

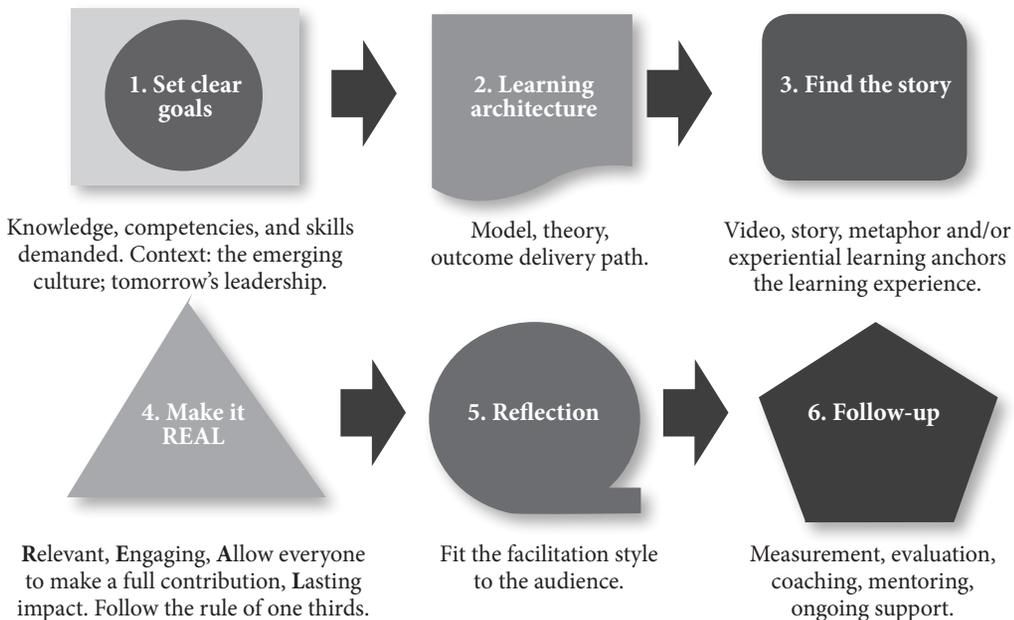
CHAPTER 40:



The teambuilding workshop

“A good facilitator is the alter ego of the leaders inside the organization, charting a better way.”

As individuals we are unique and complicated beings. A team increases the level of complexity considerably. Yet, like much in life, we are seduced by the promise of the quick fix; the two-day teambuilding session; the one-size-fits-all simulation; the cooking class; the consulting group who enquire but don't measure; and/or the facilitator whose learning methodology amounts to little more than, “What did you learn from the experience?”



TEAMBUILDING IN SIX

Figure five

CHAPTER 40: The teambuilding workshop

And yet, there can be deep and lasting value for a team in taking a time out - provided it's done well. If, for example, several key principles are woven into the design; if the bridge between the workshop and what to do differently on Monday is clear, it can add real value.

A successful teambuilding workshop draws on six key building blocks. See Figure five.

1. **Set clear goals.** Job one: define workshop outcomes, e.g., identify the competencies, skills, knowledge, insight and/or new processes the team would benefit from. Go through the TEAM assessment at the beginning of the book. Consider also:
 - i. *Building on success.* Where and in what ways does the “needed” capability, competency, skill and/or knowledge already thrive inside the organization? Outside of the organization? How can those positive examples be woven into the workshop? Results, not resolutions.
 - ii. *The organization's culture.* The assumption that tomorrow will be a replay of today doesn't work. Getting at culture, however, demands more than a “consultative approach.” The key questions become (1) What culture do we need to retain (Roots)? and (2) What culture do we have to create (Wings)? Measurement, not mystique.
 - iii. *Tomorrow's leadership.* The third rail of “how things need to happen around here” is captured by the organization's leadership competencies. Leadership, not legerdemain.
2. **Build the learning architecture.** Kurt Lewin said, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory.”⁸⁶ Learning is ultimately not about the experience; it's about what happens afterward. The challenge: to bridge the workshop with the workplace. It matters not how stimulating the event, the insights have to translate into action.

People are busy, good intent is overwhelmed by other priorities. Equally important, goals alone do not live long in a vacuum. The good news? Participants are aided significantly when the learning is anchored in an appropriate conceptual model. Geoff Colvin in his wonderful book *Talent Is Overrated*⁸⁷ suggests that the right model contributes to learning in three ways:

⁸⁶ Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) was one of America's premier social scientists.

⁸⁷ *Talent Is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else.* Geoff Colvin. (2008). Pages 122 – 124.

- i. It forms the framework on which to hang your growing knowledge.
- ii. It helps distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant.
- iii. It helps project what will happen next.

It does, however, have to be the right theory and/or model. It is important, therefore, to understand the participant's level of abstraction, ability to deal with complexity and past learning. Some theories can confuse an inexperienced group. A model that is too simple will fail to engage an executive team.

3. **Find the story.** The secret is to bring the workshop to life; to make it an enduring experience. Consider: leading-edge material; best practice visit; a rich metaphor; examples of success from within the firm; case study; assessment tools; video; books; dressing the room;⁸⁸ and experiential learning. Mastery is to blend these into a seamless "story."

Because it has become ubiquitous - a word here about experiential learning. A standby in teambuilding sessions since the 1960's, experiential learning is experiencing a renewed lease on life. Few workshops now are complete without its cooking experience, ice-cream making, team exercise, blind-walk, ropes program, outdoor experience, and/or drumming class.

Experiential learning is not entertainment; it's about changing minds. The dilemma: much of what passes for experiential learning today confuses *play as learning* with *learning as play*. For example, we need to organize a workshop to introduce the new software. That could be pretty dull. Let's jazz it up - make it fun - do something different. Hey, let's do cooking! In unsupported anticipation that the learning will, "hopefully" complement the workshop objectives, play as learning starts with the activity. It's like throwing a hammer in the hope that somewhere out there is a nail.

Step one in learning as play is to define the workshop outcomes. Step two is to build the learning architecture. Step three is to (then and only then) build the story: create an experience that both supports the agreed outcome and complements the learning architecture.

⁸⁸ Props, posters, music, and artifacts that reinforce and enrich the learning experience.

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The story is the anchor; the bonding agent that blends the learning elements together...”

I was asked to work with a new team in Brisbane, Australia. The team was drawn from the organization's operations around the world. We wanted the new team to get to know each other quickly and to understand what it meant to be a team. The eight members of the team were given a total of \$350 Aus. They were asked to, by legal means, and working as one team, double that amount. The team contacted the local children's hospital and became a legal charity for the day. The \$350 was used to make collection boxes, which they dropped off at pubs around the city. They collected thousands of dollars. At the end of the day, the representative from the hospital came to collect the money. There was not a dry eye in the place when the team was presented with a certificate of recognition signed by a young boy with leukemia. It still hangs in the company's reception area.

The story is the anchor; the bonding agent that blends the learning elements together; the framework that defines the boundaries. Jazzing up the workshop by adding entertainment value will be well received by participants. The easy option, however, is rarely the right option. A team of ten away for two days - apart from the opportunity cost - is the equivalent of losing a key member of the team for a month. Getting positive return on that investment is called “leadership.”

Finding “the story” doesn't necessarily mean starting with a blank piece of paper. It does mean building on experience, reshaping past activities, playing with conceptual scenarios, and uncovering/creating the blended elements. It's where innovation, intuition, creative thought and pragmatism come to the fore. Always, of course, keeping the workshop outcomes and the learning architecture front and centre. If it's done right, long after the content has been forgotten, the story is what stays with participants.

4. **Make it real.** We come now to the delivery of the workshop itself: content, flow, pace, balance, and *the golden thread* needed to bind the various elements together. Participants will have both team and personal relevance in mind. Human nature being what it is, the latter is often the more important. **REAL** means:

Relevant - participants can always and easily follow the thread between the activity and the outcome required. Why are we doing this?

Emotional impact, stretch, little time waiting around, and safe. Gen Y participants and their younger cousins learn very differently from boomers and even Gen X. Visually literate in the extreme they are a double cohort weaned on a “fast food” communication diet that assumes if it isn’t instant it isn’t satisfying. The learning imperative: less PowerPoint, more power to. What am I (we) going to get out of this?

Allow everyone to make a full contribution - optimum participation, structured enquiry, team interaction, time set aside for reflection. Am I fully involved?

Lasting impact - the best experiences stay with people months, even years after the workshop. Is this memorable?

Assuming that the story has been established, making it real means adhering to the 1/3rd rule.

- ✓ 1/3rd on fresh ideas, best practice and/or new concepts.
- ✓ 1/3rd on enquiry, dialogue, challenging the ideas presented, and exploring the relevance of those ideas to the participant’s workplace.
- ✓ 1/3rd on practice, e.g., coaching program participants to coach each other.

The acid test: what specifically, will participants do - actually DO - differently on Monday?

5. **Reflection.** Less experienced facilitators tend to ask, “Now that you’ve been through the experience, what will it mean for you back at work?” It’s a question that assumes participants can unbundle the activity, cut through the degree of complexity involved and understand the interaction between participants, all in real-time, without access to theory, template, an elegant model and the right assessment tools. It’s a big step for the facilitator and a giant step for the participants.

Reflection benefits from the right approach to facilitation. Three forms of facilitation to consider are:

- i. **Warrior facilitation.** Difficult to pull off for the inexperienced, in-your-face,

aggressive, hold nothing back, shake ‘em up, warrior facilitation is often the right fit for a group that operates in a highly competitive environment. People learn at the edge. A group that spends its life hitting fastballs is unlikely to connect with the facilitator who pitches balls a little-leaguer could hit out of the park.

- ii. **Deductive facilitation.** The facilitator as coach. Although guided if they stumble, participants identify both the questions the experiential activity draws out and the relevance (meaning) behind the overall learning experience. Caution: it takes a special skill to be the orchestra leader when all the musicians come “armed” with loud and aggressive brass instruments. A seasoned, highly experienced group often benefits the most from a light touch.
- iii. **Guided discovery.** The facilitator acts as a full partner in the learning experience. Using story, metaphor, symbolism and questions that challenge the participant’s mindset, the facilitator helps build the bridge between the workshop and “What to do differently on Monday?” Young and/or inexperienced groups benefit most from guided discovery.

A facilitator doesn’t simply turn up, run an entertaining session, ask a few questions and then depart. A good facilitator is the alter ego of those leaders inside the organization, charting a better way.

- 6. **Follow-up.** The most limiting aspect of leadership development is lack of follow-up. This applies especially to teambuilding workshops. Follow-up builds on an unambiguous, value-adding reason to hold the workshop - complemented by goals and outcomes that define not only skills and competencies, but the culture shift being chartered. The tried and trusted trinity of follow-up is (1) the right “do differently on Monday” goals; (2) the right on-the-job opportunity; and (3) the right ongoing feedback/coaching.

I once travelled from Boston to New York with a friend. After about an hour, he asked me what, at the time, I thought, to be a provocative question, “Do you want the good news, or the bad?” I opted for the good news. “We are making great time,” he said, with a smile. “And the bad?” I asked. “We are lost!”

Teambuilding is often recommended as a way to accelerate the team through the learning curve. The dilemma: it matters not how fast you appear to move ahead or even how entertaining the event - if at the end of the day, you are still lost.

What to do differently on Monday?

1. Take the team through the team assessment at the beginning of the book.
2. In what ways would the team benefit from a couple of days away to focus on what it means to be a great team?
3. Define three critical outcomes of such a teambuilding session. Even if you don't get away, thinking through these goals is a smart way to set a team coaching agenda in place.

What to do differently on Monday

“Teamwork” takes off when and only when four characteristics of success are in place:

Trust building - not just within the immediate team, but with influence brokers across the organization. Make trust building a way of life.

Engagement - the work builds on strengths, involves significant stretch and is inherently satisfying. Make “stretch” a habit.

Alignment - (1) with the values and emerging culture of the organization; and (2) with the strategy and performance needs of the team-one-level-up. Make alignment a routine.

Meaning - those who are part of, or associated with, the team, truly believe that the “why” behind what gets done makes a genuine difference. Make meaning a mantra.

Excerpted from *Team: Align, Build, Connect & Develop*. John O. Burdett. (2015).