

Team-building: No sissies allowed?

When the company could benefit from team-building exercises, what is the best way to approach them? Would putting employees in a difficult environment or situation strengthen the team? That's what one reader asked recently on the Admin Pro Forum, conjuring images of admins bushwhacking through the wilderness or running from giant inflatable beach balls:

"My boss wants me to research all-day team-building activities that, in her words, will 'make people suffer a little.' Her theory is that we all need to have our cushy office lifestyles totally stripped away to kick us out of our comfort zones and remind us of how to work together on a more human level. What have been others' experiences with these sorts of 'pleasantly harsh' activities? What should we try, and what should we avoid?"

—Donna, law office admin

We spoke with some experts to get their opinions on how to structure team-building activities.

Emphasize service. Teresa Lengyel of the team-building company Venture Up suggests picking team-building activities that also include a service element. Activities such as building bikes for underserved children can reinforce team relationships on a personal level and show employees how powerful they can be if they work together, she says.

Allow for fight-or-flight moments. Jared Buckley, a millennial career coach, agrees that there are pros to team-building in difficult environments. He says that in a difficult situation, people often go through a fight-or-flight moment and that such instances can teach teammates a great deal about each other.

While he says this type of team-building can be successful, he warns that you should pick activities with a purpose that deal with business-related problems.

Shift the focus. Val Wright, CEO of Val Wright Consulting, says that "fun or pain cannot be the sole focus of bringing your team together, and it cannot replace the fundamental foundation of a galvanized team."

Wright suggests offering the boss alternative approaches for building the team's cohesiveness and focus. She suggests starting with offering rewards for teams when they produce specific results.