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Driving the Rhythm – Drumming up Teamwork at Toyota Corporate Headquarters

by Christine Stevens

Recent studies have shown that group drumming can be a fun, creative and effective way to reduce stress, improve health and build morale. The first biological study (Alternative Therapies, January, 2000) showed that drumming successfully reversed the biological parameters of stress and increased NK cells, circulating white blood cells, in subjects who had never drummed before. A second study published in Advances in Mind-Body Medicine (Fall/Winter, 2003) showed a significant reduction in burnout and an improvement in morale for employees in a long-term care center. The study highlighted an economic analysis demonstrating the cost-benefit ratio of investing in the drumming program by reducing turn-over and training costs.

Now, a leading corporation in employee training and high performance teaming is dancing to the beat of a different drummer!

Business Unusual

Since opening The Drum Room in March 2001, over 3,000 Toyota associates have taken the rhythmic journey toward higher individual and team performance. The Toyota Drum Room is an extraordinary, first-of-its-kind experiment in the use of recreational drumming for corporate team-building, stress-reduction and change management. And the drummers you may hear aren't musicians and performers; they are associates of Toyota, drumming to build the level of teamwork in their respective departments.

According to Midge Waters, associate Dean of the University of Toyota, the primary benefits of the drum circles for Toyota include: a "high-performance team," morale building, interpersonal connection and teamwork. "It's an opportunity for our associates to listen to each other and put their personal creativity into the process."

Inspiration for the Toyota Drum Room came when Toyota managers attended an incredible drum circle conducted by the father of the modern day drum circle, Arthur Hull, at a professional team-building conference. Toyota's innovative management team brought in Los Angeles area African percussion master Paulo Mattioli to develop their in-house drum circle program. Mattioli trained RJ Johnson, Associate Development Manager for the Center for the Toyota Way, to become a facilitator himself. While Johnson already had years of unofficial training under his belt from playing guitar in a garage band, the drum circle program created an opportunity for RJ to take music to another level – to rhythmatize Toyota's corporate culture.

"The Toyota Drum Room creates a safe, risk-free, collaborative environment where people can create inspiring rhythms in the moment," commented RJ. "I know that when we drum together as a community and share our spirit in the form of rhythm, it changes our relationships for the positive."

Covered in ethnic décor that reminds you of Disney's Tiki Room, the Toyota Drum Room is filled with over fifty colorful REMO drums. Djembes, ashikos, djun-djuns, buffalo drums, and auxiliary percussion fill the room and beckon to the hands of entering executives to sit down, relax, and discover their rhythm.

Discover Your Rhythm

Weekly group drumming programs are available in Los Angeles at the REMO Recreational Music Center in North Hollywood, California.
Contact Mike DeMenno
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For more information on becoming a trained facilitator or to start a program in your studio, community or work-place, contact healthrhythms@remo.com or 661.294.5655 remo.com/health