



"It was no surprise that our annual trade show at Mohegan Sun was another huge success. There really is no better place than Mohegan Sun in the Northeast, and it's definitely the wonderful staff that made all of the difference."

- Susanne M. Mansir, Meeting Planner, NRF Distributors



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Teambuilding For the Good of the Team

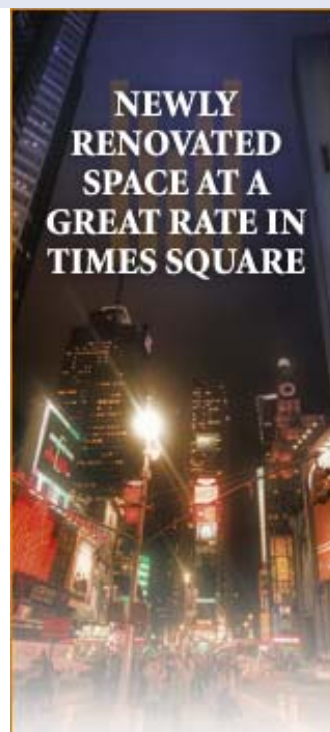
As corporations increasingly emphasize corporate social responsibility (CSR), a new brand of teambuilding is

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making its mark.
Philanthropic
teambuilding—teambuilding
with a social
conscience—helps
meet multiple goals
while giving back to
the community.

Two years ago, Peggy Whitman, CITE, organized an event where Marriott salespeople spruced up a park during a meeting. Last year, the senior manager, Western regional sales, for Marriott Individual Incentives took it a step farther and organized Marriott salespeople and their customers to spend an afternoon renovating a Girls and Boys Club during a customer incentive in Las Vegas. She's not sure yet what it will be this year, but she's committed to the idea of a teambuilding event that gives back to the community.

"It's a remarkable way to go into a community and be able to give back to them," she says. "And at the same time, we all work together on a meaningful project. It's rewarding for the soul and also builds camaraderie among the people who participate."

Depending on the scope of a project, a corporation can either plan and execute such a project themselves or work with a company that specializes in philanthropic teambuilding. Whitman worked with Lucy Eisele,

principal of the Big Lake, Minnesota-based company Integrity Incentives, which is focused on planning community-giving events.

"She went in and scoped out a charity that needed help and then helped us to organize it," says Whitman. "Even if we knew what group needed help, we wouldn't know how we could best help them or even how to figure out how much paint and other equipment we needed, and so on."

Corporate and Community Connections

Although corporations have been working with groups like Habitat for Humanity for nearly two decades, a more structured approach to teambuilding with a charitable component is a relatively new phenomenon. "Groups go someplace and do their business and have their fun, but they often need something more to bridge that gap between them," says David Goldstein, director of business and concept development for TeamBonding, a teambuilding company with offices in Chicago, Boston, and San Diego. "With these kinds of programs, you create a benefit for the company, but it also emphasizes how the company is part of the larger community. It shows your employees that your company is more than just a place to work."

Bill John, president of Odyssey Teams, Inc., based in Chico,

California, says his company's brand of philanthropic teambuilding "drills down to a company's core values and brings them to life on an emotional level. It's all about connections—connections to the individual and corporate values, to each other, to the mindset of their customers, to a more deliverable focus on quality, to the community, and to their own actions."

Such activities can also engender goodwill in the business world. "We've found these programs are especially popular in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries," says John. "These companies take a pretty good slam in the press and the public eye that can affect their employees. Teambuilding like this gives them a chance to reconnect with the virtues of doing good work and producing a quality product."

Doing Good

Philanthropic teambuilding can take place right in a company's backyard or on site as part of a corporate meeting or incentive. Pricing runs the gamut, depending on the number of participants and the specific event. Bike-building is a popular mid-range teambuilding activity that encourages group work, cooperative problem-solving, and competition—before the group experiences a heartwarming moment of actually giving the bikes to children as a surprise.

To address the needs of groups

on a budget, Goldstein says TeamBonding recently created a new event on the lower end of the price scale. "We make rescue bears—the kind that police, fire, and ambulance crews carry with them and can give to kids who need comfort. We did one event where the fireworkers came in at the end with the sirens sounding to accept them and then told stories of how such bears affect the lives of kids they come into contact with."

That connection with the recipients is a powerful aspect of such teambuilding activities, helping to emphasize a real connection to the community. When an in-person connection isn't possible, though, a video can also make that emotional connection. Odyssey, for example, has a program in which participants make prosthetic hands for recipients around the world who have lost their hands due to landmine accidents. "We distribute them to developing countries through the Rotary Club," says John, "so we show them a video where they see the devastating effects of landmines and how the hands they just made can change the lives of children and adults who wouldn't otherwise be able to get them."



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