

# NOVEL WAYS TO COOPERATE GELLING

The Business Times Friday 3 June 2005

A few years ago, a Lego game for corporate executives was making its rounds as a corporate training tool. Before that, paintball sessions and outdoor bound-adventure camps were popular tools for team-building as companies constantly looked for ways to improve team work and inject “fun” into otherwise long and dreary training sessions.

All this “fun for learning’s sake” is serious business, says Jeanne Seah of Jeannetics Concepts, a 12-year-old events management company specialising in corporate team-building activities. “It’s very popular now to have a half-day meeting, and spend the other half of the day in team-building,” she notes.

Ms Seah and other organisers constantly have to keep a step ahead of the corporate training game. Innovative, creative, out-of-the-box activities are the crucial elements here, and based on the following, it looks like nothing is too far off when it comes to company bonding.

## Building castles, strengthening ties

Companies which sign up for Alvin Lee’s unorthodox method of corporate training get this instruction list: Come in comfortable beach gear. Bring shades, sunblock and a hat. Be prepared to get sandy and sweaty.

The brief? To build sandcastles that are no less than 1.5 metres high.

“There are at least 25 learning points from this activity,” says Mr Lee, who started doing this two years ago, when he devised building sandcastles as a corporate training tool and community activity.

This usually takes place at the East Coast Park area or Sentosa or even offshore, at Bintan – and participants have to design, build and “sell” sandcastles in three hours, followed by a one-hour debriefing session.

“It’s really good because it gets people out to the great outdoors, which takes them out of their ‘comfort zone’,” says Mr Lee, who acts as the facilitator and “referee”, and sets the guidelines for the activity, such as ensuring that each team not only builds an aesthetic structure, but also something functional.

Sandcastle designs, for instance are “customised” to the company. If it was a group of schoolteachers, for instance, the brief would be to build a school; for shipping executives, it’s a logistics hub. “So it’s a scenario of the real world,” he explains.

Besides that, the teams of six to eight people each have to “sell” their structures to one another to see who wins in the end.

So far, this activity has been well-received by schools and government bodies, as well as private companies. And on weekends, Mr Lee also holds an “open” sandcastle building session at East Coast Park for anyone to join in.

A trained industrial engineer himself, Mr Lee first got into building sandcastles 10 years ago – inspired by his son and niece – when he developed an 11-piece tool kit to build proper sandcastles like the ones you see in a fairy-tale book.

Building castles in the air, that’s surely what people must have thought or said to him, when he quit his top management job to pursue his dream of bringing the tool kit to the market. Far from airy fairy thoughts, however, Mr Lee has now come full circle back to castles in sand, carving a niche for himself as a corporate trainer and motivational speaker who speaks from hands-on experience.