

Put some fun in your game

Corporate team building goes beyond the ordinary

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Imagine throwing yourself out of an airplane in the name of team building. Maybe hanging off a cliff in a race to the top of a mountain is more your style.

Corporate team building has been getting a lot more creative in recent years as companies try to infuse a sense of adventure and fun into the process of building better teams, according to companies who are trying to stretch the limits beyond traditional treasure hunts and boardroom puzzles.

Key Adventures, for example, is a U.K.-based company that offers everything from parachuting in teams to rock climbing races to whitewater rafting and other extreme sports meant to foster team development.

Many other companies have adopted games based on reality television series like Survivor, The Amazing Race, The Apprentice and others.

In Calgary, a small billing-services company called Cognera Corp. recently decided to use a Mission Impossible-themed team builder called The Go Game. It's a high-tech game using text messages and cellphones where teams are given missions to accomplish as undercover "actors" on the street try to thwart them.

In one typical scenario, teams have to chase a crying bride-to-be dressed in full wedding gown and veil through the streets of downtown to console her after finding her outside a church.

"People spend a lot of time having meetings about teamwork and co-operation, but when you take them out of the office to do something that's a lot of fun, they have a much better understanding of it," says Anjali Jameson, executive producer of San Francisco-based The Go Game.

"When you get back to the office, there's this sense of camaraderie that you really couldn't get from a day in a conference centre or even a normal scavenger hunt," says Jameson.

She originally embarked on the concept as a game that was open to any group of people to play, but quickly saw the opportunity to target the corporate sector. Since then, her company has been developing games across North America.

Kate Joslyn, president of Cognera, says the growing popularity of games such as The Go Game are reflective of the trend towards companies using more "value-added" activities in their efforts to attract and retain the best and brightest.

"We use a number of value-added activities with a big focus on personal growth and development," says Joslyn. The Go Game was also an opportunity to integrate clients as part of their team since the event was open to client companies.

"It really breaks down the barriers between service provider and customer. It really makes us part of one big team," she says.

Megan Scott, who handles human resources functions for Cognera, agrees the infusion of fun and adventure into the workplace is a huge benefit for promoting creativity and team cohesion.

"Money and vacation time are not necessarily motivators anymore; they're just expected," says Scott. "Employees are starting to ask what else you can offer me and we're starting to answer that question by focusing on a fun work atmosphere."

Other strategies the company uses as it strives to become one of Canada's top 100 employers of choice include laser-tag competitions, **development of an in-house health and wellness program using Random Acts of Fitness**, lunch learning sessions, participation in fundraising events and an employee-led social club.

"We believe the new trend in the workplace should be a focus on value-added activities," says Scott.

Being a relatively small company with 36 employees, it can be hard to beat competitors' compensation structures in an escalating pay environment.

"It's becoming really difficult to compete with other employers on salary, benefits and vacation alone, so we decided to find a really unique way of attracting and retaining top talent," Scott adds.

Mike Choboter, a Cognera employee, says it was a nice chance to mingle with clients and co-workers while having a lot of fun in the process. One team member who had taken part in a parade in Lethbridge had RCMP red serge regalia, so they donned the red coats during the game in the name of teamwork and fun.

"It was hilarious," says Choboter. "There we were running around downtown with these red coats on and cardboard hats. Everybody stopped to ask what we were doing."

The sense of camaraderie was obvious when everybody got back to the office and reviewed the video footage of the game. He recommends using this kind of strategy to build better teams. "I know everybody would definitely do it again in a heartbeat," says Choboter.

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