



PEOPLE THAT HIKE TOGETHER STAY TOGETHER. OR DO THEY?

By Greg Ranstrom

Published Tuesday, April 28, 2009

The plan was to head from Paradise Lodge to Camp Muir on Mt. Rainier. Within the first hour the team had splintered into small groups, each fending for itself. My friend, Rick was describing the “team building” event to me and commented on how much the hike mirrored the dynamics at his work. “Just like on the hike, we are left on our own to succeed or fail.” Rick further described a culture at work where errant, singular and thoughtless actions become de facto decisions.

Unfortunately, Rick’s team building experience has further cemented his view that the team is dysfunctional. Nothing more was built; his worst judgments were confirmed. This particular organization may survive because its business opportunities are exceptional. We will never know what opportunities are squandered because of the dysfunction.

Hiking with a work group creates a mini laboratory to examine team dynamics. The goal is to help the team notice how it acts, articulate this awareness, celebrate its effectiveness, or choose improved modes of operation. Rick’s team could have learned much from their experience, but without disciplined reflection and the will to improve, the hike only cemented the existing dysfunction.

Outdoor experiential training and development sometimes gets a bad rap because of experiences like Rick’s. The response is, “Oh, we did that and it was a useless exercise.” But going outside with a management team remains one of the few exceptional personal and team development methodologies...as long as the event is facilitated well.

Following a simulated rescue performed by a management team, we asked the CFO to “debrief” the exercise with the team. He spent the first 20 minutes telling the group what worked and what didn’t. We interrupted and asked the group to give feedback to the boss about the exercise and the debrief. The CFO shifted in that moment. He realized how much he closed opportunities for contributions from the team and the potential to generate better business solutions. The same development opportunity may have come later from an unfortunate business failure, but this CFO benefited from the laboratory we created in the woods. He still remembers the activity years later and leads differently in his position as CEO.

“Going outside with a management team remains one of the few exceptional personal and team development methodologies...”

We lead weeklong excursions in the Sierra and the Rockies for groups of executives. Years later, participants can name who they hiked beside and what they talked about. In many cases, the conversations on the hike have led to powerful cross-functional collaborations unimagined before the hike. Because the context setting and individual coaching is well managed, we draw the best from the individuals and reinforce healthy patterns of group effectiveness. Hiking together does help these groups to stay together.

Outside Insights 63930 W Quail Haven Drive Bend, OR 97701
www.outsideinsights.com | info@outsideinsights.com | (888) 383-2090