

IDEAS FOR GROWING YOUR BUSINESS STRATEGIES

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Working together

Unique seminars are popping up around the area to unite employees

BY ANEESA McMILLAN | STAFF

Most managers would equate the thought of their staff banging on drums in a circle with other inappropriate office behaviors, such as excessive e-mail usage or gabbing with unproductive co-workers who just won't leave your desk.

But one local "teambuilder" sees things a little differently. He's even taking drumming to another level by using its rhythm to bring coworkers together.

John Scalici's "Get Rhythm" sessions – where coworkers together bang drums – may sound new-age, but it's one of many unique teambuilding sessions held around the Birmingham area to drum up unity among coworkers.

"Companies are looking for alternative forms of teambuilding and ideas that are fresh and innovative," said Scalici.

That's because many managers are finding that their staffs are struggling to build a "team" during today's tough economic times or see that their employees are simply disinterested in the very idea of teambuilding.

When the traditional conference on teamwork will not suffice, more creative ways are needed to bring unity.

Some managers turn to Scalici and make their dismal working bunch play the drums in unison to get to know each other better. Others are signing up for a "space mission" at the McWane Science Center to force employees to work together to survive the abyss of outer space.

Unusual sessions, like drumming in a circle, get employees to interact with each other – in this case, through the use of rhythm, said Scalici, founder and rhythm facilitator of "Get Rhythm."



Get Rhythm's John Scalici, center, encourages coworkers to build more solid teams through drum circles – one of several alternative teambuilding seminars in the area.

"The better we are able to understand the rhythms that are present in the workplace, the better we're able to understand how rhythms fit together," said Scalici, who started his company in 2006.

The groups begin with a clapping exercise that is designed to show participants that all aspects of the exercise depend on them working together, he said. The clapping also reflects how the employees can produce a common beat.

"After they understand the importance of one pulse, we give them drums from all over the world," he said. "This is to highlight diversity in the workplace."

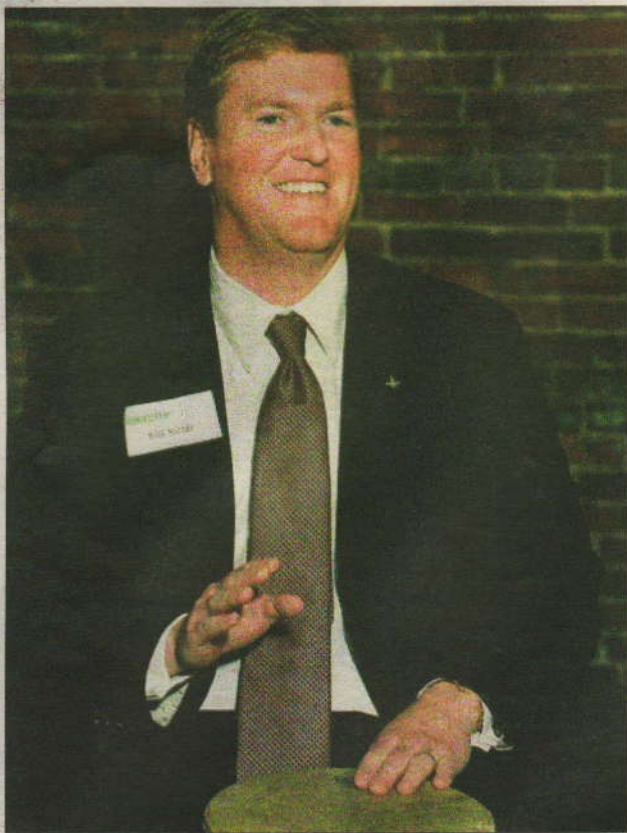
Scalici also incorporates other instruments including shakers, scrapers and metal belts. He often allows participants to choose their instruments in a secluded area away from their peers.

"We do this because its interesting to see what instruments people choose," he said.

After all instruments are assigned, there is a time when participants are not given any direction to illustrate that a group without a clear and concise plan is reckless and does not achieve very much.

"At this point, we begin to talk about the relationship of all the instruments to each other and how each instrument affects the value of others," he said. "Most importantly, we see how people affect each other's jobs."

SPECIAL TOBB



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Bill Ritter, Regions Bank's area executive for North Central Alabama, bangs a drum during a recent Get Rhythm seminar.

Ralph Stacy, president and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama, said this unique brand of team building made a lasting impression during his organization's state conference. Chamber directors from around the state were invited to participate in a Scalici drum circle.

"We're in an association and that means that all of us are not in the same office," he said. "We're in 125 places across the state doing the same thing."

The association had to find a way to unify members who are often miles away from each other, he said.

"If you're not building a team, you are not building the best organization you can," Stacy said. "It draws us an organization closer to our goal."

Chamber participants are also able to experience personal growth and enjoyment as well, he said.

"Before you begin, you don't realize how much it's like therapy," Stacy said. "We're always looking for team building, but we're also looking for entertainment and it gave us both."

Another surprise addition to list of those that are changing the norms in team building is the McWane Science Center. It recently added corporate team building to its resume in an effort to show the business community that science can not only excite, it can unite.

"We wanted to accomplish the idea that corporate teams can laugh and talk to each other," said Jan Mattingly, vice president of education for McWane Science Center. "People often walk away saying it was a lot of fun and that they got to see their co-workers do things they never thought they would."

The center used many of the same techniques they've used to

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