high adventure is in danger of being a very expensive entertainment.

### **Real Work Settings**

While improved communication is being addressed through the use of unreliable and easily forgotten test results, and trust and cooperation is being developed somewhere in the great outdoors, outcome-focused team building works on real work problems in real work settings. Not only do corporate teams become more cooperative and trusting through the outcome-focused process, valuable time and money get put to good use solving the real problems that necessitated teambuilding services. This is the main benefit of outcome-focused team building. Secondary, but equally important, is the ease with which team members can utilize the outcome-focused skills they learn in addressing future problems and growing needs.

### **Real Work Problems**

The outcome-focused process begins with a discussion of all problems relevant to each team and its functions within the corporation. Next, goals answering the needs of each problem are listed. These goals then become prioritized and one goal is selected that is determined by the team to have the greatest influence on solving the most problems addressed. This prioritized goal from each team is then given incremental sub-goals and becomes their guide throughout the duration of the process.

### **Problem-Focus vs. Outcome-Focus**

The question might be asked, "What is an outcome-focus, and why not use a problem-focus to solving difficulties in the workplace?" By default, most of us fall back on a type of problem-focus when we desire change within ourselves or at the workplace. By taking a problem-focused approach, attention is given to assessing and explaining problems, examining past failures, locating weaknesses and lack of resources, and eventually blaming other people as the source of the problem. Such a process makes teamwork break down. Future meetings, initially designed to assess progress made toward problem resolution, will often end up repeating the same unproductive problem-focused cycle. An outcome-focus should be utilized to maximize the potential for a more time and cost efficient method of problem resolution.

### **The True Equation of Motivation**

Outcome-focused problem solving gives attention to the clarification of goals, examining past successes, locating strengths and resources, and eventually acknowledging other people as contributors to success. It is through this process that motivation reaches its potential. We know motivation can not be enhanced by incentives alone. The effects of incentives are short lived. Team members need to see the benefits of achieving a particular goal; they also need to believe that goal can be achieved. These two elements of benefits and perceived likelihood of success make up the total motivation equation.

Outcome-focused team building places emphasis on the benefits of reaching the goal coupled with pinpointing team resources inside and outside of the organization, previous successes of the team and its individuals, and recent progress the team has already made toward reaching their goal. Through these efforts the total equation of motivation is satisfied as team members account for their past successes and progress they have already made toward the goal. The goal is then perceived as more attainable and easier to achieve because it is within their perspective grasp.

### **Who is to Blame for Our Success?**

One of the most powerful activities in the outcome-focused process is when team members are given the opportunity to describe the resources each other individual provides to the success of the team. Who needs ropes when frank, honest congratulations from your work associates is available? While we may feel like we walk a lonely tightrope at work, outcome-focused teams help us to see the valuable resources around us and allow us to celebrate past successes with all contributors.

### **Increasing the Frequency of Success**

As we utilize an outcome-focus when working with teams, attention can be given to the process of repeating our

successes with more frequency, and in bigger and better ways. Although team building in this manner can be fun and exciting, we promise no safety nets are needed.

**About the authors:** Lynn Johnson is an organizational and counseling psychologist and president of Solutions Consulting Group, Inc.. Lonny Stanford specializes in team building and training in organizations and is an associate of Solutions Consulting Group, Inc., Salt Lake City, Utah. They can be reached at (801) 261-1412.