

Smells like team spirit



Many companies in the UK organise team building activities on a yearly or even more regular basis these days. So, does it work? Is it worth all the time, trouble and money it takes to set up? Or is it just a day off and a bit of fun for the staff?

Team building is a phrase that engenders a variety of responses from members of staff. From some it's dread, for others boredom; for many it's glee as they welcome a break from the mundane routine and some look on it as an exciting opportunity to really get into the 'team' spirit.

One of the main reasons companies organise team building activities is that most managers today believe that these events, however bizarre, (be a clown for a day? Set your boss on fire?) will help to bond company members.

However, what is often lacking is the understanding of the concept of team building. As a result, team building events often end up being

just a day out and a chance to 'skive off'; a one night stay at a posh resort or an afternoon of fun. The outcome can be disappointing unless the concept of team building is well understood; essential to maximise the benefits for the time spent.

That said, many employees from all levels in a company often return from an event, having had fun, yes, but also having got to know their colleagues and managers a whole lot better too.

There are many, many events available across the length and

breadth of the UK. From raft building to stuntman training or making chocolate truffles to cracking the da Vinci code, somebody out there is doing it. Here are just a few of the more unusual events on offer today.....

Lights, camera, action!

If you're a hands on kind of a company then this is the event for you. Throw away the Nobo boards and overhead projectors and have a day of film glamour. Directors' Cut, offered by a company called EML offers the chance to direct, star in and produce your very own BAFTA winner. Teams can choose a film that suits them – from Titanic to the Blues Brothers and everything else in between is available. Full or half day programmes are offered and each package is matched to clients' needs says the company. Teams of between 20 and 100 people can be accommodated and prices vary. www.em-l.co.uk

Getting fired up

How about a day throwing yourself off tall buildings and down flights of stairs, hitting someone over the head with a bottle and setting fire to the boss at the end? Typical day at work or something that might help bond that sadly drifting team in purchases and acquisitions? ChillisaUCE says it can offer the ultimate in team building (including boss on fire scenario) with a variety of different events – from off-road driving to canyoning, coasteering, clay pigeon shooting, raft building and more. Costs vary according to the activities. www.chillisaUCE.co.uk



The Italian Job team heads off

The other side of the tracks

Driving while blindfolded – a joke? – I'm afraid not. The company that organises this particular event describes it as a cross between a development tool and a communications exercise. Colleagues are divided into groups of four per car and everyone sits in the back except the nominated driver, who is then blindfolded. The real fun starts as the car is driven along with the 'back seat drivers' shouting directions – the second driver finds it slightly easier but by the third references to 'left', 'right' and 'straight on' are banned. The fourth driver gets no spoken directions at all, although you can supplement other sounds for the words as agreed by the team. The company offers a range of courses including 'mud, sweat and gears', finesse driving, ascents and descents, recovery of a stranded vehicle, navigation and route planning. Cost for a half day will be around £2,600 for 12 people. www.freshtracks.co.uk

Careless whisper

What do you know about horses? Well, they race, gallop in fields, eat sugar and carrots and can help develop leadership and communication skills. Sounds unlikely? Not according to Leadchange which says that horses give an immediate feedback on behaviour that can coach people in a very effective way, helping them change their attitudes at work. Faced with half a ton of horse in a parade ring, overbearing and bossy just doesn't cut it. If a horse is asked to do something in a threatening manner it will dig its heels in and not move an inch.

However, if the request contains no threat or pressure of any kind, then the horse will respond positively, allowing himself to be led around the ring. It can help people tone down 'over the top' behaviour and allow less confident people to be assertive without being too aggressive. The courses are run in Exmoor but can be arranged locally to you if there are horses available. Costs vary but average around £400 per person. www.leadchange.com

Chocolate heaven

Driving, stuntman for a day, building a new HQ from paper clips and A4 paper sound like typical team building activities to me – but what about making the perfect chocolate truffle or fashioning a new design in pralines? Not macho enough? Many companies would disagree. Chocolate

making workshops run by MyChocolate are popular with corporate clients and even the most hardened cynic will be won over by the end of the day, says owner Hannah Saxton. Sessions are tailored

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to meet individual requirements but usually begin with a history of chocolate (including lots of samples) before the real cooking begins. You can try a variety of delicious hand made chocolates accompanied by champagne, learn how to make fudge, praline and truffles, create your own flavoured truffle centres with spices and essential oils, demonstrate your cooking skills (or lack of them) as you cut, dip and decorate your own chocolate under a skilled chocolatier's guidance.

The team building bit comes in when guests are divided into groups and set the task of creating their own selection of chocolates using a variety of flavours and decorations. The results are judged on technique and flair. And at the end of the course you will return home with a ribbon-tied box of chocolates, clutching a

Below: Chocolate heaven or a da Vinci mystery

handful of detailed recipes to try at your leisure. Cost is around £65 per person. www.mychocolate.co.uk

Cracking the da Vinci code

Hot on the heels of the best selling book and blockbuster movie, team building now incorporates the da Vinci code. Your objective is to be the first to discover the curious secrets on the high class intellectual quest. You are taken on a mystery ride and given lots of clues. Teams can compete against one another or the whole group can try to work together to discover the secrets of the Cryptex and unlock the chalice, releasing the secret elixir of life (or rather a bottle of da Vinci wine at the end!).

And the Italian job is very much a corporate favourite. Armed with a set of car keys and a personalised Mini

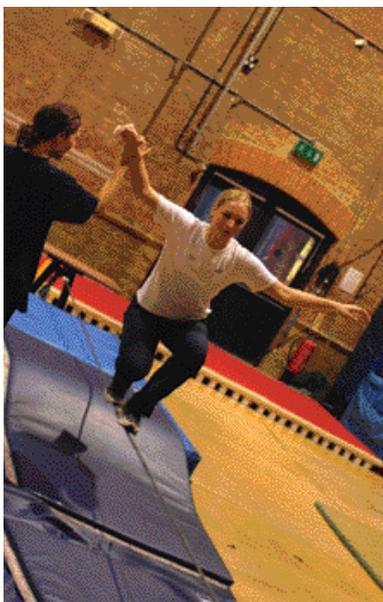


Cooper your team sets off on a mission of discovery and intrigue around a city of your choice. In fact you can play this team building game anywhere in the world! You will also be given a GPS, 2-way radios, and 'shovels' to help you find your stash of gold on each of the challenges around the course. At the end there's a weigh-in and the team with the most gold wins. Sounds like fun – especially as the winners get to race some awesome remote control cars as a finale to the day.

This company offers a wide range of activities from planning, designing and racing your own car to going back to school for a day. You can even contribute to community, taking the garden challenge and transforming a garden which has fallen into disrepair. Costs vary enormously according to the event. www.bluehatuk.com

Clowning around

A chance to clown around at work without getting fired. This unique team building course has become very popular with corporate clients and this company in particular has grown by word of mouth to be one of London's leading arts based corporate training providers. The circus team building events encourage participants to communicate and work effectively together when learning circus skills, especially whilst working towards a given goal ie, a group balance or a team performance. A course can be tailored to meet your objectives and ensure your employees have a rewarding and memorable day. All the circus skills are taught by professional circus artists and are suitable for people of all ages and abilities. Flying trapeze requires courage and calculated risk taking;



Balancing acts at the circus

acrobatic balancing, tight-wire walking and stilt walking demand that people literally support and trust each other; juggling helps people learn from their mistakes and others' successes; clown and mask requires the development of authentic communication, innovation and humour. www.thecircusspace.co.uk

Firewalking

Ever wondered if your team would walk over red hot coals for you – well now's your chance to find out. Take them on a journey of self fulfilment and exploration culminating in a short walk over embers that have an average temperature of about 1200 degrees plus Fahrenheit. There are several companies in the UK

specialising in this type of corporate event, which seems to be becoming more popular as time goes on. Firewalking gurus Scott and Diane Bell of UK Firewalk say: "Walking on fire enables you to dispel old limited views and feel psychologically reborn. Firewalking is richly rewarding in terms of your personal self development and the activation of your potential.

"Realise and focus your talents, make decisions and set goals, awakening and exercising inner strength to expand your conscious awareness beyond everyday experiences."

They also say that the chances of getting burned are minimal, although most people who do get



burned already think they will.
www.ukfirewalk.com

After the event

Everyone has had a fabulous time, is fully engaged with their team

were scheduled and held. You will eventually lose the people you most want to keep – especially if they don't see your organisation getting better as a result of off-site team building and planning sessions."

Left: Trapeze, right: The art of firewalking

waste of time and energy. "In fact, I don't lead team building events that are just for team building without a business purpose, in addition to, or to build the event around," she says.

Dr Heathfield advises that the likely long-term effectiveness of a team building event or corporate retreat is enhanced when you incorporate annual team building events into an overall company structure.

This cultural framework of philosophies, values and practices is designed to build the concept of 'team' on a regular basis. In this environment, team building sessions can yield supportive results. For information: <http://humanresources.about.com/mbiopicpage.htm>.

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members and straining at the bit to put all their newly acquired skills into action. So what next? How do you build on these positive foundations and not let all that enthusiasm dwindle away?

Dr Susan Heathfield a management consultant specialising in human resource related systems, issues and opportunities, says: "Corporate team building or planning events are, at best, a short term boost to employee enthusiasm and positive morale. If they are planned and executed well, people feel good about themselves and about each other. Employees get to know each other better and have a common experience to talk about back at work.

"An event that is not followed up with meaningful activities in the workplace should not be held. They harm trust, motivation, employee morale and productivity. They don't solve the problems for which they

She adds that if the team building event has no follow up, people become jaded about such events as a

Case Study

The da Vinci Code, Blue Hat UK Ltd

Client: Airbus
Industry Sector: Aviation
Numbers: 45pax
Location: St David's Bay Hotel, Cardiff
Date: October 2005

Purpose: Annual away day (the team work in several countries across Europe and this is one of their only times to get together as a whole team in one place). The event is to serve as a platform for participants to develop their existing working relationships with colleagues, some of whom they may not have actually met face to face before. It also serves as a reward for dedication and excellent team work on their various projects undertaken throughout the year.

Option taken: The full day da Vinci Code Challenge at a five star venue with excellent catering facilities and within one hour of the UK headquarters. The group were split into smaller working teams with a fun competitive element to maximise the enjoyment of teams as they vied to be the one team who would successfully access the chalice and the elixir of life.

Testimonial: "Having been on many team building events to date, this is by far the best.....it has obviously been really cleverly thought out with great attention to detail given to the creation and presentation of each activity...the variety of tasks are ideal to ensure there is something for everyone"

Airbus Sales Manager, Michael Page