

Team-Building Tactics to Motivate Employees

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Introduction

Every business owner is also the coach of a fast-moving team. A key component for success is cultivating talent, managing personalities and bringing out the best in every employee.

Easier said than done. Amid the day-to-day hustle and bustle of running a business, it can be challenging to see the bigger picture—and connect the dots between members of your team and how they work together. In this guide, our experts highlight tips and tactics to foster an environment where people are happy, motivated and well-equipped to do their best each day—whether they're walking through the front door of the office or signing on virtually.

Want to bring your team closer? Try listening exercises or a scavenger hunt. How can you build a leadership culture? Open the floor to new voices. Think you're ready for a company-wide retreat? Believe it or not, the food and drink you serve can be just as important as the agenda.

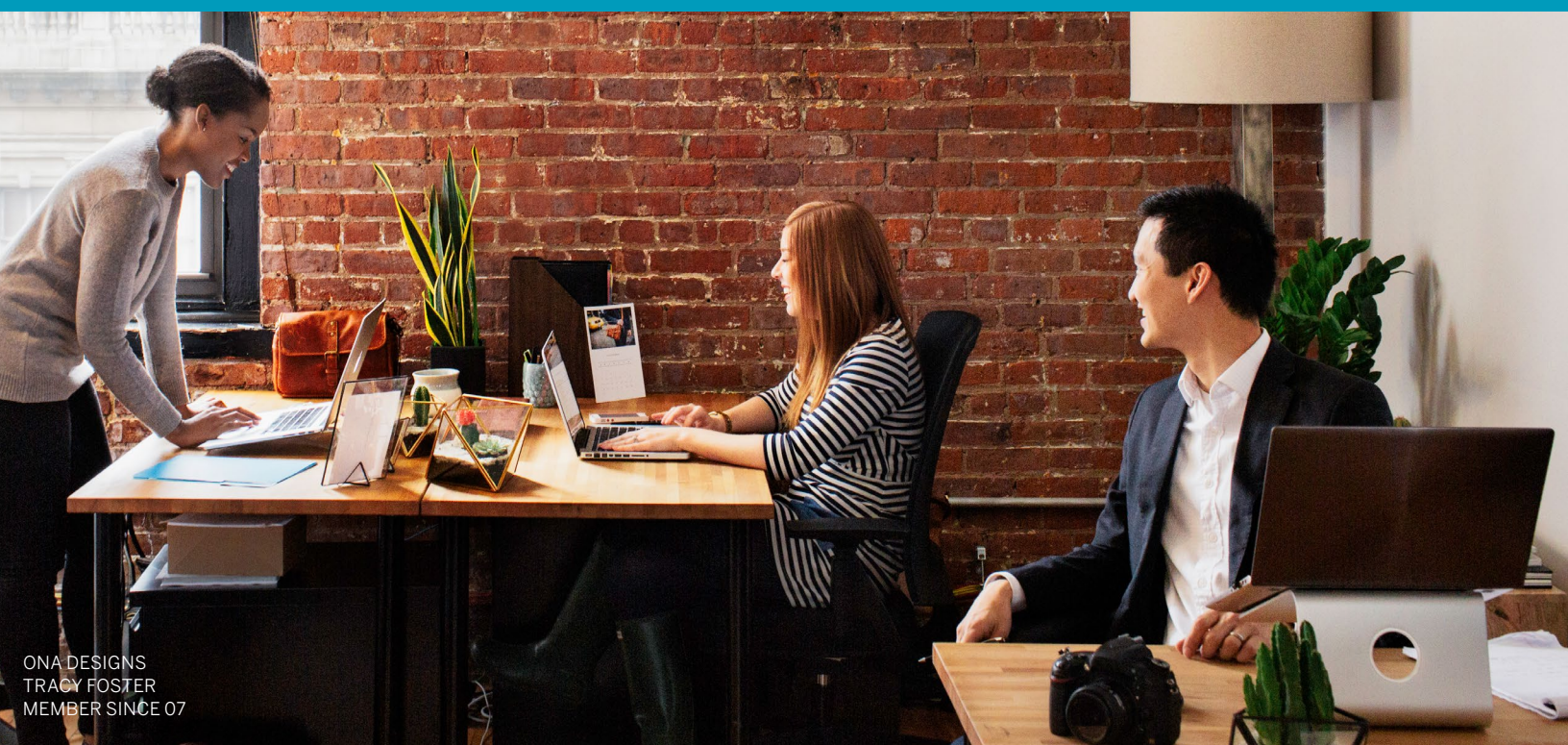
Hiring right is essential, but it's just the start. How you manage and guide your team along the way can position your company for real growth—and make showing up to work a whole lot more fun.



By Rod Kurtz

Editor-at-large, OPEN Forum

Rod Kurtz is Editor-at-Large of OPEN Forum and a New York-based media strategist. For more than a decade, Kurtz served as a journalist and advocate on behalf of entrepreneurs—before becoming one himself. Today, he works with a variety of brands and organizations, on all things content and storytelling. His work has appeared in publications including The New York Times and CNNMoney, and he appears as a regular guest on TV and radio, including CNN, MSNBC and the Today show. He is also a guest lecturer in entrepreneurship at The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.



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5 Team-Building Exercises to Help Your Employees Bond

Looking to re-energize your employees? These simple team-building exercises can help workers learn more about each other and work together to achieve your company's goals.

By Anita Campbell

Founder and CEO, Small Business Trends

A business may only succeed if its team is able to work as a cohesive unit. Sure, everyone has their own strengths and responsibilities. But they still need to be able to weave those strengths together effectively to achieve a company's main objectives.

That's where team building comes in.

There are several different team-building exercises and activities you can use to build cooperation, trust and bonds among your team. Plus, they can be really fun!

Here are five team-building exercises you can use to help strengthen your team.

1 Active listening

Active listening can embody a number of different activities. One of the most common and effective active-listening exercises involves physically showing whoever you're communicating with that you're actually listening. So instead of quietly sitting still while they talk, you could nod, smile or show another form of



acknowledgement. Try this exercise—after listening to a presentation or discussion, have your team summarize, in their own words, what was said.

This team-building exercise can help encourage your employees to really hear one another and improve communication throughout your workplace. When some might feel they're not being heard or others might get distracted during regular communication, this method can really help encourage people to begin listening and communicating clearly.

2 Crossing the line

The main part of this team-building exercise is played with just two people. But the real value can come from the discussion afterward. So consider doing this at a

full meeting or similar event where your whole team is present and can be broken off into teams of two.

To play, choose two team members and have them stand in a large circle with a line down the center, with one standing on each side of the line. Tell them their goal is to get the other person to cross over the line using any means other than physically dragging them across. They can bargain, persuade or even bribe.

After the game is completed, have your entire team discuss what happened during the game. One of the benefits of this game is demonstrating to your employees the best ways to persuade and influence people positively. For instance, it's often more effective to ask the other person what they want

rather than just making demands or offering them something that's really of no interest to them.

It can also show your employees the value of community over straight competition.

3 Find the common thread

The goal of this team-building exercise is to have your team members find some of the things they have in common. To play, break your team up into small groups and instruct each group to find one thing they all have in common. They might find that they all have dogs, love Motown music or regularly watch the same TV show. When each group has found at least one commonality, bring them all back together and have them announce what they discovered about each other.

Once completed, you should have a team that knows a bit more about their fellow employees. Some will now realize they share common bonds. Some might even realize that the preconceived notions or assumptions they had made about their fellow co-workers were incorrect.

4 Scavenger hunt

Scavenger hunts can be popular activities for parties and various other gatherings. But they can also be effective as team-building exercises. To put a business spin on this activity, split up your team by department, then set up clues related to your company. Alternatively, you can

split up teams so everyone has to work with people in other departments, if your goal is to encourage inter-departmental cooperation.

The benefit of this exercise can be to get your team to work together to create a healthy, competitive atmosphere. You can either use the scavenger hunt to improve teamwork among people who work together every day, or to get people who don't work together to form bonds and improve communication.

If you use company-centric clues, it can also help increase their knowledge about your business in general.

5 Truth and a lie

The purpose of this game, sometimes called "two truths and a lie," is to help your team to get to know one another better. To play, have each member of your team come up with three statements to share about themselves. Two of those statements should be true, and one should be a lie. When each person shares their three statements, have the rest of your team discuss which one they think is the lie.

By playing, you can encourage more open communication throughout your team, because everyone will know just a bit more about who they work with. Some might even be surprised to find out some things they never knew about each other. And that can help improve the working relationship your team members have with one another overall.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anita Campbell

Anita Campbell is the founder and CEO of Small Business Trends, a website and magazine providing news, insights and resources to 2 million small-business owners and entrepreneurs each month.



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Could Your Team Survive an ‘Escape Room’?

Victor Blake’s Escape the Room experience—where groups are challenged to solve puzzles to escape a locked room—is rewriting the book on team-building exercises.

By Katie Morell
Independent Journalist

Take a moment to imagine yourself walking into a church and hearing a door lock behind you. Your heart starts to pound and you realize you’ll do anything to get out. You aren’t sure how, so you walk over to the church confessional, open the door and BAM!—you are staring down a pathway to a secret cave. Now assume that you aren’t alone, but surrounded by co-workers, and you must work together to reach the ultimate goal: Freedom.

Welcome to Escape the Room’s Dig room—a mixture of, as the company puts it, “Indiana Jones and *The*

Da Vinci Code” where participants are tasked with solving a puzzle for how to get out of a locked room within 60 minutes. (Note: There is an emergency button you can push at any time to get out.) Escape the Room is one of a handful of businesses in the new “escape room” space where individuals, families and co-workers purchase tickets to get locked in a room together for an hour and have to solve a unique puzzle of how to get out.

“Remember in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when Indiana Jones had to find an amulet and staff and have the sun

shine through it to open the door to the cave?” asks Victor Blake, Escape the Room’s founder. “It’s just like that. You don’t have a map or instructions; you have to work together to figure it out.”

Blake somewhat stumbled on the company idea. A New York-based longtime puzzle lover, he was traveling quite a bit as part of his finance job and downloading puzzle games on his phone. He thought a real-life version would be fun to try, so on a whim in October 2013, he rented a 300-square-foot space inside another office, created his own game with props and shared the news via word of mouth through friends.

“I didn’t have a website, but we sold out by the second weekend,” he says. “I started moving stuff back and

forth from my house to the rented space in the back of a cab while keeping my full-time job. I didn’t think this would become a new business; I thought it would be just a fun way to make some extra cash.”

But become a business it did, and by March 2014, Blake had quit his job, opened up a permanent location in Manhattan and created several more game rooms. Since then, his business has exploded; he’s opening a new location approximately every other month in cities such as Atlanta; St. Louis; Detroit; Minneapolis, Minnesota and Scottsdale, Arizona. And, while at first Blake was thrilled to welcome individuals, couples and families into his locations, the word quickly spread to companies looking for team-building activities.



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“I did not anticipate the corporate team-building thing because I didn’t even know that that was a market,” he says. “Now, it is a huge part of our business.”

I recently spoke with Blake about how escape rooms can help teams bond.

Why are escape rooms so popular right now?

There are several reasons for this. First, it is something that every person can do. It isn’t scary or stressful; it is fun. I also think adults are looking for another activity outside of eating and drinking. Brunch isn’t an activity. Going to an escape room is. People come here, have a great time and then go to a bar. Their experience here becomes the dominant conversation at the bar.

But beyond that, I find that we are a great place for intergenerational families to connect. Everyone gets to participate and no one is using a screen, phone, computer, etc. The connection it provides speaks to a lot of people.

Why do you think Escape the Room is effective for team-building purposes?

A lot of companies have corporate hierarchies where you always know where you fit. Experiences like Escape the Room flip that on its head, and I think that is refreshing to a lot of people. We will have everything from startups coming in with their interns, HR managers bringing in teams that aren’t working well together, and bosses and employees. You name it, a variety of groups come in. We’ve gotten so popular that several companies have us as a preferred vendor, which means they can even do team building with their clients at one of our locations.



What makes a team succeed or fail at an Escape the Room experience?

Our success rate across all of our games is only about 20 percent, and it all comes down to how the team works together in the room. You might think that a group of, say, engineers would do well, but many times I find that they all think similarly, which isn’t necessarily a good thing in these scenarios. Teams that come in with a diversity of thought are the ones that break records.

The teams that do the best are the ones that focus on open communication. You can’t be the guy in the room that finds the clue and doesn’t tell anyone about it. You can’t do it alone. The teams that win are the ones that listen to each other, regardless of hierarchy at the office.

The ones that don't win have members who are afraid to speak up in front of the big boss. An employee may worry that he or she has an idea but that it is a stupid one, so they stay silent. Chances are, though, whatever they are thinking isn't stupid at all, and it would help the team if they said something. On the other hand, if a boss says he or she has the answer and doesn't want to listen to constructive feedback, the team won't win, either.

How often do you think companies should schedule team-building activities?

Depending on your corporate goals, as often as possible, really. We have a ton of repeat corporate customers who come in every few months. And we have so many different rooms that they can play a different puzzle each time.

“I think it is most important to be open to the organic fluidity of the experience. Just because you are the boss at the office, doesn't mean you should be the boss while team building.”

—Victor Blake, founder, Escape the Room



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I think it's important to know that team building doesn't only need to be among internal employees. Consider doing these types of things with your suppliers, vendors and clients—the results can be tremendous.

What kind of feedback do you get from your corporate clients?

I get a decent amount of emails saying that coming to Escape the Room was the best thing a person's company has ever done. I think the biggest compliment I ever get is when someone plays with co-workers and has such a great time that they bring their friends and family. That happens a lot.

What advice can you offer about how a company can maximize their team-building experience?

For any type of team building, I think it is most important to be open to the organic fluidity of the experience. Just because you are the boss at the office, doesn't mean you should be the boss while team building. Be open to letting people shine in different ways. Listen and communicate. Throw away your preconceived notions of how a person is because usually those notions are just wrong.

And get into it. There can be a general sense of cynicism about team building, but I recommend you really throw yourself into the experience. You will quickly realize just how much you can get out of it.



6 Things to Consider When Planning a Business Retreat

A well-planned business retreat may help you bring your team closer together while addressing issues that may be affecting your company's growth.

By Mike Michalowicz

Serial Entrepreneur, Author and Speaker

One of the businesses I owned did forensic computer work. It was a crazy, stressful industry, with forensic techs everywhere in the field and frantic requests for lab analysis. We had a great team, but the dynamics of many strong personalities—coupled with the rapid-fire pace we had to keep—meant that working together was sometimes difficult. We were the poster company for needing a business retreat.

Business retreats may be able to pull your team together into a cohesive, productive force, or they might be a

massive waste of time and money. These six suggestions may help you make the next company retreat you plan a successful one.

1 Plan the event outside the office.

We're creatures of habit, and trying to establish new dynamics in the same old scene may lower the likelihood of success. Disrupting the company's ordinary routine may help usher in new ways of working together. You may want to avoid any distractions during

your retreat—consider picking someplace where your team can relax and learn new ways of communicating and collaborating.

2 Identify the people attending.

If you're unable to shut your business down for the retreat, you may want to leave some folks behind to keep the company running. We opted for an annual retreat where some key people attended every year, and others rotated their attendance.

3 Have a clear agenda in advance.

When putting your business retreat together, consider planning activities with two main goals in mind: getting your team to learn and share together, and also getting them to let their hair down.

“Think about doling out accolades where warranted, and making sure you send your team home with a sense of pride.”

— Mike Michalowicz,
serial entrepreneur, author and speaker

I recommend having two distinct kinds of activities: those that are explicitly business-oriented and those that aren't. On one retreat, we did a business exercise called Utopia Corporation. Teams of two created an imaginary company that was better than the one we actually had. Identifying

our company's weaknesses and hypothesizing ways to improve it was super enlightening. We also navigated an orienteering course. It got people off their feet and outdoors. While it didn't seem like it was business-based, the skills we learned helped us grow closer as a team. Whether you're creating imaginary companies or trying to follow a map using a compass, plan carefully.

4 Make sure food and drink is handled well.

Folks need to eat—especially if you want them physically and mentally active! I wouldn't advise leaving the food and drink arrangements as an afterthought. Feed your team properly and consider using meals as an opportunity to grow closer.

5 Have a clear opening and closing process.

When you begin your business retreat, consider covering your goals and expectations with your team. And when you wrap up, you may want to reflect on what you've accomplished during the retreat. Think about doling out accolades where warranted, and making sure you send your team home with a sense of pride.

6 Strive for a balance among all people.

Some people are naturally more dominant than others. In order to facilitate sharing, learning and growing, it may be helpful to find a way to put everyone on the same level. A number of strategies may help to equalize your team. We used a speaking stick: The rule was that every member of the team must hold the stick and speak with no interruptions for a specified time. It's also important to structure competitive activities in a



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way that lets various people shine. Consider choosing activities that privilege a range of skill sets so that everyone gets a chance to be the leader and look like a rock star. Learning to celebrate the accomplishments of others is key.

The well-planned business retreat can function as a reward, a workout, a challenge and an invigorating perspective shift—all rolled into one. Our retreats transformed our scattered, frantic collection of talented individuals into a cohesive, balanced and amazingly

productive team. We managed stress better. We delivered better results more quickly, and we did it all with enthusiasm, knowing that we could do more as a team than we ever could alone.

It got to the point where some employees looked forward to the company retreat more than they did their own vacations. But that perfect retreat doesn't just happen on its own. It's the result of careful planning and creativity. Taking the time to put in work ahead of time may pay massive dividends in the end.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Michalowicz

Mike Michalowicz is the entrepreneur behind three multimillion-dollar companies and the author of *Profit First*, *The Pumpkin Plan* and *The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*. Michalowicz travels the world as an entrepreneurial advocate and is globally recognized as the guy who “challenges outdated business beliefs” and teaches entrepreneurs what to do about it.



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What It Takes to Create a Leadership Culture

Building a culture of strong leadership may be the best way to happier, more fulfilled employees.

By Jane Hiscock

President and CEO, Farland Group

Ask a group of business owners or employees for their definition of leadership and you'll get a range of responses. But they'll likely all boil down to a few principles: autonomy, collaboration, mentorship, consensus building, listening and a commitment to the customer experience.

We all know what good leadership looks and feels like at work. Turnover is low, productivity and profitability are high and there's a sense of pride among people across the company. Yet too many of us also know what bad leadership looks and feels like, especially as "Sunday-

night stomach" kicks in, bringing a sense of anxiety about what the coming work week will bring. But fostering a culture of strong leaders may help put employees at ease. Here are five ways to help put those positive principles in action and create a culture of leadership.

Understand the need for strong leaders and strong managers.

Not every good manager is a strong leader, but all organizations need both types of people. Critical to cultivating an environment that embraces both strong

leaders and strong managers is to avoid an “up-or-out” culture that’s built around aggressively climbing the ladder. Not everyone is going to move up and that’s OK. Strong managers that embody a very good day-to-day acumen of supporting your business needs can be as important as having leaders to shape the future.

Know when to seek collaboration and when to build consensus.

The nuances between the two are subtle, yet can have a remarkable difference on a project’s outcome. Collaborative styles are ideal for longer-term initiatives, where decision making is spread across the company to establish goals and policies for the organization, for example. Consensus building is most successful when it’s employed by small, agile teams who build fast solutions and prototypes to drive productivity. It’s also a great way to pilot potential leaders as they learn to build consensus among smaller teams with less at stake.

Be open to different leadership styles.

This isn’t just about nurturing different approaches to getting the job done. Sometimes it’s about shaking up the dynamics completely. For example, consider the rise of “holacracy,” which eliminates titles and instead organizes teams into self-governing circles with explicit responsibilities and expectations that are focused on getting the work done. This, in theory, heightens the commitment to improving the customer experience, boosts loyalty by eliminating hierarchies and increases productivity by giving a voice to everybody in the organization.

Tear down traditional corporate walls.

There’s often a reluctance to let “outsiders” in to learn about your company and product direction—and for good reason. But taking an all-or-nothing approach to including partners and customers as stakeholders



can limit your organization. It can stunt your ability to accelerate growth, gain valuable market insight and build trust. Instead, try creating circles of trusted advisors, including customers and partners that can help shape your company's direction and inform how to lead in your industry. Don't forget, these so-called outsiders also have a stake in your future.

“Shift the reward criteria and watch how quickly managers become leaders, companies become influencers and customers become advocates.”

—Jane Hiscock, president and CEO, Farland Group

Never compromise the customer experience

There are few companies on the planet that would advise otherwise, but what does it really mean to “never compromise the customer experience?” Put another way, are your leaders equally rewarded for meeting quotas and shaving margins as they are for customer satisfaction, retention and growth? Shift the reward criteria and watch how quickly managers become leaders, companies become influencers and customers become advocates.



All this talk about leadership might beg the question about who follows if everybody's leading. The reality is that the lines are now blurred as more voices are encouraged to be heard. This doesn't mean we'll necessarily lose traditional corporate structures, even though some might be completely upended. What it does mean, however, is that it may be time for your organization to rethink how it defines, values and rewards leaders.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jane Hiscock is president and CEO of Farland Group, a C-level customer-engagement and marketing consultancy. Her role in helping companies develop stronger C-suite loyalty programs gives her firsthand exposure to the sharing and exchange of innovative ideas and perspectives of hundreds of C-level executives every year.



When All the World's a Stage, Build an Ensemble

Cathy Salit's consulting company, Performance of a Lifetime, uses the power of improv to help teams connect with each other, solve problems and work better together.

By Amy Cortese
Journalist and Author

Cathy Salit is an actor, performer and renegade who, at age 13, dropped out of school and started her own alternative school in a former dry cleaning shop. It taught her that you can break rules and create something new. "I've been improvising ever since," she says.

Today, her consulting company, Performance of a Lifetime, or POAL, combines psychology, theater and education to help break down barriers that

might otherwise impede personal and organizational growth. The signature exercise from which the company takes its name asks people to create a one-minute performance of their lives. Naturally, the work environment at New York-based POAL is anything but business as usual. Meetings typically start with an improv exercise—and lots of applause.

I recently spoke with Salit about team building—or, as she prefers to call it, ensemble building.

How do you work with organizations on team building?

We work with companies on the execution of the human side of their business—they've got some new initiatives, and in order to support that, they're going to have to develop and support their people. We have to not just change behaviors, but have people grow in the ways they need to grow. People now have to work together who might hate each other, for example. That's very common, or some version of that. They don't get each other's worlds. And that's a disabler.

It's about helping people cross boundaries. Our preferred way of talking about it is *ensemble* building, because we believe that all human beings are natural performers. Sometimes we do things that we know are

performances, like a salesperson giving a presentation. But we believe that we're all in a play of our collective making. And to better navigate and perform in that play, we need to tap into this natural ability to imagine, to pretend and to play, so that we are both performers and directors.

Your work centers on something you call the “Becoming Principle”. Tell us about that.

The idea is that we're not just who are; we're who we are and who we *are not*, and if we are going to tap into our humanity, we need to get reconnected with that. Think about what we do with babies: They're these little cute creatures that make these sounds, and us big people say in these little voices, “Ooh, you're so cute, let me get you a cookie.” And that's actually how babies learn



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to speak. They're not speakers, but we relate to them as if they are, and it is that conversation that gives them the platform, the stage to speak.

There is a field that we're inspired by, and hopefully inspire, called performative psychology, led by Lev Vygotsky. He talks about a "zone of proximal development," or ZPD. And for us, building ensembles, building teams, is building ZPDs. It's bringing people together of different skills, different levels of development and different points of view, and together creating a zone where everybody grows. Sometimes it's an individual becoming who they are not yet, sometimes it's a team that's becoming who they aren't yet. You have to disrupt the status quo in certain ways in order to create that space and do things that feel hard.

What are some of the activities you do with clients?

We do a lot of work in hospital settings. We worked on ensemble building with the leadership of the medicine and the emergency departments at a major teaching hospital. The hand-off of patients between emergency and medicine was having all sorts of issues—it was absolute havoc. And they hated each other. We were sort of a last-ditch effort.

We brought 75 nurses in leadership positions from both departments together and did the one-minute performance of a lifetime exercise. After they had done some improv exercises and started to see each other more as humans, we put them into a situation closer to what they deal with, where there was a challenge. We put them in mixed groups of emergency and medicine personnel and said, "This group will solve medicine's problems, and this group will solve the emergency room's problems." The only direction we gave them was no complaining.

After 90 minutes, they came back and they had come up with some wonderful solutions. It was by virtue of the fact that they had both sides working on it that they were able to come up with solutions that were relevant to each side. Afterwards, the inter-department problems diminished. They no longer hung up the phone on each other, and the charts were more complete. That's an example of people having to be who they're not in order to be who they're becoming, which is people who can work together, who can hear each other.

"It was by virtue of the fact that they had both sides working on it that they were able to come up with solutions that were relevant to each side."

—Cathy Salit, founder, Performance of a Lifetime

How do you go about team building within your own company?

It's just a huge part of what we do. We pay a huge amount of attention to that. Almost obsessively. We have 15 full-time and another 85 part-time employees or contractors.

At our weekly staff meetings, and almost any meeting, we start with an improv game. We play. It's on the agenda. It can be anything from "sound ball," where you throw the ball and make a sound—"weeeeeooosh!"—and you have to receive it by making the same sound, but then you throw it to someone else and make a new

sound—“waaaaah!”—and you pass this imaginary ball. Then there are games where you have to introduce yourself—“I’m Cathy, hahahaha!” You have to do something that’s a physical and verbal expression of you, and then everybody does yours. We start almost every meeting that way. There’s a very fine line between playing and work. It’s about creativity.

Applause is also a huge thing. We’re sort of crazy here. We get a new client, there’s applause. We delivered our first program in Japanese recently—applause! As a performer, it’s all about the audience. Giving to them and also being given to. And applause is an important part of that. I think appreciation is underappreciated in work and in life. So we practice these things. Even though everybody knows it’s silly, it still feels really good!

Do you have any tips for ensemble building for other leaders?

In my book, *Performance Breakthrough: A Radical Approach to Success at Work*, at the end of every chapter I have some exercises and tips. One is to create a ZPD. When you bring a diverse group of people together to work on a project, take the time to highlight your differences—where you each are coming from, what you each bring to the table, your strengths and weaknesses, and talk together (enthusiastically!) about making use of all that. Figuring out how to do this together is ensemble building. It’s not just *what* you’re working on, it’s *how*.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Cortese

Amy Cortese is a Brooklyn-based journalist who writes about topics spanning business, finance and food for publications including *The New York Times*, *B Magazine* and OPEN Forum. She is the author of *Locavesting*, a pioneering book about the local-investment and community-capital movement, and the founder of *Locavesting.com*, a media and educational site.



Another one is, spend a week saying “We” every time you would say “I.”

Are there any patterns or common themes you see in your work with teams and ensembles?

The desire for community is really strong. Doing something new, doing something with another person, you get to wake out of your roles, and that creates a desire to do that more. We see this over and over again. We all need this.



Build Teamwork Into Your Virtual Team

Virtual teams offer flexibility, but can make team building difficult. Consider using these tips to bridge the gap between virtual and in-office employees.

By Barry Moltz

Founder, Shafran Moltz Group

The very nature of teamwork has profoundly changed in the digital age. Most businesses are no longer centralized in one location, but instead have their employees work from many locations. This can be good news because the company can build a virtual team from the best resources anywhere in the world.

The virtual team trend is very popular. Even team members that reside in the same geographic area as the company's headquarters are asking for the convenience of working from home when their activities require focused concentration.

For business owners, allowing employees to work from home can reduce the cost of physical office space and all the additional expenses that are associated with a large location for all of its employees.

However, having virtual employees can also come at a cost. Without face-to-face interaction, it can become more difficult to build a cohesive team that can work effectively together. Virtual employees may feel isolated from a company and its culture; this feeling is very real and needs to be specifically addressed when it occurs. In addition, employees may feel pressured by the access to technology



to work more hours regardless of the time of day. While business owners may see this as a positive trend, it can lead to increased burnout of the team members.

To build a virtual team, you may want to try a new style of management to maximize the performance of these virtual employees.

Specifically define goals and processes that can be tracked by everyone.

Try documenting the metrics that will objectively define what success looks like. This can be particularly helpful for employees who can't be "seen" every day, or when your virtual team doesn't have regular one-on-one contact.

For salespeople, it can be easy to use their quotas as the goal. But for customer service or development employees, it can be a little more difficult to come up with measurable objectives. Whatever you decide these specific targets will be, consider reviewing them every month instead of on a quarterly basis for your virtual team.

Provide the hardware to work remotely.

Virtual employees may need additional solutions that office-bound employees don't need. This can include a webcam, smartphone, tablet and reliable remote access to all secure office applications.

Provide collaboration tools.

Teams typically collaborate best with face-to-face meetings and not just through email. When this isn't possible, consider using collaboration tools like cloud file storage, Microsoft Office 365 and Google apps. These tools can help virtual team members work together, share versions and leave comments.

Messaging apps like Slack that integrate with business applications can help build conversation and camaraderie when team members are not in the same physical location. In a sense, it helps create a virtual water cooler as an informal location to talk.

Check in with the employee by phone or video chat every other day.

Instant messaging or emails can be effective for some tasks, but it may not establish the personal connection that can be beneficial to teamwork. Video calls can help the leader focus on being with that employee virtually.

Set up in-person meetings at least twice a year.

I think three to four times a year is even better. It's hard to replace the value of in-person meetings when it comes to establishing a solid working relationship with a virtual team. It can be easier to use virtual

collaboration tools productively as described above once this has happened.

You may even want these meetings to include some type of social activity like sharing a meal to learn more about the person.

Over-communicate.

Consider committing to a timetable of giving more feedback to a virtual employee than anyone who works in the physical location.

Remember that working outside the office can be an isolating experience. The individual may worry about what people may think of the quality of their work or feel out of the loop. This focus may help them feel like they have the manager's attention, and may improve their ability to remain on target. It can also help identify any conflicts early which can hide more easily when people are not physically together.

Make your virtual team a part of the company.

Extending your company's culture outside a physical location—especially if you have a mix of in-person and virtual employees—can go a long way.

Consider taking it a step beyond just including them on a conference call while everyone else is in the room.



Maybe you can include them in ongoing virtual exercises where they can participate anywhere. There are several effective technology tools that can assist in growing virtual relationships. Bonfyre is a social platform that does this on a very personal level and helps employees build relationships with each other. Team members can invite each other to virtual communities where they post comments and photos like an internal Facebook news feed. Another virtual team-building tool is Highground, which sends kudos to fellow employees using virtual badges that align with the company's mission. It also allows business owners to take employees' "mood temperature" regularly (from sad to happy faces) to identify problems early.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barry Moltz

Barry Moltz has founded and run small businesses with a great deal of success and failure for more than 20 years. He now gets small businesses unstuck. He is the author of five best-selling small-business books, including his latest, *How to Get Unstuck: 25 Ways to Get Your Business Growing Again*, a member of the Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame, a frequent guest on MSNBC's *Your Business* and NPR and hosts his own business radio talk show on AM560 The Answer.



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8 Strategies for Big (or Small) Organizational Changes

Organizational changes are rarely fun or easy, but they may be a little less stressful if you follow these tactics.

By David Niu

Founder and CEO, TINYpulse

To remain competitive in the market, companies must evolve and adapt to the changing climate. But organizational changes—whether big or small—can be disruptive to the workforce if you don't have strong change management.

Many companies tend to be ineffective at organizational change. It's not as simple as just changing the name from the CEO's office, deciding to merge with another successful company or undergoing a shift in culture. For change to be successful, it often helps when you take into account

every aspect of the company—from the culture to the top leaders and even part-time staff. There are several strategies for change management you might consider adopting before you make any shifts within the organization.

1 Start at the top.

To initiate any type of change, consider forming a team that will lead the charge. But ensure that people at the helm of the change ship are competent and aligned on the cause.

“It’s not efficient to communicate change and then assume that employees are ready to go. Instead, look for feedback—and do it constantly.”

—David Niu, founder and CEO, TINYpulse

Change managers aren’t just the strategy people, despite it being an important part of their role. These folks should ideally be effective communicators so they can clearly spread the word in the organization.

2 Ask for feedback.

Many organizations ask for feedback after they’re already shoulder-deep in their change initiative. But you may be more likely to succeed if you begin the change with the feedback already in hand.

Employee engagement survey tools that help you gain insight from employees on the frontline who are affected by the day-to-day change may help streamline the change process.



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3 Define the change.

It's often not enough to just tell your employees that change is coming. Consider establishing goals for transitions. While you can simply tell your employees change will "accelerate growth," it's often much better to set concrete goals that can be measured.

To do so, consider making the goals "SMART": Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic and Time-Bound. You'll not only be able to measure your progress, you'll also hopefully give your employees something solid to work toward.

4 Simplify.

Overcomplicating matters may just make your employees confused and overwhelmed. Keep things simple. Avoid trying to do too much at once. Stick to a goal. Define it with simplicity.

5 Implement change in sections.

Consider beginning by introducing the change into only one section of the company, which will act as the "treatment group." The rest of the company—the unchanged section—will be the control group.

Doing this may allow you to figure out the difference in productivity, morale and finances, which may ultimately determine whether the change has potential for success across the entire organization or if you should do more tinkering before escalating it.



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David Niu

David Niu is a Seattle-based serial entrepreneur and founder of TINYpulse. Previously, he was co-founder of BuddyTV and NetConversions (acquired by aQuantive). He is also the author of *Careercation: Trading Briefcase for Suitcase to Find Entrepreneurial Happiness*.

6 Don't stick to numbers.

Remember those defined goals? Don't just make them about finances and figures. The emotional aspect may be just as important. Ensure there's an emotional drive toward making a change. You can't overestimate the value of a dollar, and you can't underestimate heartstrings.

7 Adopt recognition programs.

Consider setting standards by recognizing employees who are aiding the change. Tailor the rewards to specific actions and company values so other employees know what type of behavior might garner a reward. It may also show that you truly appreciate and acknowledge your employees during this difficult time.

8 Keep communication lines open.

It's not efficient to communicate change and then assume that employees are ready to go. Instead, look for feedback—and do it constantly. Consider leveraging surveys, team meetings and company-wide emails to ensure all employees are on the same page. Then you might use that feedback to adjust your change strategies.

Organizational change can undoubtedly be stressful. But it may be stressful for all employees, from the top down, which is why it may be helpful to maintain employee morale through clear communication, feedback and employee recognition.



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What's the Glue That Holds Your Team Members Together?

Creating a bond amongst your team is one way to take their performance to a higher level. Learn how you can help empower your team members.

By Sarah Robinson

CEO, Fierce Loyalty

Teamwork makes the dream work. There is no “I” in team. Together we achieve more. We’ve all seen these slogans on staff break room walls, but do they really mean anything to your people? More importantly, do they hold your team members together and push them to achieve more?

Why Motivational Posters and Rallies Don't Always Work

One of my favorite sports to watch is rowing—especially the eight-person teams. Each rower in the boat has a

job to do and to do that job, they have to be completely tuned in to their teammates. The coxswain (the person who sits facing the rowers, yelling “Stroke!”) keeps everyone moving to a precise rhythm, so they can operate like a well-oiled machine. If one rower gets out of sync, the boat “catches a crab,” goes over into the water and the race is over.

These teams probably don't just rely on motivational posters about teamwork in the boathouse or quarterly motivational rallies and call it good. They are in the water, every single day, working on precision, speed

and synchronicity. Why? Because they all hold a common goal and a common value: to have the grit and drive to be the best team on the course. They all want to deliver one perfectly executed stroke at a time and cross the finish line first. Without this, there would just be eight individuals, paddling their own way at their own rhythm. The goal would be impossible to achieve.

Why Is Your Team Rowing?

When I first start working with my clients, I ask them why their teams are doing what they do. Often the answers are based on a company goal (i.e. “to sell more widgets,” “to be #1 in the marketplace” or “to make more money”).

From the company’s perspective, these answers make perfect sense. However, these answers may not be enough to give your team members a reason to get up at four in the morning, put a boat in freezing cold water and push themselves for hours to work as a team so they can be just a little bit better than they were yesterday.

If you want to see this kind of performance from your teams, you may want to help them develop a bond based on a common value and goal. Does this take time and effort? Yes. Is this investment worth it? It can be the difference between ho-hum or best-in-class results. If you’ve read this far, I’m going to assume you want the latter. Here are a few steps to help get you started:

1. Have a conversation. Consider asking your team members individually why they do what they do. Another helpful question to ask is what they would change about their job, and what gets in their way

of doing their job. Listening to their answers openly and without judgment is important.

2. Have a team meeting. During the team meeting, you can share the answers you got (without naming names). Consider giving the team the autonomy to work with the individual answers and come up with team answers to the same questions.
3. Create a team goal. Using those answers, you may want to have your team develop their team value and goal. They may be tempted to use “company speak” language that they think will get approval. But think about challenging them to go deeper than that by asking questions like, “Will that get you up in the morning after working late the night before?” and “Would that be a reason to push through a team setback?” and “How does that get you more aligned as teammates?”
4. Empower managers. You can encourage the team’s manager to operate like the coxswain of a rowing team. Consider telling them that they set the rhythm and the pace for the team. They can help every team member stay in sync until they cross the finish line.

“If you want to see this kind of performance from your teams, you may want to help them develop a bond based on a common value and goal.”

—Sarah Robinson, CEO, Fierce Loyalty

A Common Refrain: ‘I Shouldn’t Have to Do All This’

I hear that a lot. A common expectation is that team members will just magically discover the best way to work together to achieve higher and higher goals. While each individual can absolutely figure out how they work best, learning how to work together is another skill entirely. If we go back to the rowing analogy for a minute, each rower in the boat is great at rowing. But no one would expect eight great rowers to get in a boat and instantly row in sync and win all of their races.

The same is true for your teams. Yes, you hired highly skilled individuals. But it takes a common value and a common goal—along with practice, coaching and experience—to bond those individuals into a high-performing team.

You may want to spend time helping each team develop this common bond. Then you may be able to watch their performance gain momentum until they are so intuitively in sync, almost nothing can get in their way.



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Sarah Robinson is the CEO of Fierce Loyalty and a business strategist, speaker and author of the Amazon best-selling book, *Fierce Loyalty: Unlocking the DNA of Wildly Successful Communities*. Based in Birmingham, Alabama, Robinson advises her international clients, including m-Wise and Microsoft, on how to build thriving, successful communities and set their companies apart from the pack. She is a regular guest expert at MSNBC, Inc.com, Entrepreneur.com and AOL.com.



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