

Team Building: Nine Ways Johnny Carson Can Help You Run Outstanding Meetings and Better Team Building

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Recently, America lost one of the giants of late night television, Johnny Carson. He was a master at his craft, because he would conduct his show, essentially like a ninety minute meeting. The program would be entertaining, insightful, informative, and leave you wanting more.

Many times we fear going to meetings or briefings because we feel, based on past experiences, that they are going to be boring, not relevant, lack information, and we can't wait until the meeting ends.

Here are my eight techniques used by Johnny Carson to make your meetings or briefings outstanding for all involved:

1. Do Your Research for Better Team Building

Johnny Carson would invest time before each show to find out information on what was important to his guests and audience members. He would find out about his guests' personalities, their interests, and concerns.

Why not do the same? E-mail the participants with your agenda before the meeting. Ask them for feedback or any concerns they may have concerning the meeting. This allows you address any concerns before the meeting and to think through any potential problems and come up with better answers for solutions during the meeting.

2. Plan the Meeting for Better Team Building

Master the details for your meeting. Set an agenda with points to be covered and the time period for which they will be covered.

3. Invite Only the "Guests" That Can Contribute for Better Team Building

When Johnny was finished speaking with one guest, then it was time to bring out his next guest and engage in conversation with that guest. When he finished speaking with his guests he would excuse them so they could leave.

Invite only the "guests" that are relevant to subject matter at hand. How many times have you wondered, "Why am I here, this meeting doesn't pertain to me?" Also once your "guest" has contributed to the meeting and there is nothing else in the meeting that pertains to them, excuse them so they can leave.

4. Keep on Time for Better Team Building

You knew every night the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson would start at its assigned time (unless there was a special event).

Starting you meeting on time shows respect for the participants who made the effort to show up on time, and let's the late comers know that this behavior is unacceptable.

Also designate one person to be the time keeper. They are responsible for keeping you on track to stay within the time limits for each subject covered in the meeting. The results are that you start on time and end on time while accomplishing your meeting agenda.

5. Set the Tone for Better Team Building

Johnny would stand up and greet each guest with an engaging smile and welcome. Do the same with your meeting participants. Put them at ease for more informational meetings. Let them know that you really appreciate their feedback and participation.

6. Engage the Participants for Better Team Building

Johnny would continue the flow of the conversation with his guests by asking follow-up questions or summarize what they said.

Ask additional questions to draw out important information with your meeting participants. Say the following:

Tell me more about...
That's an interesting viewpoint, please explain further...
If I understand what you are saying...

If there are participants that are quiet, make it safe for them to give feedback or suggestions. Say the following:

"Mike, we would really like to hear your ideas on...
"Jane, you look like you really want to add something important to the discussion, please tell us."

Once they make their comments say, "Thanks for your valuable comments. I look forward to you contributing more insights in the future."

7. Make the Meeting Participants the Stars for Better Team Building

Johnny Carson had a way of letting his guests, whether they were infamous or famous, be celebrities on the Tonight Show. He allowed them to tell their jokes and witty stories, as well as complimented them, so that the stars were and ultimately the show was successful.

You can do the same for your staff in meetings. You could dominate the meeting and develop all the ideas yourself. You wouldn't accomplish much because the meeting participants would have no sense of ownership and would be slow to initiate your ideas. Or you can encourage the participants to contribute ideas so that they take ownership of the ideas and take responsibility for implementing *their* ideas. Also, acknowledge and reward these "solution creators" in front of the group.

Let them shine!

8. End the Meeting the Right Way for Better Team Building

While excusing his guests, Johnny would sincerely thank them for coming on the show and compliment them on their contributions. The guests left with a good feeling and always wanted to come back again and again.

Make sure you thank the meeting participants for their time and contributions. Let them know how they made a difference in the meeting. If there were solutions created in the meeting, communicate what is the clear course of action to accomplishing those solutions. Express your confidence that you know that these solutions will be achieved.

9. Follow-up, Follow-up, Follow-up for Better Team Building

Johnny Carson would talk about how great a show was because of a guest. This was another way to make the guests on his show feel special.

Send an e-mail to all relevant employees, whether they were in the meeting or not, explaining what was covered in the meeting, what was decided on in the meeting, and what course of action we are taking.

Also again, acknowledge key people in the meeting for their contributions.

Your meeting should be a place of information, empowerment, and motivation. Follow these nine techniques used by the master of late night and your meeting or briefing will be outstanding.

<http://www.thesykesgrp.com/MeetingArt01.htm>