VIRTUAL TEAM-BUILDING:

Using Experiential Learning to Increase Collaboration in a Remote Workplace

EAGLE'S FLIGHT™

WHILE REMOTE WORK HAS BEEN ON THE RISE FOR YEARS, COVID-19 DRAMATICALLY AND IRREVERSIBLY CHANGED WHERE AND HOW WE WORK.

Unless it was absolutely necessary to be on the frontline, overnight employees started to work from home. Rather than remote work being the exception, it became the new normal. With employees being disconnected from their peers and organization, there is increased pressure on company leaders to encourage collaboration.

In today's business world, sophisticated technology and complex work processes have created an environment where employees are more interconnected than ever. However, technology can only go so far. Collaboration will only be as effective as the humans behind the technology, as they require the skills to work effectively as critical team members. Every employee can benefit from team-building training that focuses on the skills needed for collaboration while working remotely.

If the events of 2020 have your teams feeling like a disconnected collection of colleagues, rather than a cohesive unit working in concert, then it's time to consider virtual team-building training that utilizes experiential learning to truly increase collaboration.

WHY SHOULD YOUR COMPANY INVEST IN VIRTUAL TEAM-BUILDING?

In a virtual world, it can be all too easy to lose a sense of personal connection with colleagues. Since impromptu chats at the water cooler or spontaneous lunches are no longer possible, it can leave employees and leaders feeling disconnected from each other and the organization. This can have negative repercussions given that employees work more effectively, are happier, and are more engaged with their organization when they trust each other, communicate and collaborate effectively, and feel like everyone is working towards a common organizational goal. This is why there are a multitude of benefits when organizations invest in virtual team-building for their employees.

1.

Employee Engagment
Even before the quick and drastic shift to remote work, companies across all industries were experiencing an engagement crisis; according to a U.S. Gallup poll, 67 percent of employees are not engaged at work.[1] That is bad news for many employers because engagement is not only correlated with business growth, but engagement actually drives growth.

Gallup studies also found that engaged teams outperformed disengaged teams on measures of profitability, productivity, customer ratings,

turnover, and safety incidents. In fact, teams in the top quartile for engagement outperformed bottom-quartile teams by 22 percent when it came to profitability.[2]

So, what is the backbone of workplace engagement? The way your employees work and engage with one another. When done well, virtual team-building improves communication, strengthens relationships, and sparks collaboration so your team members feel connected to the company's mission and to each other. Put simply: Investing in your teams improves employee engagement, which can radically strengthen a company's bottom line.

2.

Increased Productivity

Team productivity requires that every member is on board and contributing to a common goal. Research validates the clear link between collaboration and productivity. A study conducted by the Institute for Corporate Productivity found that companies that embrace and reward collaboration are five and a half times as likely to be high-performing as companies that don't create a culture of collaboration.[3] What this means in a time where employees and teams are feeling more disconnected than ever, is that an investment in team-building can produce a significant ROI for the organization through an increase in employee and team productivity.

3.

Reduces Conflict

Conflict is costly. Employees in American companies spend approximately 2.8 hours each week involved in conflict. In total, that is 385 million days, which amounts to $359 billion in paid hours that are forced on conflict instead of driving the organization forward.[4] Even worse, for 25 percent of these employees, avoiding conflict led to sickness or absence from work in the past.[5]

Team-building is a great way to reduce conflict by building an emotional connection and psychological safety amongst your employees. This is illustrated in a multi-year study conducted by Google to determine what made up the perfect team. They performed a data-driven analysis on the makeup and performance of hundreds of Google teams in search of answers. What the researchers found was that emotional connection and psychological safety are what produced world-class teams.[6]

When team members get to know their colleagues not just as co-workers, but as actual people, they hold them in esteem, meaning they value who they are, not for what they can do for you on the job. They see every individual in an organization is valuable, unique, important, and capable. This reduces conflict as it builds respectful relationships amongst colleagues where they are not intimidated by their teammates' professional accomplishments, and when they don't have to put on that work "mask" themselves, team members can let their guard down - and that is when significant breakthroughs happen.

HOW DOES EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING WORK?

Experiential learning is an engaging, immersive virtual experience that pulls participants out of the daily grind by utilizing a captivating theme such as a space mission or solving a museum heist. Participants engaged in the team-building activity are having fun working together to overcome a challenge that they are often not even aware that they are learning valuable new team skills in the process. This is because the use of a well-crafted metaphor and theme allows participants to test new team skills and behaviors in a safe setting outside of typical workplace scenarios.

Thanks to the accelerated timeline of the experience participants are able to quickly see the results of their actions, make corrections, and learn from their mistakes and successes. In the end, a facilitated debrief links the lessons learned in the experience to situations in the workplace. Participants can see how their new collaboration skills can be applied in the situations they experience on a daily basis.

All of this leads to behavior change because participants have personally experienced the results that come with applying their existing skills (both successes and failures), and they are then more inclined to do things differently next time. They draw their own conclusions about the power of applying new approaches when working in teams and behaviors they need to demonstrate to be successful back on the job.
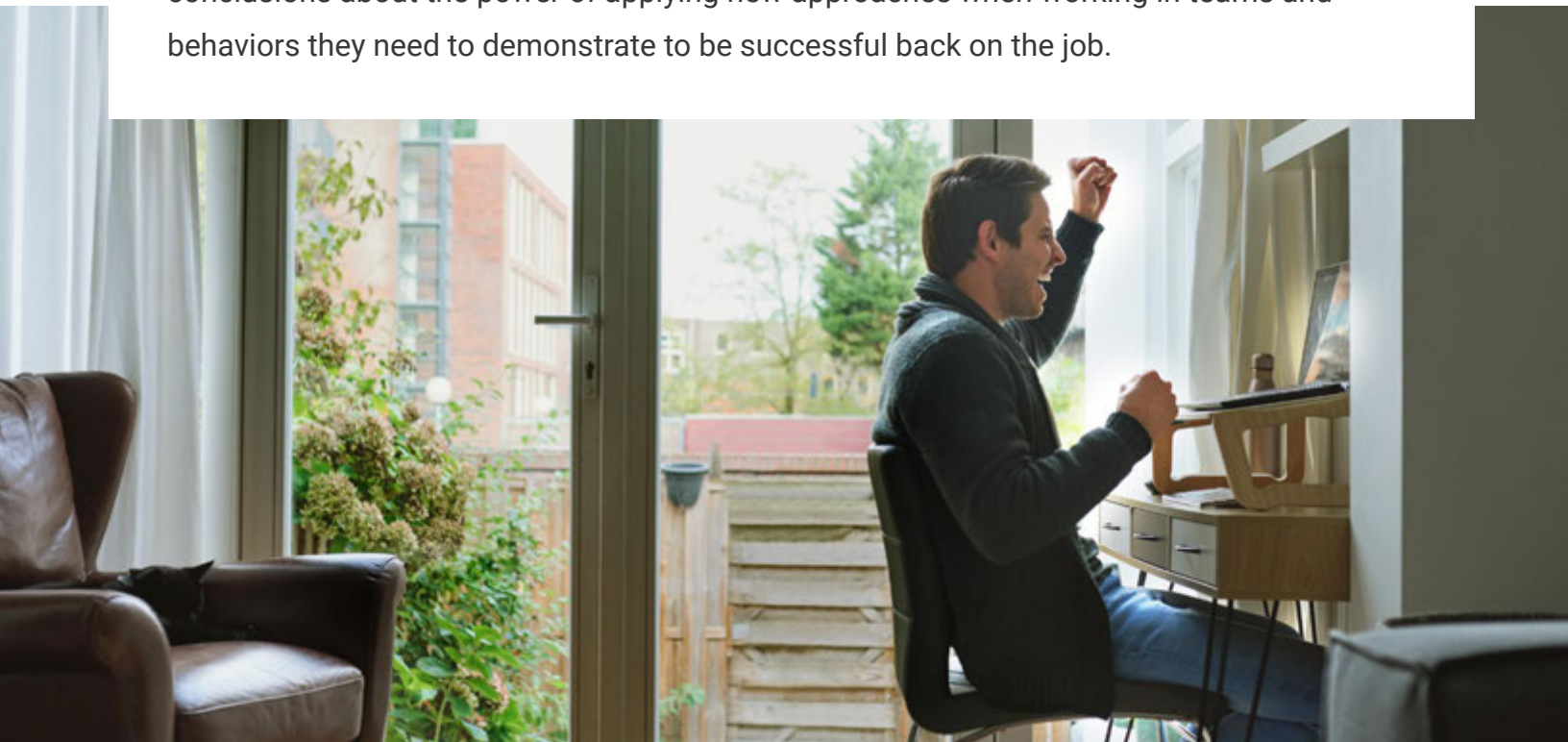
WHY DOES EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING WORK SO WELL FOR VIRTUAL TEAM-BUILDING?

Experiential learning works so well for virtual team-building because it provides team members with the skills and competencies they need to enable them to work together more effectively. By its very nature, experiential learning fosters teamwork and collaboration. Here are a few other reasons why experiential learning is an ideal choice for virtual team-building training.

Increases Learner Engagement

An all-encompassing theme with an immersive experience ensures total engagement in the virtual team-building training. Learner engagement skyrockets as participants in experiential learning activities are only thinking about the task at hand. Also, because experiential learning is fun, trainees want to participate. They want to win the challenge. On the other hand, at a passive learning event, such as a lecture or speaker, participants can mentally (and sometimes physically) check out. With virtual experiential learning, participants are all-in for the duration of the team-building training - and they're having a great time!

When it comes to team-building, traditional training approaches are often participatory—think of classic team-building exercises like the trust fall or the egg-drop challenge. What really sets experiential learning apart is how it fully immerses participants in a story or situation. Participants must work together to solve a themed challenge, like "building a bridge to save endangered wildlife stuck on an island" or "journeying through the jungle to find a treasure." These immersive situations are full of vivid details and follow classic storytelling principles, bringing the situation to life for participants. And the best part? Experiential learning team-building training can be delivered in-person or virtually, unlike other traditional team-building activities like a ropes course which can only be done in-person.

Builds Conviction to Apply Lessons Learned Back On the Job

After completing an experiential team-building session, participants have a chance to reflect on what just happened and why. With the help of the post-experience debrief, they come to personally see the link between their actions and their results. They make the connection between how to win in the game and how to apply the same lessons to win at work. Plus, because the themed nature of the experiential learning activity doesn't usually correlate to just one specific business problem, facilitators have flexibility during the debrief to make connections to several different problems brought to life by the experience. This is especially important for team-building training because dysfunctional teams are rarely dysfunctional in just one way. If a team exhibits multiple dysfunctional behaviors during the training, the facilitator has the ability to address them all during the debrief, adjusting how much time they spend discussing each one according to training priorities.

An experiential learning exercise creates a clear line of sight between a team's behaviors and their effect on an outcome. Teams are often formed at work to tackle big projects. These team projects have a lot of moving parts, long timelines, and fluctuating budgets - which makes it difficult to pinpoint the cause if the project doesn't turn out as anticipated. During a compressed experiential learning activity, the effect of a team's behavior becomes crystal-clear in a short amount of time. Team members come out of a virtual experiential learning activity knowing exactly what behaviors cause dysfunction, and they can feel confident that applying their new skills during on-the-job team projects will make a big difference.

Builds Relationships and Trust

As found in Google's Project Aristotle, the two pillars of high-performing teams are emotional connection and psychological safety which is why experiential learning also works so well for team-building because it does just that. Experiential learning works because intense shared experience fosters new connections between team members that carry through to the workplace. Coworkers gain a new sense of trust and also encourage each other to continue applying their new skills.

PARTNER WITH EAGLE'S FLIGHT TO INCREASE COLLABORATION AT YOUR ORGANIZATION

Most of the time, the future unfolds gently. However, today we're faced with a world that changes seemingly overnight. For some organizations, this has forced them to pivot the way they work. In today's ultra-connected world, people are becoming increasingly aware that collaboration is not optional. In fact, it's paramount to the success of individuals, leaders, teams, and the organization as a whole. Collaboration also leads to improved engagement at work, better working relationships, and a more positive company culture. What's not to love about that?

To make it a reality, the individuals of an organization need to be trained with the right skills to be effective collaborators. Communication, teamwork, and problem-solving are just a few of the skills that will improve collaboration in your organization. Virtual team-building training that uses experiential learning is your key to making that happen. With team-building training that covers a wide array of skills, Eagle's Flight has a solution for every team out there. We are passionate about helping organizations achieve this because we know that the investment in teams that perform to their full potential, is one that pays off big in the long run.

EAGLE'S FLIGHT™

Since our founding in 1988, Eagle's Flight has developed and refined a framework for creating predictable, sustainable behavior change. We specialize in experiential learning and provide organizations with a better outcome by truly engaging the learner. Successful organizational development programs require ongoing work, but this can easily get lost in the shuffle of daily tasks that feel more urgent. Partnering with a provider that has a strong track record of helping organizations achieve long-term measurable change will help ensure that your development goals are met. If you would like to learn more about what a partnership with Eagle's Flight could look like, contact us today.

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