

After the Teambuilding

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Tips for Maximizing Change Efforts

After The Week in The Woods

After the Teambuilding Jennifer Guy

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The Challenge

OK, so you have done the team building, you have brought in the consultants and forked over the resources to have all of your team have a better relationship. At first, it seemed as if the results were there, but now the benefits seem to be, well, wearing off. What next? How do you make sure your time and money will reap the long-term benefits the consultants promised?

This is the question many managers have after a team building exercise has been done in their organization. Even if everyone in the entire organization has been through the same team building efforts, after a time any inclinations to be defensive, get upset, frustrated, self centered or territorial will come out. That is when the grumbling starts it begins to look like it didn't work."

Did it work? Yes, but it is only a first step. The major shortcoming of most team building efforts is not the effort itself, but that they do not always provide sufficient tools to deal with the breakdowns in relating that will naturally arise *after* the sessions. The relationships that were developed in the team building sessions are fragile and they must be nurtured and cared for in order to grow and get very strong.

In this article, I will give you an exercise designed to provide you with a day-by-day way of dealing with relationship breakdowns and designing your responses for a more powerful future.

The Access

There are two important points that must be understood first.

- 1) *There is one access and one access only to any relationship. YOU.* No one has any access to changing anyone but themselves.
- 2) *It takes two to tango.* One person cannot argue or fight. If you can remember these two things, you are well on your way to mastering relationships.

If you can only change yourself, and you are committed to altering or solidifying a relationship, then where do you start? With yourself!

Your Commitments

In most team building sessions there are opportunities to commit to new behaviors. What behavior have you committed to? Have you promised to be more trusting, more communicative, less rigid in your opinions? Have you promised to speak up more rather than to keep your complaints and issues to yourself? Have you decided you want to be more of a take charge kind of person?

That's great!

But knowing what commitments you have made in the workshop setting is very different than keeping your commitments on a daily basis when you are up against the kind of things that bring back automatic pre-team building responses. I have designed the fol-

lowing exercise to give you access to *designing* day-to-day responses to work situations that can give you trouble. Follow the steps outlined below and you will have some responses in your pocket when a situation arises.

The Process

A. & B. Identify the new behavior and the old. Please note this is *behavior*, not a sign that you are the consort of the devil. It isn't your fatal Shakespearean flaw or the reason you should be clapped in irons, it is a behavior that is a reaction to certain circumstances. (I know this sounds dramatic, but it always surprises me that people think they should be drawn and quartered if they have a bad habit.)

C. Identify the times when you can predictably expect to behave in the old way. Be honest here and be generous. If you see blame in your statement, try to word it another way. "I do that because *they* never like my ideas" might become "I react that way when I haven't communicated the value in my ideas." This puts the ball back in your court. You don't have to take on the impossible task of changing them, you only have to work on changing you.

D. Identify how you know that behavior has surfaced. What happens that tells you this is one of the times you are against your commitment. Are you being loud and banging the phone? Do people get sullen? Do people get defensive? Do they take over? Usually the behavior is automatic so it is important to know the signals.

E. Identify your automatic responses to these signals. If people get sullen, do you get loud? Do you give up on the conversation and walkaway? Do you bully

them? This is where the "tangoing" begins. If you can stop the cycle here, you are in good shape.

F. Identify new ways of responding to those reactions. These might sound like: "I apologize, I didn't mean to make you _____?" "Did I sound like I was trying to abdicate responsibility, I'm sorry. I do that sometimes." "What I meant was..." and go from there.

The chart shows a sample of what might result as you do this exercise.

A. Old Behavior	B. New Behavior	C. When do I do this?	D. How do others react? (How do I know I have done this?)	E. What is my normal response to this reaction?	F. What else could I do?
Clam up when I am upset.	Let people know if I disagree/disapprove.	When I don't like or don't understand the reasons for what I am told to do.	People don't notice. They just keep on talking like nothing has happened.	Talk behind their back. Think angry thoughts. Tell my friends how badly I am being treated.	Ask questions. "what is the intended result?" "Is there any particular reason you chose me for this?" "Would it be a problem to assign this to someone else?"
			People get distant - try to get away from me.	Let them go.	"Wait, we have to talk about this! I don't think it makes sense the I do this and here's why."
Dominate meetings.	Get everyone's ideas.	When I have a good idea that people don't agree with.	People begin to talk among themselves.	Turn my back to them and keep talking.	Request their attention and ask them for their feedback.
			No-one says anything for a long time. They sit back and look at their notes, not at me.	Ask if anyone has comments and if not, move on.	Ask pointed questions. "Who thinks this won't work and why?" "Who thinks it will work and why?" "What do you think will be the outcome of this plan?"

You are never going to get rid of your human nature. If you have been a doormat for 50 years, then it will probably take a while before you are habitually a take-charge person.

The key here is to stop the cycle. In this conversational cycle you have access to Step A or Step F. Acting in Step A will have the problem not exist, and acting in Step F will avoid it being a problem. It is also important to know that you can stop the conversation and go to Step F *at any time* in the conversation. No explanation is necessary, just say "Can we go back to the beginning of this conversation?"

Conclusion

It is hard to change. For you and your co-workers. Have some compassion for yourself and others and give yourselves a break. You are all new at whatever team relationship you have generated in the team building sessions. Mastery takes time, practice, patience and courtesy.

Team building works. And if you combine it with the proper maintenance tools and a great deal of respect for people, your company can be a very pleasant place to work.