

MEETINGS & MUSIC

Sonic perspectives from meeting pros



ROB FLETCHER

Get Your Team In Tune

"Hey, everybody! Let's have some fun," sings a team member into her microphone as her colleagues play bluesy harmonica riffs. Someone's playing a guitar, and one adept associate beats a tambourine against his palm. Everyone's sporting pairs of retro-shades and pork-pie hats.

As a music team-building facilitator, it's always a pleasure to tell a group they're going to be learning how to play music. They lighten up, relax and even get a little playful. Let's face it: Some people look forward to team building, and some are a little more ambivalent. But everyone loves music. It's universal. And most people wish they could play, not just listen.

Although I've combined music and team building in a variety of ways—from forming rock bands to playing "office percussion" to writing and singing songs—my most popular program is Play the Blues. Everyone gets a harmonica and learns how to play. For the finale, teams write and perform original songs they compose about themselves. And it doesn't have to be the blues. I've had groups learn "Piano Man," "Love Me Do" and perennial favorite "Rawhide."

The best team-building programs combine a theme or subject people are already interested in with work or personal enrichment concepts. I love it when I hear from former clients who now start every meeting with a song or who went home after a team-building session with their harmonicas and taught their kids how to play.

And there are a lot of closet musicians out there. Someone is always surprising the rest of the team by picking up a guitar and playing

like Jimi Hendrix or singing like Aretha Franklin. There are roles for everyone regardless of talent, and safety in numbers on stage helps even the shyest people let go.

With music team building, everyone has a clearly defined role and a certain expertise and passion. The sum herein is greater than the parts. There's a clearly defined goal that is adaptable enough to address the realities of the moment—a common rhythm, an extraordinary amount of listening and concentration, response and inter-play, all in the service of a tangible, customer-focused product.

That's what a great band does, and the process helps teams realize the intended theme: ensemble music performances as a catalyst for productive work environments.

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Your Brain on Music

Research has revealed that when people play music together, their brains form links. Daniel Goleman writes of this phenomenon in his landmark book, *Social Intelligence*. Other studies have shown that music enhances how people think, reason and create.

The Right Place

Certain conditions work better than others. The room's settings should be transformable—from ordinary to extraordinary.

The Right Group

Groups that have "been there and done that" with team building often respond well to music, as do people who aren't that excited about more traditional team-building programs.

The Right Time

First-thing-in-the-morning music programs work fine, but the best setting is evening. It's a fun—but structured—way to have a memorable time together. Beer and wine are nice complements for the event.