

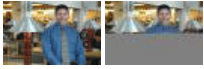
Philadelphia Business Journal - April 9, 2007

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# PHILADELPHIA BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## When your employees are knocking heads

**Team Builders Plus will help smooth the fuss**Philadelphia Business Journal - April 6, 2007 by [Adam Stone](#) Special to the Business Journal**STORY IMAGES**

CHERRY HILL -- Do what Merrick Rosenberg says, or he will kick you in the face.

He can do it, too. Skilled in martial arts, Rosenberg also heads up Team Builders Plus, a fast-growing training, development and team-building enterprise. You know what they say: Nothing motivates team performance like a foot in your face.

But Rosenberg hasn't established his reputation by assaulting clients, and anyway, it takes a lot more than fancy footwork to build and grow a business.

Rosenberg founded Team Builders here in 1991 along with partner Jeff Backal. A fourth-degree black belt, Rosenberg says the skills of karate transfer naturally to the realm of professional coaching.

"In the martial arts it is not about the punches and kicks. It is what you learn about yourself and how you relate to others," he said. "To do that in the corporate setting is basically the same thing. It is about how you interact with other people, how you behave in your work environment."

People come to Rosenberg when those interactions are not clicking. Then, through a combination of detailed assessments, classroom time and interactive exercise, the trainers at Team Builders help get everyone into synch.

At law firm Flaster Greenberg, Executive Director Gail Ruopp has turned to Rosenberg to help those with different personalities learn to speak to one another appropriately.

"My people in technology, for instance, need a lot of detail. Or the person in personnel is very sociable, and it's important to address that person with feelings, and not just with facts. It really helps to know these things and to do this every couple of years when you get new players," Ruopp said. "We end up being a very tight-knit, productive team. We were OK before, and now we are much better."

If Dilbert has poked a hole in touchy-feely leadership exercises over the years, Rosenberg is ready to defend what he does as more than mere play time.

"It is not just about fun," he said. Prior to meeting, participants score their teams on such measures as trust, communications and respect. Scores can often rise from a pre-training 4 or 5 up to a 7 or 8 after training. "That is a measurable improvement."

Rosenberg's own history suggests that he knows something about what it takes to make a business tick.

He and Backal launched the firm with just \$2,000 each as working capital. Now, this next part is nothing short of genius. As graduate students at Drexel University, the partners leveraged their classmates. When a marketing class needed to craft a business plan, Rosenberg convinced them to plan his future business. When the sales class needed to demonstrate sales strategy, students put together a sales plan for the future Team Builders.

"We left there with every piece of material we needed. We had everything ready to go and we made money in year number one," Rosenberg said. (The effort was not purely mercenary. Rosenberg and Backal now give back to the school as frequent guest lecturers.)

If this gambit paid off, clients say, it is largely because of Rosenberg's force of character. While Backal has the management savvy, Rosenberg has the charisma.

"He definitely is a very outgoing person," said Carla Stafford, manager of training and patient services at Drexel College of Medicine. "He is extremely engaging and he has the skills to easily capture his audience's attention. And he is definitely a subject matter expert: He certainly knows what he is talking about."

Team Builders Plus has worked with 26 of the Fortune 100. Through those experiences Rosenberg has gotten a pretty good sense of what ails corporate America.

"We get two different types of people for coaching," he said. "We get the high-potential person, the 'future leader' who needs that little bit extra, and then we get the person who is in trouble, the person who is not meeting their goals. It is our job to coach those people so that they can save their jobs. They may be technically proficient, but interpersonally challenged."

The Team Builders staff addresses these issues in a range of formats, from classroom lectures to high-tech adventures in which participants build cooperation skills through mock "treasure hunts."

With its own team humming along, Team Builders is expanding, with a Delaware office opening soon and plans for future offices in North Jersey, Baltimore and elsewhere. Rosenberg said the firm will break into each market with a series of "preview days," inviting corporate leaders to come in for a free taste of the training.

"We believe in what we do and we believe in it strongly enough to have them come out and try it out for free," he said. "We know that we are going to get clients from that."

UP CLOSE

Name: Merrick Rosenberg

Age: 40

Company: Team Builders Plus, 1873 Route 70 E., Suite 302, Cherry Hill, N.J. 08003

Best business decision: "Partnering with someone whose skill set complements my own."

Key challenge overcome: Growing the company without going into debt.

Advice to other young entrepreneurs: "You have to find something that you are passionate about."

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