

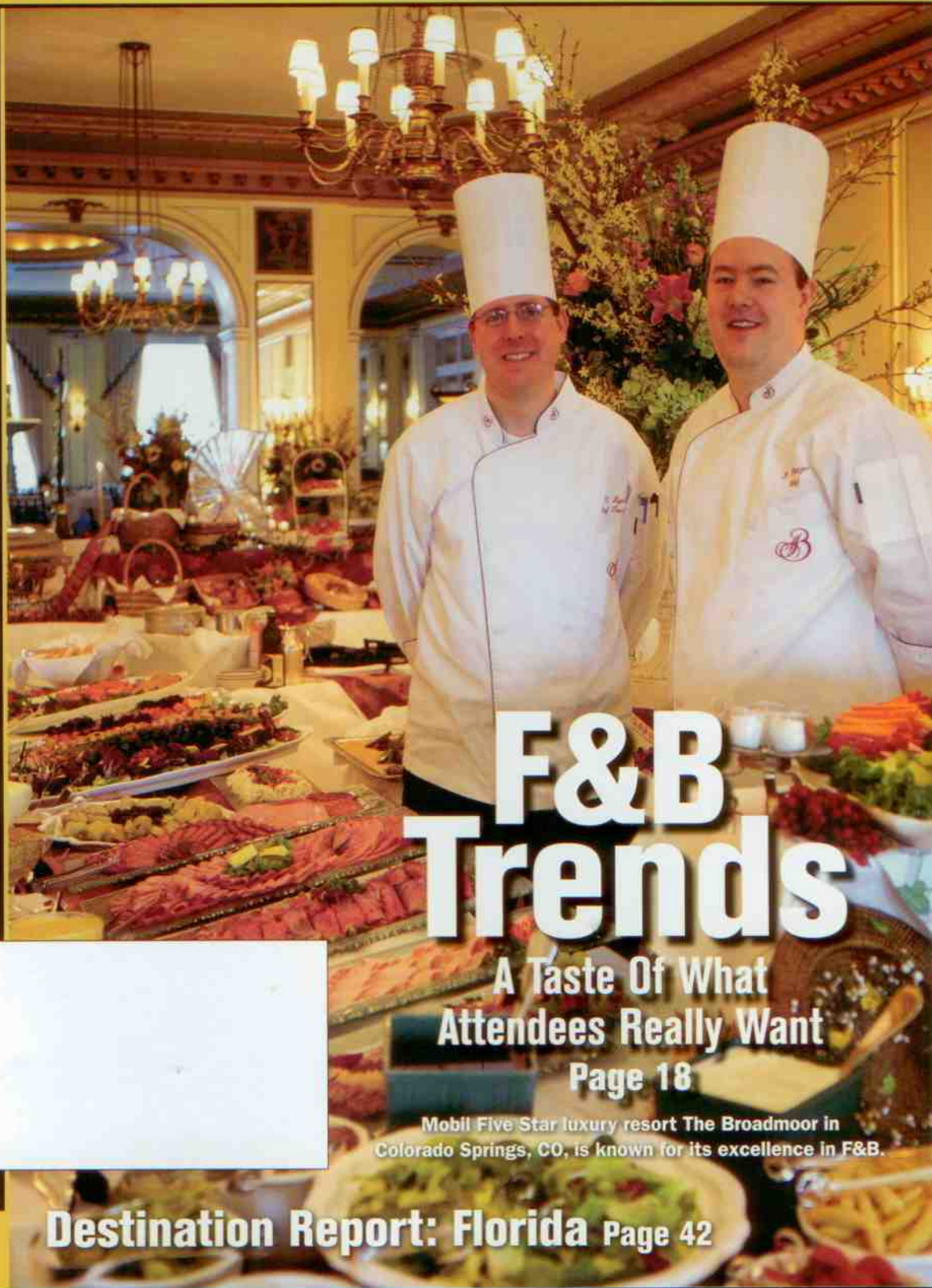
INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

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Mobil Five Star luxury resort The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, CO, is known for its excellence in F&B.

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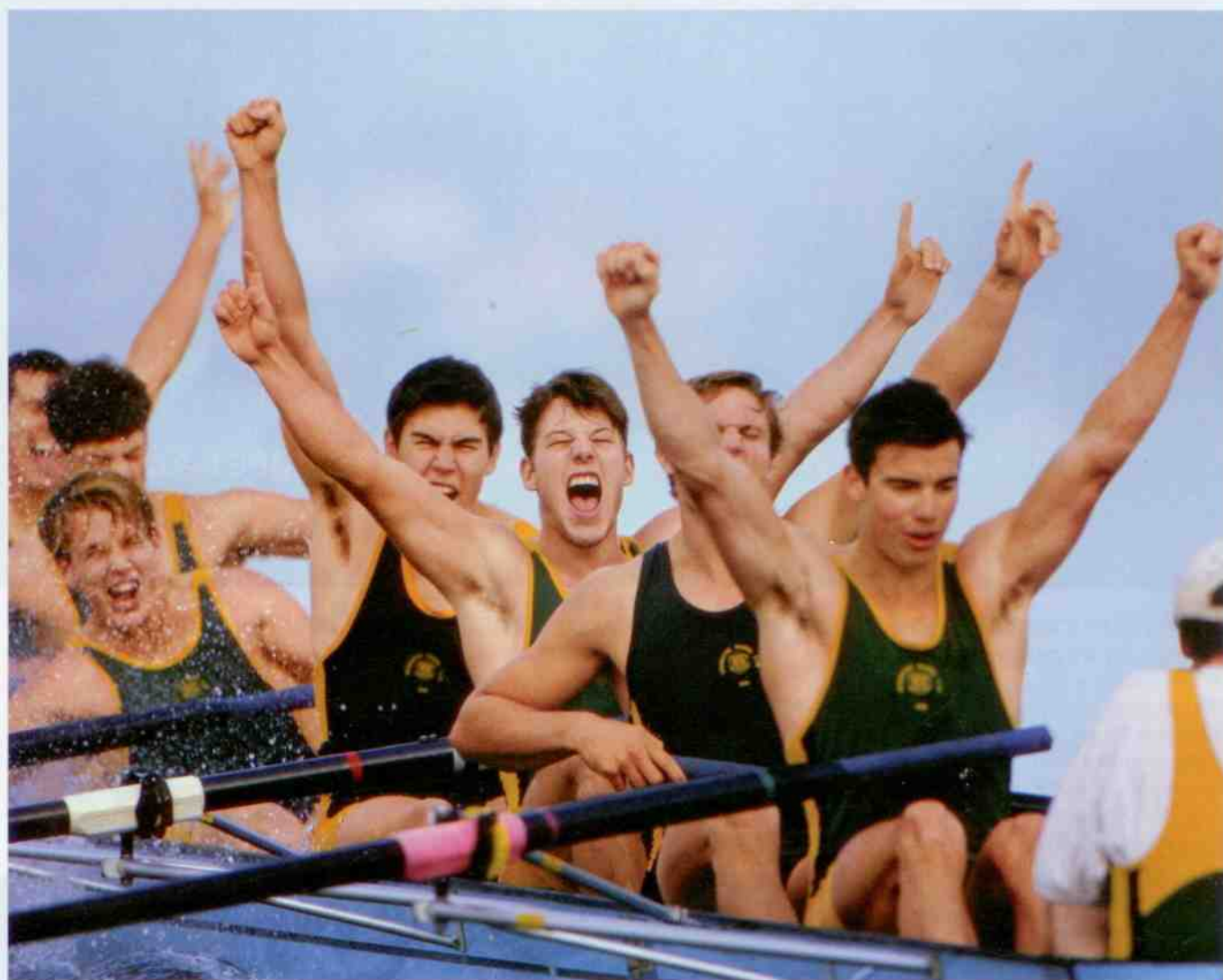


Photo courtesy of The Broadmoor

Transformational Teambuilding

A New Twist On The Traditional

By Diana Rowe



Strength in numbers — whether teambuilding programs focus on physical, intellectual or philanthropic challenges, the intended outcome is the same: to transform individuals into cohesive collaborators for best-in-class performance.

How many times have meeting planners had to endure groans and eye-rolling when attendees learn that teambuilding is on the agenda? That's because tried-and-true approaches are beginning to lose their luster with overworked attendees who would rather be checking their BlackBerrys than "playing games" to satisfy the corporate mandate of developing motivated, productive employees. To compete for attendees' attention, planners are charged with finding innovative activities that put the BlackBerry on the back burner.

Sometimes it's as simple as putting a new twist on traditional teambuilding activities. But now more than ever, what really strikes a cord is teambuilding with a purpose. There is no obstacle course, scavenger hunt or boatbuilding program that compares with the smile on the face of an underprivileged child who gets his first bike ever — or his first prosthetic hand — assembled by your team. The same objectives of cooperation and communication are achieved but with the added, profoundly powerful component of doing good for others. "Paying it forward" not only enriches giver and receiver, it extends to the company's bottom line.

"I witnessed firsthand my colleagues' leadership and coaching styles emerge," recalled Joseph Atalig, sales development manager of the Tempe, AZ regional office of Wells Fargo & Company. "Yet the dynamics of working together for something bigger didn't click until the kids came out."

Atalig refers to the Life Cycles workshop, facilitated by Odyssey Teams Inc. Each team builds a bicycle. When the bike is completed, the kids enter the ballroom to claim their bikes. This is a program he's participated in four times, each time recording tangible results in the team's success when returning to the office. Just over a year ago, the impact was measured when his Arizona delegates became the number-one team in sales out of 24 districts with one



Teambuilding with a purpose — corporate sales meeting attendees assemble bicycles for deserving kids. Odyssey Teams' Life Cycles program has donated more than 10,000 bikes to children worldwide since 2001. Doing good for others enriches not only receiver and giver, but the corporate culture as well.

of the lowest employee turnovers in the state.

Changing Lives

"It might be a simple bicycle-building team event," added Atalig, "but the simplicity is what connects the team members to the local underprivileged youth. We are rewarded by doing something for others, and then witnessing that pure excitement on the kids' faces. In turn, that accomplishment connects back to the team that built that bike. We realized that we're not just selling loans and checking accounts — we're changing lives. There's a bigger purpose in what we do every day."

When planning his teambuilding event with Odyssey, Atalig was asked probing questions in order to customize the events, ranging from the meeting objective to the culture of their region.

Life Cycles is just one of several of Odyssey Teams' philanthropic pro-

grams and a textbook example of teambuilding for a cause. Lain Hensley, owner and COO of Odyssey Teams, said, "We wanted to create relevant experiences so that people can have transformational moments. Forming an emotional bond, such as with the bike-building experience, creates an internal pressure to personally sustain change and motivate first."

Hensley said that for a team to develop there are four stages: forming, storming, norming and performing. In the first stages of teambuilding, the forming of the team takes place. The team meets and learns about the opportunity and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks. Every group then enters the storming stage in which different ideas compete for consideration, a stage when team members begin to open up to each other. In the norming stage, the team adjusts their behavior with one another, developing work habits conducive to

"A scavenger hunt may seem simple, but it's a fun way to introduce a group and get them to work together. ...I find it immensely powerful if done well."



Jeffrey Brown
Executive V.P.
Chief Administrative Officer
Webster Financial Corporation
Waterbury, CT

creating a fluid team. The final stage is performing, when team members become interdependent, motivated and knowledgeable.

"If teams don't go through these four phases, they won't know where they are," explained Hensley. "The first three stages are accomplished by teambuilding, so we can certainly escalate that time period through specific teambuilding activities."

Once Odyssey discovered the bridge between training models and philanthropy, Hensley said he started opening the lens to find activities with more global impact. One of those new inspiring programs Odyssey created is Helping Hands, an exclusive program in cooperation with the Ellen Meadows Prosthetic Hand Foundation.

"The program challenges participants to assemble artificial hands for later donation overseas," explained Hensley. "As participants realize what they're building, a profound sense of responsibility emerges, as they are literally giving an amputee a new life. This sense of teamwork brings a new purpose to their life and career."

The program includes a video that shows the amputees, tens of thousands of youth and adults maimed as a result of landmine explosions or political violence in developing countries, receiving their new hands.

The Impact Of Jazz

Your teambuilding activity doesn't need to be philanthropic to be effective. When Michael Gold, principal of Minneapolis-based Jazz-Impact, and his ensemble of jazz musicians take the stage, within minutes the crowd is on their feet. Yet this isn't your typical stage. Gold is presenting an interactive seminar for a group of financial managers on corporate teambuilding. His innovative business consultancy links the principles of the jazz music art form — innovation, experimentation and collaboration — with business fundamentals.

"Jazz is the sound of people negotiating change," said Gold. "I bring both worlds together. Our jazz ensemble is a team, just like any corporation, any department, any group. Jazz is a good model because every voice and instrument is wildly different. When we come together on a shared platform, we interact with each other and bring an enjoyable program (live music) to the audience."

"Jazz has been a part of our culture for decades," said Gold, "but many still don't appreciate its evolution in the world of music. During the in-

teractive demonstration, we move between talking about what we are doing on stage to bringing clients' culture into those experiences. We show how personal a team can be and how they resonate when they work together."

Dude Ranch Redux

For Ramsey Potts, state sales director for AFLAC of West Virginia, his event was successful by structuring the entire meeting, including the teambuilding activity, around Mother Nature.

"When I announced to my management team that the annual incentive trip would be to a dude ranch," Potts recalled, "I nearly had mutiny on my ship. Many were disappointed that we weren't going to the beach and felt like a dude ranch was little incentive to perform. I had to assure them frequently that Rancho de los Caballeros was a luxury ranch resort."

Just 90 minutes northwest of Phoenix, Rancho de los Caballeros is an historic ranch resort with 79 guest rooms, 8,500 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space, 18 holes of golf and 100 horses for exploring trails on 20,000 acres of spectacular Sonoran desert. Planners can offer their attendees an au-



Jazz-Impact is an interactive seminar that uses jazz to teach corporate teambuilding and training. Principles of the art form such as improvisation and collaboration help participants find the musician within to overcome business challenges.

thentic dude ranch experience with additional luxuries such as gourmet dining, the award-winning championship Los Caballeros Golf Club and the luxurious Spa at Los Caballeros.

Images of "City Slickers" and sleeping under the stars while eating beans and wieners prevailed until the team arrived at the ranch resort, said Potts.

Potts and his sales team participated in a popular teambuilding activity offered at the ranch called "team penning," which matches teams with a cowboy coach to compete on horseback. The objective is to herd three calves into a framed pen, while working against a clock.

"The horses are so well trained that we just go along for the ride," added Potts. "In fact, several people (including myself) were rather reluctant to get on the back of a horse. However, by the end of the event, the team came together and there was more than a little friendly competition.

"From the 'team penning' to the championship golf course, from the trap and skeet shooting to the beautiful horse rides through the desert, from the relaxing spa to the cowboy cookouts, Rancho de los Caballeros is the perfect combination of an incentive trip mixed with a healthy dose of teambuilding."

Traditional Teambuilding That Works

Nicolette de Guia is a meeting professional for a national personal line insurer's conference planning team who coordinated a very successful Distribution Leadership Forum at the La Quinta Resort & Club, La Quinta, CA. To set the Forum apart from other meetings and to engage the audience in a team event tied to performance, de Guia explored the various venues available both on and offsite.

"The theme Accelerate to Win tied in with our company's objectives and NASCAR-sponsored programs," said de Guia, so with that in mind, and with the aid of some very insightful, creative and flexible partner vendors,



Meeting planner Ramsey Potts, state sales director for AFLAC of West Virginia (far left) along with cowboy coach and attendees participated in a "team penning" event. Teams competed on horseback to herd calves into a framed pen while working against a clock.

de Guia found what she wanted. But instead of the group going to the offsite venue, the offsite venue came to La Quinta and in the end, was masterful. "We took the concept of the race and made it our own," said de Guia.

The teambuilding event included extensive graphic pieces including pit passes, qualifier books, NASCAR-style lanyards, very inventive and creative racing style décor, Breathalyzers and an authentic NASCAR race car along with a special guest NASCAR driver, Kasey Kahne. De Guia enlisted the help of her vendor partners: Access Destination Services-Palm Springs, La Quinta Resort, Eventworks (décor company), and Karting Ventures Inc. to bring racing to life at the resort. The hotel agreed to close down a busy onsite parking lot, and Karting Ventures arranged delivery of 12 go-carts and brought in their whole operation from track to operators.

"We had them at 'ladies and gentlemen, start your engines,'" de Guia reported. "Before the racing experience, our general session was relatively quiet with very little audience participation. It needed some life and excitement. After the teambuilding session, the entire personality of the meeting changed. Everyone seemed to feel like a part of a team, more relaxed, focused and more engaged overall in the meeting content. This

teambuilding event was extremely successful and a very effective morale booster.

"Our racing theme resonated with everyone," said de Guia. "Name a teambuilding activity from bike building to scavenger hunts, and we've done it. Our goal wasn't to cleverly disguise a teambuilding event. Out of 120 attendees, only two sat out. We needed to get everyone engaged in the meeting, and we wanted them to have fun doing it."

Objective, time, budget, corporate social responsibility and diversity of group are just a few topics raised by Beth Daniel, sales manager for Access Destination Services-Palm Springs. "To come up with unique events, I always start by asking the right questions. Maybe there's an upcoming sales pitch, a new product launch, a merger. Teambuilding is a fun and interactive learning experience that brings a group together toward a common goal."

Teambuilding isn't without challenges, added Daniel. "You have to work with the variables and logistics: weather, team numbers, theme, etc. Whatever the theme or objective of the meeting, we can uncover or cre-



Nontraditional teambuilding options are available through the Disney Institute and include go-cart racing, news magazine show production, on-air radio production and more.

ated the perfect teambuilding event."

Daniel said traditional teambuilding activities, such as chili cook-offs, build-a-boat, culinary themes and game shows can still be quite effective. However, brainstorming for

that "perfect" fit to create something unique is crucial.

"With de Guia's event, for example," explained Daniel, "I had originally proposed an offsite racing venue, but the budget brought it back to the hotel and engaging the services of Kart-

In the activity, teams band together "in pursuit of the prize" during this one-of-a-kind scavenger hunt throughout a Disney Destination Theme Park. This activity jumped to the top of the list for Brown as the fastest way to throw a group into the "deep end of a pool."

Their attendance ranges from 45 to 75 employees from the top-performing branches. FirstMerit Corporation is a \$10.4 billion diversified financial services company headquartered in Akron, OH.

"We are always interested in ways of enhancing team dynamics," said Pfeifer. "We've done everything from cooking a gourmet lunch to a team Park Challenge. Because they've earned these trips, we already know the teams are competitive and like challenges, so we build on that spirit."

Through the Disney experience, Holet and Pfeifer customized their teambuilding experiences, offering attendees glimpses into the theme park that they couldn't get with a general admission ticket. The teams are small, and attendees are grouped with people that they often do not know.

"Our gala events are exclusive parties in venues not accessible to the public," explained Holet. "Teambuilding events like Pluto's Pursuit or On Location allow us access to behind-the-scenes areas. We tell attendees all they have to do is pack their bags, and we'll do the rest. Teambuilding events make that experience more intimate. These are all unique encounters that they take back to their branch as a motivator to earn their return trip next year. From college-aged to senior citizen, Disney teambuilding events are flexible for all ages."

Holet and Pfeifer are also conscious that many of their attendees are repeat winners, so they work together to create something new that appeals to first-timers and repeat winners. They start by opening up the lines of communication with Disney, passing on details about their current group of winners, and creating a teambuilding event that effectively targets the meeting's objective.

Whether launching a new product, building business strategies or cultivating leaders in a recent merger, teambuilding is a proven tool that boosts performance. But perhaps the best programs are those that help to change lives for the better. **I&FMM**



Disney Parks and Resorts organized a teambuilding scavenger hunt for Webster Financial Corporation that took place in the Magic Kingdom.

ing Ventures. Together, we took our vision and tweaked it to fit a hotel location, including closing down the parking lot."

The Disney Dynamic

There is no shortage of creativity at Disney Parks and Resorts, which provides the expertise needed to execute innovative teambuilding programs. Disney Institute offers a variety of teambuilding and professional development programs proven to drive success. Group experiences are designed to actively develop relationships that lead to strong results.

When a group of 20-plus senior officers needed to team up, Jeffrey Brown, executive vice president and chief administrative officer of Waterbury, CT-based Webster Financial Corporation, brought them to the Disney Institute. A Disney teambuilding event Pluto's Pursuit kicked off the two-day meeting.

"We'd just completed a major restructuring," explained Brown, "merging several different departments. To create a shared services environment, we wanted a means for these 23 senior managers to get to know each other in a short period of time. We also wanted a more relaxed environment before throwing them into a classroom."

"A scavenger hunt may seem simple," agreed Brown, "but it's a fun way to introduce a group and get them to work together. It's very easy to discount these sorts of activities, but I find it immensely powerful if done well."

For the past seven years on behalf of FirstMerit Bank, Carrie Holet, retail sales and service consultant, and Michele Pfeifer, senior vice president of performance and learning resources, have planned Disney incentive trips that include teambuilding events.