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# Transformational Teambuilding

## A New Twist On The Traditional

Adapted from an article written by Diana Rowe for *Insurance & Financial Meetings Management* magazine, May/June, 2008

*Photographs were among those featured within the article.*

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.

## 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 [such as destination management partner, Access Destination Services], 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.



Photo courtesy of Disney Institute

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 [including Access Destination Services-Palm Springs, and La Quinta Resort] to bring racing to life at the resort. The hotel agreed to close down a busy onsite parking lot, and [karts, track and operators were brought in.]

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

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**

Since 1970, **ACCESS Destination Services** has provided the highest caliber of full-service, professional destination management and event production services in the West, including the Anaheim/Orange County, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Palm Springs and San Diego areas.