

Background

My girlfriend recently went on a team-building weekend. She went to a cottage in the countryside to play games and go on nature trails with her colleagues. She came back tired and angry. 'I never want to see those people again,' she said. So the weekend didn't work – rather than help her form alliances and work closely with her colleagues, three days of forced 'enjoyment' made her hate her colleagues more than ever. So what went wrong? 'Team-building exercises usually *fail when there is no focus – when the organizers don't set clear goals and don't have a good idea of what they want to *achieve,' explains Jason Sindall, an HR specialist. Sindall suggests that if you really want to develop teamwork in a company you should carefully plan your team-building events so that participants will be *challenged and will have to trust their colleagues in order to succeed. He suggests going to a team-building specialist who can organize tailor-made weekends for your company.

One such specialist is a company called *Go Ape*. *Go Ape* is an *assault course with a difference. The mile-long course runs through the forest and is high up in the trees. Up there you have to cross high wires, crawl through *tunnels, swing on ropes, and cross rope bridges. The course takes about two and a half hours to complete and is completely safe. You are given clear instructions before you are allowed to start and are attached by a *harness, so even if you fall you cannot hurt yourself. After the course has been completed *Go Ape* provides food and drink for the participants to give everyone a chance to share their experiences.

Sindall says, 'the *Go Ape* experience is an excellent team-building event – it's great fun and everyone feels that they have achieved something. It also *encourages people to look after each other. You can do the course alone, but it's much better if you help your colleagues through it. People all face different challenges – some people hate the heights, some hate the tunnels. So they need to rely on each other for *support and encouragement.'

If swinging through the trees is not your thing, Sindall suggests trying a company called *Chillisauce*. *Chillisauce* provides a range of team-building events. '*Chillisauce* days are designed to improve team working, and increase communication skills and confidence – they take the team members out of their usual roles and give them challenging new tasks and different ways of working together.' Their website confirms this – *Chillisauce* offers a range of different events to suit all tastes. You can go boat racing, take part in *blindfolded driving, or solve a crime using the techniques seen on Crime Scene Investigation. The choice seems endless. 'These are real team-building activities,' explains Sindall. 'Think about blindfolded driving – you have to put your trust in a colleague. And with the Crime Scene activity, you can't solve the crime by working alone.'

So whether you want to swing through trees or solve a crime, there are plenty of choices out there for great team-building activities. Just make sure that they are well planned and that they encourage your staff to rely on each other.

Glossary

*achieve = to reach a goal / aim

*assault course = where soldiers have to run between objects and test their strength and fitness

*blindfolded = when a piece of cloth has been put on your head to cover your eyes

*challenged = when your ability to do something is tested

*encourage = to make someone more likely to do something or give them confidence to do something

*fail = not succeed

*harness = ropes that are attached to your body

*support = help

*tunnels = a passage under the ground

Exercises

1 Work with a partner and discuss these questions.

- 1 What is a team-building weekend?
- 2 Have you ever been on one? What was it like?
- 3 What makes a good team-building weekend?

2 Read the text quickly. Compare your answers in 1 to the information in the text.

3 Read the text again quickly and choose the best title for the article.

- 1 Teaming-building weekends never work
- 2 Team-building activities can be fun
- 3 Choose your team-building activities carefully

4 Match 1–10 to a–j. Then look back at the text to check your answers.

- | | |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 form | a challenges |
| 2 work | b your trust in a colleague |
| 3 set | c all tastes |
| 4 develop | d confidence |
| 5 look | e clear goals |
| 6 face | f on each other |
| 7 rely | g closely with colleagues |
| 8 increase | h teamwork |
| 9 suit | i an alliance |
| 10 put | j after each other |

5 Match the phrases from 4 to definitions 1–10. Then look back at the text to check your answers.

- 1 deal with things you find difficult: _____
- 2 agree to work with other people to achieve something together: _____
- 3 improve the way a group of people work together: _____
- 4 make people feel more certain of their abilities: _____
- 5 take care of other people: _____
- 6 trust other people: _____
- 7 make clear or fix the outcome of something: _____
- 8 have belief in someone or something: _____
- 9 spend a lot of time working with other people: _____
- 10 be right / acceptable for everyone: _____

6 Work with a partner. Make a new sentence for each phrase in 4.

7 Read the text again and answer these questions in your own words.

- 1 What did the author's girlfriend think of her team-building weekend?
- 2 What can cause team-building exercises to fail?
- 3 What does a team-building exercise need to include in order to develop teamwork?
- 4 What are the differences between the *Go Ape* and *Chillisauce* team-building activities?
- 5 How do the *Go Ape* and *Chillisauce* activities help build teams?

8 Work with a partner. Discuss these questions

- 1 Which team-building weekend would you prefer – *Go Ape* or an event with *Chillisauce*? Why?
- 2 Is it usual for companies in your country to send staff on team-building activities?
- 3 Do you think it's a good idea for companies to spend money on team-building weekends, or would it be better to use the money for something else? If so, what should they use it for?