

Building Team Resilience: Activities

The following activities are grouped according to which of the 5 essential ingredients they help to build. Try these at team meetings or retreats with your team members. Most exercises will take less than one hour to complete, with the exception of behavior profiling. Don't forget to debrief after each activity, to reinforce the concepts.

Building Trust

Personal History Exercise

To help build empathy and understanding among team members, ask each person to share personal responses to some of the following questions:

- Where did you grow up?
- How many kids were in your family?
- Tell something about yourself that may surprise others.
- What was your very first job?

T-shirt Activity

Hand each team member a piece of paper with the outline of a t-shirt on it. Using markers, ask each person to draw a picture or write something on the t-shirt that tells who they are. (5 min.) Then, ask each person to share their t-shirts and explain how it represents them.

The Truth Be Known

This helps to build interpersonal understanding among team members, and is fun too. Ask each person to share three (3) things about him/herself; two of these pieces of information have to be true, and the other one, false. After hearing the information, the other members of the team will try to guess which statement is false.

The Shape of Things to Come

This is a short, fun exercise that could be used to introduce the concept of behavior profiling. It will take about 15 minutes to complete. To set up for the exercise, hang a picture of each of the following shapes around the room:

- Box (square)
- Triangle
- Rectangle
- Circle
- Squiggle

Some background:

This activity comes from the research of Dr. Susan Dellinger, the author and creator of *Psycho-Geometrics*^R. This system, developed in 1978, is a unique method of analyzing human personality on the basis of a preference for shapes. This system has been presented to over a million people

worldwide. More information may be obtained on: <http://www.drsusan.net/> and <http://www.psychogeometrics.com/onlinetest.php>.

Ask your staff to choose a shape that represents them at work. After they have chosen their shape, group staff by the shapes they have chosen. Once in groups, ask each group to spend a couple minutes discussing these questions:

- Why did they choose this shape?
- How does the shape represent them at work?
- What is their best guess about the attributes of the shape they've chosen?

Then, ask each group to report out what they've discussed.

After each group has given their report, share with them a little bit about what Dr. Dellinger's research has discovered about each shape preference, as follows:

Box (square)

Hard worker; dependable; detail oriented; collector of data; likes to work independently

Triangle

Upwardly mobile; shows leadership qualities; energetic; task and results oriented

Rectangle:

A shape in transition; can't decide what shape it wants to be; explorer; risk-taker

Circle:

Interested in harmony; wants people to feel good about themselves; nurturer; people pleaser

Squiggle:

Innovative; unique; can be a bit disorganized; multi-tasker; likes several things going at once

Behavior Profiling

Select a behavior profiling instrument (ex: Myers-Briggs) to determine each member's type. After administering the instruments, give team members a little time to reflect on what they've learned about themselves. At the next, or an upcoming team meeting or retreat, ask team members to be prepared to share their personal types/descriptions and one of the following:

- 2-3 things that they felt were particularly insightful about their style
- 1 insight highlighting a strength that they would like to use more for the good of the team
- 1 particular insight that highlights a weakness they would like to address for the good of the team

These activities may be done progressively over time, as trust builds among the members.

Mastering Conflict (confronting)

Conflict Behavior Profile

Ask team members to review their behavior profile, to understand their tendencies with conflict. Then, at a staff meeting, ask each member to share these tendencies, as well as other influences such as family experiences and culture. Discuss similarities and differences among team members, including the potential impact on team interactions.

Open Your Fist

This exercise may provide some insights into team members' tendencies around confronting.

Pair up participants. One will be A; and, the other B. Ask the A person to make a fist and place it on the surface in front of person B. Tell the B's that they have 15 seconds to open the fist of person A – without harming. The facilitator says, “Ready, set, go,” and times them. Afterward, ask these questions:

- Who tried to use force?
- What about tickling, or some other distraction?
- What about bribery: money, food, washing their car, doing laundry, etc.?
- How many just asked person A to open his/her fist?

FYI, research indicates that very few people use the last approach. Ask the group why that is. When you debrief, talk about the team dynamics, that is, how many go straight to the ‘force’ approach? How many prefer compromise? What about direct approaches – and, indirect? Then, discuss any potential impacts on team interactions.

Conflict-Norming Exercise

First, ask team members, individually, to write down their preferences around acceptable and unacceptable behaviors when debating. Topic areas might include: tone of voice, body language, types of verbal responses, emotions, and extent of involvement. Then ask each team member to share their preferences. Have someone on the team capture key similarities and differences. Ask the team to come to an understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behavior standards to which all members can commit. (The leader may have to break ties.) Formally record these norms and post in the team's regular meeting room.

Conflict Resolution Exercise

Choose an issue that the team frequently wrestles with and finds it difficult to appropriately resolve. The team may review prior discussions, looking for obstacles that prevented them from achieving resolution. Obstacles are usually of the following types:

- Informational (facts, opinions, perspectives)
- Physical Environmental (temperature, noise, work politics or culture)
- Interpersonal Relationships (unresolved personality conflicts, history of turf or ownership issues)
- Individual (social/emotional, self-esteem, values, skills, knowledge, experience)

Once members identify the issues, have them discuss their impact on the decision-making process. Next, ask the members to discuss how to best resolve the issues so the team can move forward.

Achieving Commitment

Commitment Clarification

At the end of a team discussion, the leader should go to a white board or flip chart and ask everyone, “What Have we agreed upon today?” As team members give their understanding of what's been agreed to, if consensus has not yet been reached, the leader will encourage further

discussion to eliminate discrepancies and clarify commitments. The leader will write the commitments on the white board, and when back in the office, will email them to the team.

Cascading Communication

After the above commitment clarification exercise, the team decides what agreements will be communicated by supervisors to their direct reports. This is done within 48 hours, and is done in person, so that staff can ask questions and receive clarification, if needed, so that they will understand how their work is impacted.

Establishing a Common Goal

The intent here is to provide the team with a common sense of purpose, so that it achieves greater alignment. Team should enter into a discussion and answer the following question: What is the one goal that we need to achieve during this period of time to consider ourselves successful? Some examples are:

- Improve customer service
- Control expenses
- Implement a new process or project
- Strengthen the team

Organizational Clarification

Conduct a discussion with the team, and come to agreement around these important elements:

- Vision
- Mission
- Values
- Unit or department strategy
- Goals
- Team roles and responsibilities

Clarification of Team Principles

Conduct a discussion with the team, and come to agreement around how members will deal with one another on an ongoing basis on such issues as:

- Meeting structure and schedule
- Acceptable behavior during meetings (ex: laptop or Blackberry use)
- Preferred method(s) for communication and how to use them (ex: voice mail, email, face-to-face)
- Response timeliness
- Use of shared resources
- Team member availability for projects, questions, support, etc.

Embracing Accountability

Team Effectiveness Exercise

This exercise provides team members a forum for providing one another with focused, direct, and honest feedback about how their behavior can enhance overall team performance.

Have each team member respond to the following question about their team mates:

- What is the single most important behavioral characteristic demonstrated by this person that contributes to the team's strength?

When each team member has received his/her feedback, each should summarize aloud one or two take-away items that made an impact.

When a team has progressed in trust and is high-functioning, another, related activity may be done, with each team member responding to this question about their team mates:

- What is one behavior or characteristic demonstrated by this person that can sometimes obstruct team progress or the general working of the team?

As members share, the leader will question the team to see if any are taken aback or surprised by the feedback. When each team member has received his/her feedback, each should summarize aloud the one or two take-away items that made an impact, and that will be worked on. After the team meeting, each member will email the leader the issues they have decided to work on, individually, for the good of the team. At the next team meeting, each member will report personal progress, and solicit new feedback from their team mates.

Focus on Results

Team Score Card

Once a common goal is established for the team, have the team discuss and agree upon several objectives that must be accomplished for the team to achieve the goal. It would help to measure progress on the goal, if the team set up a score board or dash board that visually shows progress (ex: tracking expenses, employee turnover, customer requests completed).

Best Practices

Present team members with an open question related to a team goal, for example: what can we do to increase our productivity? Ask each team member to come up with a clear concise, practical response and write it on an index card. (2 min.) Ask members to hold their cards with the written side down. Ask team members to walk around and continually exchange the cards with each other, for about 20 seconds. The leader then stops the activity and asks members to pair up.

Each pair is then asked to objectively distribute 7 points (using whole numbers) between each idea on their two cards, reflecting their usefulness. Scores should be placed on the blank side of the index card. Members should not divulge if they get their own card.

Then repeat the walking around process, exchanging cards, for 20 more seconds. Have them pair up again, and score the two cards distributing 7 points between the two ideas.

Repeat the walking around and scoring process 3 more times.

Then ask members to sit down with the card they now have. Ask them to total the number of points on the card.

The leader will count down from 35. When members hear their card's score, they will stand and read the card's idea. When the top 5 ideas have been read, check in with the team to see which ones should be implemented, and how soon.

Activities from:

- *90 World-Class Activities by 90 World-Class Trainers*; Editor, Elaine Biech, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2007
- Lencioni, Patrick, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, a Leadership Fable*, Jossey-Bass, 2002
- Lencioni, Patrick, *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team, a Field Guide for Leaders, Managers and Facilitators*, Jossey-Bass, 2005