



Tom Romito

FACILITATOR

FACILITATION AND TEAM-BUILDING

I'm Tom Romito. I'm a facilitator and I work with organizations that want to improve themselves. Many groups of people want to become better teams in order to achieve their goals. This short paper explains how I, as a facilitator, help them do that through a process called team-building.

When I meet with a group for the first time, I ask them what they want to accomplish. Usually, they don't know exactly what they want to do. They maintain, however, that their efforts are fragmented and unfocused because they don't have any money, their boards and officers are burned out, and they don't have a plan for the future. I explain that I can offer three ways to help them. They are action planning, strategic planning, and team building. All three have the objective of improving internal management, but they differ in their approach and intensity. I decide on the right approach to use based on my assessment of the group's health, size, and interest.

When I decide that team building will help an organization the most with the time they want to devote, I employ an exercise that I borrowed from Peter Senge's book called "The Fifth Discipline Handbook." This exercise is appropriate for the use of breakout groups. Here are the steps I used to conduct this exercise with several organizations:

- **Assemble breakout groups.** The organization essentially came together in a four-hour retreat. I divided everyone into four groups and directed them to congregate in areas.
- **Assign tasks to each breakout group.** I named the four groups 1A, 2A, 1B, and 2B. I assigned Teams 1A and 2A the question: "In order to become the organization that we want to be, what do we need to do that we're not doing now?" We called them "vision items". I assigned Teams 1B and 2B the question: "In order to become the organization that we want to be, what do we need to do differently from what we're doing now?" We called them "changes." Their task was to generate as many items as possible in 30 minutes using the brainstorming technique. I prepared them for this task by conducting "Just in Time Training." Then I turned them loose and circulated among them to ensure the groups were on track and working.
- **Report back.** Then I had the breakout groups reassemble and report back to the whole group their top three vision priorities and top three change priorities. Then, with my help, the whole group consolidated the top three vision priorities and change priorities into one list.

- **Develop an action plan.** Again, with my help, the whole group developed an action plan to implement the vision items and changes. The beauty of this step is that the action plan included three things: What they were going to do, who was going to do it, and when they were going to do it. Someone (preferably different people) had to commit to championing each action item.

The intermingling and cross-fertilization of ideas and expertise in this exercise had a powerful result. Each of these organizations came together as a team. I met someone from one of these organizations years later who told me they were so excited about their experience that they were still talking about it. Is team building for your organization?