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Business Owner Story

Corporate bonding events a 'waste of time'

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- Demand for corporate bonding events jumps
- Aim to boost



Corporate team building groups say their events improve communication and boost teamwork / File

communication, teamwork

- May not teach useful skills, says expert

DEMAND for corporate team building events is up sharply as businesses hope to keep staff from jumping ship as the economy improves.

But experts believe there's a chance of these activities backfiring, with some touted as a waste of time.

Outwitting your office enemies in corporate Survivor, cooking up a feast with new starters or pounding away on African drums with your boss are some of the many team building activities that claim to boost communication, improve work habits and break down negative attitudes at work.

But high turnover and redundancies can make corporate bonding events ring hollow to staff, and not everyone enjoys athletic events or competition, psychologist Dr Darryl Cross of Crossways Consulting said.

Businesses should avoid events that are too competitive and be aware that team building days don't always teach workers useful skills, Mr Cross said.

"Everyone has a good time, they enjoy their ropes experience, their climbing or their go-carting but it doesn't translate back to the workplace," Dr Cross says.

"Back in the work scene, the old patterns emerge, the old communication styles emerge. The same way of dealing with people stays.

"Occasionally, if you get into team activities, some of the teams can play really hard and get a bit vindictive and sometimes that vindictiveness people remember back in the work scene. So the wrong emotions are taken back to the work scene," he said.

YOUR SAY: What's the worst corporate bonding experience you've had? Are they a waste of time? Tell us below.

Drum Circle Events uses music to help teach employees co-operation and show staff how they fit into the business' bigger picture, director Lance Radus said.

Optus, NRMA, St George and accountants KPMG have paid up to \$12,000 for large group drumming sessions, which Mr Radus said broke down people's "I can't do it" mindset and teach teamwork skills they can apply back in the office.

"The metaphor around drumming can be used in so many different circumstances," he said.

"That idea where people can understand what that person is doing in marketing and sales has a direct effect on what I'm doing in customer relations".

Leave work arguments at the door

Cheeky Foods founder Leona Watson said her team building cooking events worked best at changing behaviours when the business owner or manager knew exactly what they wanted out of the day. For example, a PR firm may want staff to focus on image, so their event would stress presentation of the food, she said.

"They often end up leaving the old disgruntlements at the door and go away with a new way of interacting and patterns of behaviour," Ms Watson said.

"The thing is they do it without even knowing, that's a key to the success of this. They establish quite different ways of behaviour and our job is to create a great atmosphere where people can do that."

Ms Watson said demand for corporate cooking events was up 60 per cent on last year as businesses sought to reward staff after tough economic times.

"Also for the business world in general then that's a really good sign people are putting the focus back on their staff, and on keeping them happy in small and large businesses," Ms Watson said.

One in five clients is a small business owner, because they often have a very diverse group of employees working closely together, and cooking works well because no one feels left out.

"The great thing especially about cooking together as opposed to the more physical sports, if you've got a 18 year old receptionist up to a 60 year old partner, everyone can be a part of it," Ms Watson.

Coming together to do something fun outside of the office can help introduce new starters or reward loyal employees who have put in long hours and need a boost, she said.

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