

# 14 Critical Components Of Successful Team-Building Activities

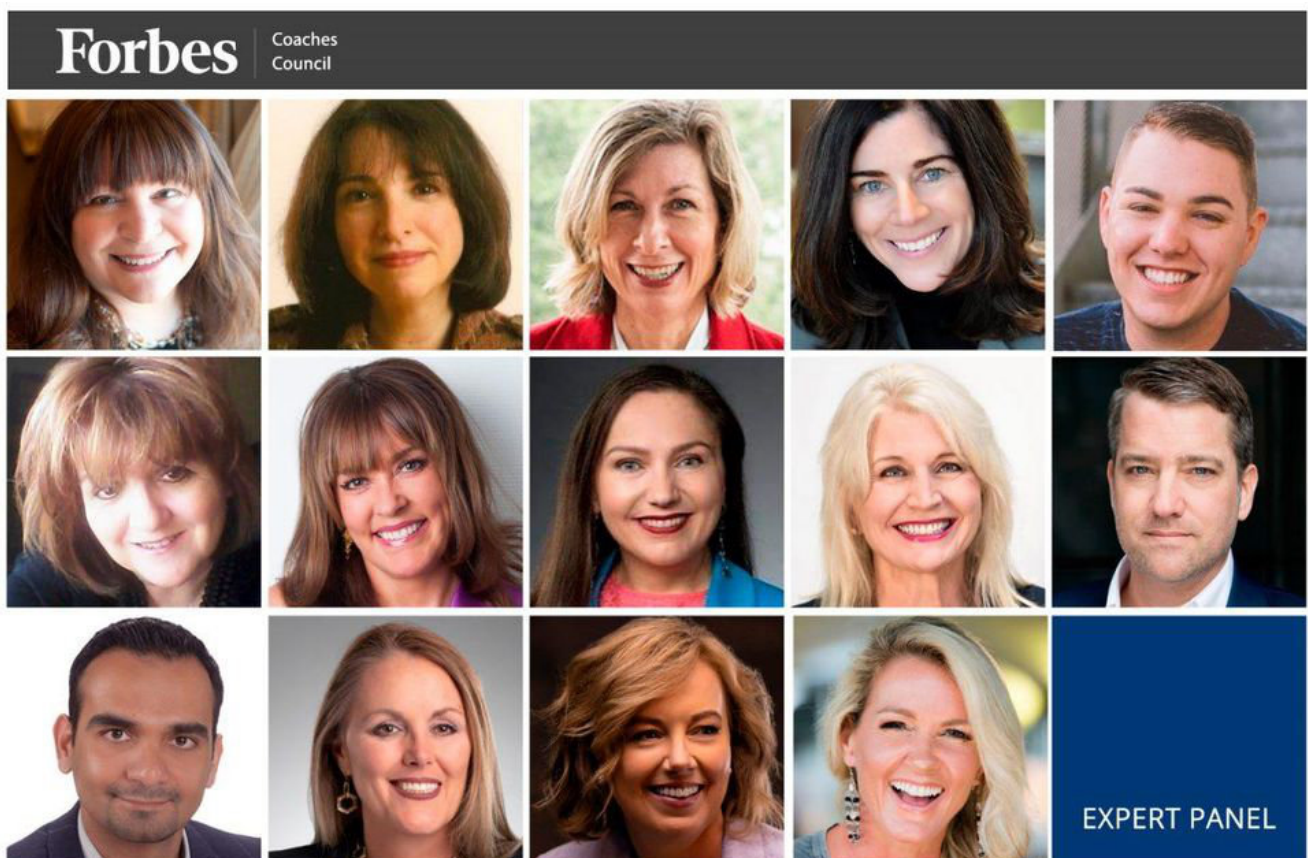
Post written by Expert Panel, Forbes Coaches Council

Top business and career coaches from Forbes Coaches Council<sup>[1]</sup> offer firsthand insights on leadership development & careers.

The idea behind team-building exercises is to help employees become more in-tune with each other's strengths and weaknesses. By sharing experiences, members of a team should be able to operate like a well-oiled machine, specifically under pressure.

Sadly, many team-building exercises don't work that well because the teams feel as though they're just going through the paces. There's not enough engagement to actually create a connection. Developing that connection is the whole purpose of team building, so any exercise that doesn't is a waste of the company's resources.

Fourteen members of Forbes Coaches Council<sup>[2]</sup> examine some of the critical components a team-building practice should have if it intends to impart the right kind of mindset on the employees involved.



Forbes Coaches Council members share what every team-building activity needs in order to be effective and successful.

Photos courtesy of the individual members.

## **1. Organizational Priorities**

Team-building exercises only hold value if they are aligned with the company's priorities and business goals. Participants are taking time away from executing on their goals so create a direct line of sight between the retreat and the bottom line. Weave the team's top business goals into the discussions and activities. Engage participants by making the case that it will lead to better outcomes. - Loren Margolis<sup>[3]</sup>, Training & Leadership Success LLC<sup>[4]</sup>

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## **2. Authenticity And Application**

Team building has to do two things to be successful. Exercises need to allow everyone to start from a common baseline where no one is smarter, funnier or better informed, and any opportunities to share need to result in disclosure that feels authentic without being overly intrusive. Equally important—whatever "content" comes from the exercise must have a place in the ensuing work. - Karyn Gallant<sup>[5]</sup>, Gallant Consulting Group<sup>[6]</sup>

### **3. Truth And Trust**

High-performing teams flourish only where trust abounds. Team-building exercises that build trust are worth every minute because there can be no truth-telling without that trust. Getting to know your colleagues at a deeper level through creative activities creates the space to build trust. The goal is for everyone to feel encouraged to speak up, to flag concerns and solve issues in advance. - Laura Camacho<sup>[9]</sup>, Mixonian Institute<sup>[10]</sup>

### **4. Psychological Safety**

The degree of psychological safety is one of the strongest predictors of team effectiveness. It allows people to safely disagree and offer new ideas. It helps people show up as the best version of themselves. Whether the team-building objective is to teach a new skill or develop new strategy, ensuring that the team's psychological safety is also built greatly increases the likelihood of success. - Maureen Cunningham<sup>[11]</sup>, Up Until Now Inc.<sup>[12]</sup>

### **5. Team Input**

You cannot have effective team building without team buy-in. Begin by asking your team how they like to be appreciated, ways they wish to be connected and what they find fun. Questions to consider: "What is your love language?", "What's your favorite team-building activity?", "What do you do for fun?" and so on. Only after these questions are answered should you start crafting any team-building activities. - Kyle Cromer Elliott, MPA, CHES<sup>[13]</sup>, CaffeinatedKyle.com<sup>[14]</sup>

### **6. Fun And Relevance**

The top components for team building? Relevance and fun. To be meaningful, guided exercises must propel the group toward a real goal. The clearly defined purpose may be serious, but the learning activity itself should be fun. Fun is powerful because setting the stage for fun unlocks creativity. Creative thinking leads to innovation. Innovation is the cornerstone for success. Discover that together. - Robin Blakely<sup>[15]</sup>, Creative Center of America<sup>[16]</sup>

### **7. Commitment To Change**

It is important that the team leader demonstrates a commitment to change, including managing expectations. Nothing is more frustrating for teams than to invest in team-building exercises (or retreats) where promises are made, expectations are raised and

commitments are not honored. It is very important that realistic expectations be agreed upon and commitments move forward. - Palena Neale, Ph.D<sup>[17]</sup>, unabridged<sup>[18]</sup>

## **8. The Right Questions**

I believe that every exercise is a good team-building exercise if there is a decent debriefing, so participants learn what they can apply in their workplace. If tasks are done just for fun and without putting them in the right context, they're not truly team-building. Best questions to ask: "How do you feel your solution relates to real-world situations and problems?" and "How does it relate to your work?" - Inga Bielińska<sup>[19]</sup>, Inga Arianna Bielinska Coaching Consulting Mentoring<sup>[20]</sup>

## **9. A Clear Agreement**

When teams don't come to an agreement about what they're doing, when, where, why, how and for what purpose, it doesn't matter how cool the team-building exercises are—they won't be successful. Teams need to know the measure of success and what will help them accomplish this measure before they truly dive in and engage. Learning, professional development and psychological safety are the result. - Christine Rose<sup>[21]</sup>, Christine Rose Coaching & Consulting<sup>[22]</sup>

## **10. Awareness**

As with everything for humans, the key component is awareness and desire—understanding the purpose and reflecting meaningfulness. The first step is to realize that you are not fooling yourself and, finally, doing what you really think is right. Be open and honest. - **Cristian Hofmann**<sup>[23]</sup>, Empowering Executives | SUPERGROUP LTD<sup>[24]</sup>

## **11. A Common Challenge**

Most organizations do team building for sake of it. The common exercises are bowling, a scavenger hunt or spending a day at a charity. These are good, but true team building starts with identifying challenges faced by the teams and solving them through group activity. Find out what's bothering your team, what skills are they lacking, what will make them better co-workers, then align with an activity. - Sameer Khan<sup>[25]</sup>, Inspiring Insights LLC<sup>[26]</sup>

## **12. A Growth Mindset**

Team-building initiatives provide key benefits for organizational excellence. Without a strong sense of purpose, aligned with commitment and communication from leadership and team members, team-building initiatives are often seen as inefficient, and met with strong resistance. Develop a growth-mindset culture to support effective team-development

strategies and to create organizational value. - Lori Harris<sup>[27]</sup>, Harris Whitesell Consulting<sup>[28]</sup>

### 13. Effectiveness And The High Dream

Design the exercises with the team. First, start by inviting each team member to share what they like about being on the team, what the team's successes have been and the high dream they have for their team. Engage the team members immediately so that team-effectiveness exercises can be customized with their input and reality. Second, focus on team effectiveness, not team building. - Linda Allen-Hardisty<sup>[29]</sup>, Allen-Hardisty Leadership<sup>[30]</sup>

### 14. A Little Prep Work

The key to successful team-building exercises is prep work. Ask team members to identify areas in which they'd like to grow and, where possible, frame the team building as an opportunity for them to explore one of those areas. Clearly communicate the outcome for the team building in advance and ensure each team member understands how it's personally relevant to them. They need to own the outcome. - Ashley Good<sup>[31]</sup>, Ashley Good Coaching & Consulting<sup>[32]</sup>

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