

Everyday Team Building DIY



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by Billy Kirsch

KIDBILLY  MUSIC
TEAM BUILDING THROUGH SONG

Every Day Team Building

I've always been the person standing in the back of the room, quietly soaking it all in. Except when I'm at the front of the room, either on stage performing or working with a group to facilitate creative team building. Back of the room, front of the room - two seemingly very different scenarios, but for me they're very similar. Either way, I'm observing, with my antennae up. I'm observing what's taking place and what's not taking place. By what's not taking place I mean the 'feel' of the room, the group culture. Is it tense or is it loose? Are people free to express themselves? Are leaders listening or dictating?

Team Building is about listening, openness and collaboration. It's also about individual expression, often the kind of individual expression that doesn't have an opportunity to surface during normal day-to-day work life. When we, as individuals, have a chance to express ourselves, when we have a chance to listen to others express themselves, we can then combine ideas, sift through challenges and offer solutions.

That's real team building. It comes as no surprise that I'm passionate about my program, Team Building Through Song. The activity enables groups to brainstorm, to discuss themes and ideas and to articulate the key things that make an organization what it is. The activity gives voice to the personal stories we all have as employees and colleagues. There's fun involved: music, rhyme and laughter and this creates a great environment of collaboration and discovery. But here's some news. Even a fantastic team building event won't effectively change your company culture unless there's follow up. An 'event' can only provide a catalyst for change. It's what you do on a daily, weekly, or at least monthly basis that really matters.

So here are some team building activities you can do on your own with your company, association or even family. Integrate these ideas into your life and see what happens. You'll pave the way for better teamwork through better communication. You'll practice brainstorming, enhancing your abilities to create, to innovate and problem solve. Best of all, you'll have fun and increase morale in whatever area of your life you do this. Enjoy!
Billy Kirsch

I: Be A Team Building Superhero

I don't claim to be a superhero, fighting injustice wherever I see it. In fact, most often I'm too slow to react. And then I'm filled with regret for what I might have done, had I only had the wherewithal to step right in and fix things. However, I care deeply about systems, fairness and invitation. By 'invitation' I mean, inviting new people into teams or groups and helping them feel comfortable. By 'fairness' I mean, let's be fair. We were all new at one time, so let's be welcoming. By 'systems' I mean, let's stop the spinning of the wheel just long enough to enable our new colleagues to jump in and get up to speed.

One day, not too long ago, during my early morning swim, I noticed a man crossing into the lap swimming area I was in. One other swimmer and I were hitting it pretty hard and this newcomer wasn't sure how to navigate. Not wanting to slowdown, I waved him out of my way and to my dismay he ventured right into the oncoming path of the swimmer next to me. She barely slowed down, went around him disapprovingly and continued on. My intention was to finish my current lap and then explain to the new swimmer that he could claim the center of our area, thus creating his own lane and carry on quite nicely. However, by the time I turned around and headed back to the end of the pool, he was gone. I saw him headed out the door and I felt awful. Maybe his doctor suggested he take up swimming, maybe he made a resolution to get in shape, maybe he was trying to heal a back injury, maybe a lot of things. But definitely one thing, he most likely wouldn't return anytime soon and he was probably feeling humiliated or at least defeated. I could have helped this guy by reacting more quickly and being less self-centered. Had I stopped immediately upon almost colliding with him, I could have said hello, explained the rules, set him up in his own area and continued with my workout, having helped someone and made a new friend. But instead, my hesitation and preoccupation with my narrow set of personal goals contributed to a newcomer's alienation and failure. I know I'm making this sound dramatic, but I think it is. I missed an opportunity to be a team building superhero, or at least show a little leadership, and I regret that.

Stopping the spinning wheel, stepping outside of the box, showing leadership immediately and not only when it's convenient, all require true dedication to team, or team-think. Had I been in a team-think mindset, I would have stopped in time to help this guy and it would have made a better experience for both of us, a win-win. Had I been in a team building mindset that morning, I would have had antennae up for my fellow swimmer and slowed down as soon as he entered our area. We could have co-created an experience and become friends, but my superhero was dormant for about 60 seconds too long, and that was long enough to miss a great opportunity.

Activity I: Be A Team Building Superhero

- Start your day with a team meeting, do NOT bring an agenda.
- Talk a bit about how you're feeling that day. Good, bad or indifferent – describe at least one feeling.
- Invite your colleagues to do the same and then ask, “Does anyone need any help with anything today?”
- Adjourned, that's it. But now all of your antennae are up. You've started the day by listening and that's a great start.

Facilitation Tip: Every meeting needs a beginning and ending time, so you'll have to plan. Give everyone on your team two minutes to express how they're feeling. A two-minute timer is a fun device to encourage people to jump into discussion. If you have a large team, ask five people per meeting to share within the two-minute time frame.



II: Every Day Team Building

I'm resistant to change and I don't like to be told what to do. I don't think I'm unusual in this way. So when my wife, Julie, told me I "needed" to move my clothes from bins in our bedroom to a dresser in another room, I resisted and quietly did nothing! About a week later, as I was complaining about not being able to reach my clothes without having to move my nightstand and pull out a bin, Julie said the following, "I really think you'd be happy if you used that dresser in the spare room. I think you'd like it and you'd find it easier to get your clothes when you need them." Here's what I heard, "happy", "easier", "like it". I reacted so differently from when I was first told I "needed" to move. In fact I'm now looking forward to doing so, and this weekend I'm moving my clothes. While I'm still not 100% convinced I'll like using the dresser, I'm going to give it a try because Julie got me to buy-in to the potential benefits. Julie knows from experience I don't like change, and so she found a way to get me to buy-in to the possibility that the reward of change would be greater than the risk.

When you talk with your employees, co-workers or family members, are you approaching them as team members or are you giving orders? The next time you have something you think you "need" someone else to do, think about the language you'll use to communicate your intentions. You can practice every day team building by being intentional with your language. Start by coming up with a simple thing you'd like to change, either at work or at home. Then think hard about how you'd want to be approached if you were being asked to change. Rehearse a few different ways of making your request. Try saying it out loud and see how you react to your own communication style; you might be surprised!



Activity II: Every Day Team Building

- Think about how you'd want to be asked to change something at work or home.
- Think about 'why' you're asking someone to do something – They may ask you why.
- Think about how you believe the other person likes to be communicated with.
- Practice out loud and be honest about how you'd react if you were asked.
- Communicate the positive potential for change and present your request as a choice.
- Start with small requests and build trust.

Facilitation Tip: Before you present your solution or action plan to someone, simply identify the problem and ask them if they can think of any solutions or action steps. Give them time to respond. They may need time to think about it.



III: Leaders Learning To Listen

We've all been there – another meeting with the boss. It's supposed to be a meeting of the minds but instead it's a more like a lecture. The boss goes through his or her check list, asks for updates from all of you, interrupts when you're updating, draws conclusions for you and gives marching orders until the next meeting. Is that fun – no! Maybe this is the worst-case scenario, but it plays out to varying degrees at company meetings every day. Smart leaders know that listening may be the single most important attribute to cultivate.

“When I am getting ready to reason with a man, I spend one-third of my time thinking about myself and what I am going to say and two-thirds about him and what he is going to say.” – Abraham Lincoln.





Activity III: Leaders Learning To Listen

- Pass out your meeting agenda.
- Ask someone to announce the first agenda item and to lead discussion about it. With each new agenda item, ask a different colleague to lead discussion about it. Don't assign discussion items by areas of expertise. You don't want 'experts' talking, you want to create a culture where questioning and dialogue occurs.
- The leader's role is to act like a consultant – one who listens and is there to answer questions only when needed.
- Set a reasonable time for discussion of each agenda item.
- Close by asking the boss to share what he or she 'heard'. Was it informative for him or her?

Facilitation Tip: To execute the above exercise you'll need to shorten your agenda items, and not be as goal focused. Each item will generate more discussion than usual but you'll discover more engagement for the tasks at hand and a greater sense of ownership by all. The meeting will truly be a meeting where problem solving occurs, ideas and tasks evolve. After all, why meet if it's just to get a lecture. That's a lecture, not a meeting!

“Some people talk in their sleep. Lecturers talk while other people sleep.” Albert Camus.

IV: Create A “You Are Special Box”

I was hanging out with a friend last weekend when she received a text from her daughter, “I love you soooooo much”. Wow – what precipitated that, I asked? My friend had sent her daughter a care package with the usual goodies including, of course, food. But here’s what prompted the Wow: She made a little cardboard box and labeled it “You Are Special”. She filled it with notes like, “You’re really creative”, “Thanks for being a good listener” and “You’ve already accomplished so much”.

My friend told her daughter to take a note out of the box and read it whenever she was having a bad day or feeling stressed. Hey, I need one of those boxes, and I bet you do too.





Activity IV: Create A “You Are Special Box”

- Ask each team member to create a personalized box for a co-worker.
- Have everyone add personal notes to each of the boxes.
- Distribute the personalized boxes, with notes, to each of your team members.
- Remind everyone to take a note out of the box when they need some positive reinforcement. It’s okay to take a note out of the box, read it, and then put it back in. Shake it up every once in a while too!
- Monitor how this increases communication, sharing and morale. This has power because our co-workers create these affirmations for us.

V: Be A Change Agent

At 5:30 AM I go to the gym to work out. This is the hardest part of the day for me. But I believe if I can get out of bed, get to the club and get my swim in, then I'm set up for the rest of the day. So while I'm usually bleary eyed and somewhat hesitant, I always show up. Recently, as I was leaving the locker room to go to the pool, I heard someone banging his locker repeatedly. I looked over and saw him opening and closing it, fiddling with the lock, trying to get it to latch securely and close. I quickly realized that was the same locker I had tried last week, and that the latch was broken. When I encountered the broken latch last week, I tried it twice, and then I quickly moved all of my stuff into the neighboring locker. I watched for a while as this person repeated the same actions to no avail. I went over to him, mentioned that the locker was indeed broken and suggested he move his stuff to the next locker. With resignation and a chuckle he said, "Yeah - guess that makes sense".

Ten minutes into my swim, finally becoming awake and mentally alert it struck me. There was stark contrast to the way the person banging the locker and I had reacted to the same problem. He kept repeating the same action steps, even when it was clear they wouldn't solve his problem. He was engaged in the physical activity of frustration without allowing himself even a moment to reflect that there could be a simple solution. Once he committed to that locker he was resistant to changing course. What struck me was how our underlying attitude toward change, toward commitment and to seeking alternate solutions effects even the small chores we do. Imagine then, how our disposition, or lack of disposition to embrace change effects our team's ability to innovate and solve problems. If it's easy for you to adapt, innovate and change you can be a change agent on your team. If you're more like the guy repeatedly trying to close the broken locker, think about change as an invitation, rather than a chore. Invitations are exciting and chores are not!

Activity V: Be A Change Agent

- Ask your colleagues how they view change. Do they tend to see it as an invitation or a chore?
- We all have different preferences, so explain that difficulty with change is not a weakness, just a preference.
- Encourage those who see change as a chore to stop and ask for help when they're banging the locker door (metaphorically).
- Share possible solutions with co-workers, even if they haven't asked. Sometimes offering help is enough.
- Advocate for change without being overbearing or fixed on a specific solution.

Facilitation Tip: When you encounter someone engaging in an activity that isn't working, don't judge. Simply encourage them to stop, to reflect, to consider alternative solutions and to ask for help when needed.



VI: Car Talk And Team Building

Listening to Car Talk one Saturday morning, it occurred to me that a big part of what makes the show so compelling is the stories told by the people who call in. The hosts coax the humor, individuality and drama out of every caller. The stories are as important, often more important, than the specific automotive problem being discussed. These personal narratives are compelling because most of us relate to them. Most of us drive cars, and thus empathize with the dilemmas facing the car talk callers. Besides, the callers and the hosts make us laugh and that's powerful. When I talk with prospective clients about our team building programs, one of the first things I mention is story. Everyone has a personal take on what they experience at work. When those work stories are shared, groups identify the common ideas and company themes that appear in everyone's personal narrative. It's similar to car talk in that when someone starts talking about a personal experience, you can see everyone in the room riveted with that "I feel your pain" kind of attention.



Activity VI: Car Talk And Team Building

- Begin by asking someone in your group to share a personal story about a problem they've had with their car and how they got the problem resolved. Allow for informal dialogue so you don't miss those, "I feel your pain" moments from other people.
- Next ask someone in your group to share a story about a problem they've had or are currently having at work. Ask them how they've tried to resolve it.
- Ask others if they've had similar problems and how, or if, they've been resolved.
- You'll find increased collaboration with team members offering tips and solutions.
- There's real potential to increase productivity here, as participants discover others who have encountered and solved similar problems.

Facilitation Tip: One of the keys here is to find out if common problems and solutions are shared on a regular basis. Set up a regular time to trade stories about car problems and then segue into stories about work challenges. You'll build empathy, communication and awareness.

VII: The Power Of Fun

Many people approach team building from a place of doubt and sometimes dread. Aarghhhh....the team building activities, can we leave yet? I get it. I hated our ginormous extended family picnics growing up, organized field trips and the like. I was always the one slinking off to just do....nothing!

So when I was contacted by a healthcare company several months ago, and they told me that the team building program they did last year was not well received, I was excited. Yes, a chance to convince another group of people that there's power in fun. Shared experience on an equal footing loosens inhibitions and dissolves hierarchy. Whether it's dissolving into laughter at the creation of a really silly rhyme while songwriting, or seeing your CEO tremble with fear at the top of a zip line (that's always fun), out-of-office experience has real value. Here's a quote from a client that sums this all up. "As I told my wife, I'm a skeptic and expected to hate the team building day. But I was laughing so hard the whole time that I cried and thought I was going to wet myself...I got to see a whole different side of my co-workers. I never knew they could be so funny and creative. I feel less isolated and from now on I'm going to leave my cubicle, walk down the hall and ask for advice when I need it."

Remember the time you were on the road and at the bar with your boss. You finally found the courage to suggest that fix you'd been scared to mention, and the boss loved your idea.



Activity VII: The Power Of Fun

Dedicate time to partake in fun, out-of-the-office experiences with your team.

- Notice how new ideas evolve, and information is exchanged when all are relaxed and engaged.
- You must dedicate time to this because -
Fun = interaction = communication = ideas = solutions, and that's ROI.

Facilitation Tip: Just do it!

Epilogue: And That's Not All

I'm passionate about team building. Can't you tell? Whether you need advice about every day team building or guidance on planning a professionally facilitated program, I'm here to help. Visit www.kidbillymusic.com or email billy@kidbillymusic.com and let me know how every day team building works for you. I hope you'll stay in touch.

About Billy Kirsch -

Grammy nominated, CMA & ACM award winning songwriter Billy Kirsch has harnessed the power of creativity to lead a successful life as an entertainer, songwriter and entrepreneur. His body of work includes award winning songs and career songs for the artists who have recorded them.

"Holes In The floor Of Heaven" recorded by Steve Wariner, won a Country Music Association song of the year award, was nominated for a Grammy award and was a number one hit. Top 10 songs, "Is It Over Yet" and "Come Some Rainy Day", both recorded by Wynonna Judd, have become standards in the repertoire. "Stay Gone" launched singer Jimmy Wayne's career as a Top 5 single. The list of artists who have recorded Billy's songs include Tim McGraw, Kenny Rogers, Alabama, Englebert Humperdink, Lee Greenwood, Donny Osmand, Collin Raye, Steve Wariner and Wynonna to name just a few.

Billy's unique abilities as facilitator, leader and performer are the foundation of his highly successful corporate event programs, Team Building Through Song and Harnessing Your Creative Power. Billy's presentations help people rediscover their creativity to become more innovative and engaged in their work. Microsoft, Healthways, BD Diagnostics and Vanderbilt University are among the many groups who have benefited from Billy's interactive and entertaining presentations.

Awards include Grammy & Emmy nominations, Country Music Association Song Of The Year and ACM Song Of The Year.

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