

weekend retreats and touchy-feely exercises may do more to create bad feeling than build teams.

5 Instead, take some lessons from a winning volleyball coach.

It's time someone finally said it: most of what passes for team-building these days doesn't really build teams. So why do companies spend millions of dollars annually to make their employees go through ineffective team-building activities: walking around in blindfolds, navigating rope courses, and sitting cross-legged on the floor with paper and crayons, illustrating their 'life paths'?

There are three reasons. While it's generally recognized that a great team will beat a mediocre team 99 times out of 100, little hard thinking goes on at most companies about how effective teams are actually built. Employees usually don't complain about silly team-building efforts, whether out of apathy or for fear of being labelled 'anti-team'. And thirdly, most team-building practitioners are well-meaning, sincere people whom no one wants to offend.

So if conventional team-building activities are largely ineffective, how do you build a great team? In 1978, I played a supporting role on a volleyball team that won the first National Championship in our university's history. That team was made up of people who weren't the most physically-gifted athletes in the world. But they merged into a force that was far greater than the sum of the players' individual abilities.

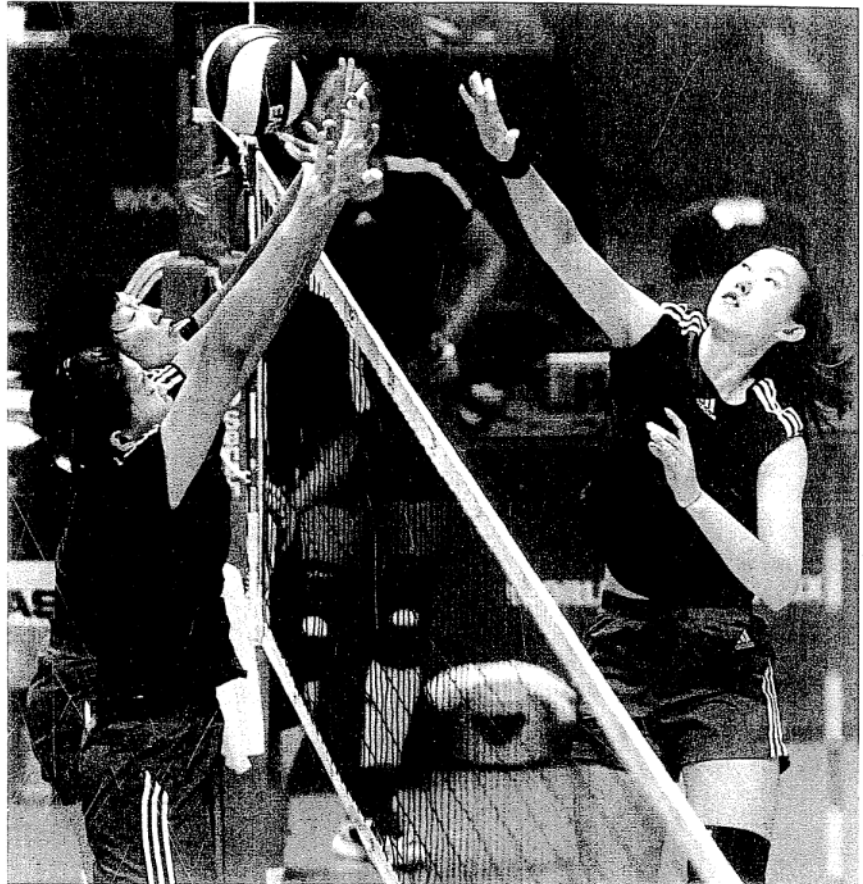
Nearly 30 years later, what I learned that season remains one of the most important lessons of my life. Great teams – whether composed of athletes, businesspeople, fire-fighters, military commandos, or what have you – teach us four key lessons:

1 _____. One of the most memorable features of my 1978 team was the level of intensity which the players brought to every practice and game. The atmosphere was charged with an emotional commitment that caused members of the team to constantly push each other to give everything in service of the goal.

Far too often, a company thinks it has a team-building problem when what it really has is a goal problem. If you want to build a great team, make sure its members share a determined passion to accomplish something. How do you get that kind of commitment? By involving everyone in the development of the goal.

2 _____. It's not enough to get a bunch of people together who care

SMELLS LIKE



deeply about reaching a goal. They need to have a strategy for achieving it. The best team-building tool ever is a good strategy that everyone buys into. If you want to increase teamwork, don't focus on the team, focus the team on the task.

My team coach had a detailed strategy for winning that the players bought into completely. A part of the strategy was to overcome our physical shortcomings with a commitment to superior conditioning and training. So, for two months the team endured a schedule so demanding that it was the talk of the campus.

3 _____. Yes, trust and respect are key. But ironically, often the best way to increase levels of trust and respect on a team is to get them focused on the goal and the strategy. This gets people saying what they really think. When people say what they really think and are held accountable, trust and respect usually follow. Don't impose an atmosphere of false politeness.

There was plenty of conflict on the team and people sometimes lost their tempers. But on the court an atmosphere of respect always prevailed. All great business teams share that same quality.

4 _____. There's no getting around it: great teams usually have great managers. My old team coach still coaches volleyball at that same university today. He has an unrivalled 426-162 win-loss record and has also coached a US team to a World Championship and an Olympic gold medal.

So, learn how to be a great coach. Aspiring business leaders would be a lot better off if they spent less time reading management literature and more time around people like my old coach. The great college coaches may know more about team-building than anyone else in the world. After all, their leadership and team-building skills are measured in real time, in front of real crowds. And they start from scratch with a new team every year.

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- accomplish
- aspiring
- bunch
- buy into
- milestone
- offend
- scope
- start from scratch