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The power of one

Repario consultants say we are
“the star of our own movies.”
Here’s how to deliver an oscar-
worthy performance.

Story by: *John Wheeler*

Repario’s James Carter and William Mariani make no bones about their bias: They are the anti-teambuilding teambuilding company.

“Teambuilding can never be the goal because it’s just too big,” Mariani says. “We need to focus on something smaller.”

Add the fact that they build a philanthropic element into the experiential learning activities they create for their corporate clients, and you have a radically different approach to employee development. It’s the reason they adopted the name Repario, a Latin word that means “to renew or restore.”

“We’re just reminding people what they already know; we’re not teaching anything [new],” Mariani says. Indeed, “Many companies and facilitators base their whole thing around their life experience. Well, they’re not facilitating, they’re public speakers,” he adds.

Herein lies the difference: “We try to find out what problems companies are facing and then design programs to fit their needs,” Mariani says.

Although many of their corporate clients find them online while looking to add a team-building component to their annual meetings, retreats or sales summits, they soon learn that Repario beats to a different drum.

“They are usually bringing in a team-building company to do something fun and recreational for their group,” Mariani observes. “But then we talk about putting some meaning into it. That’s the difference.”

Connecting to a higher good

One example of Repario’s unique approach is its Building a Dream program in which, over four to six hours, participants build bicycles for a group of unnamed “customers.” It is only later that the group learns the bikes are for underprivileged children. In an additional “reveal,” the kids are brought to the event and receive their surprise gifts in front of the group. It’s an emotional experience for everyone involved.



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Repario’s rules

Repario’s James Carter has a different take on many of the old adages people live and work by. On the Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would like to be treated yourself? “The problem is it’s totally wrong,” Carter says. “Operating by that principle will only cause you problems and cause conflict within your life. Treat other people the way they want to be treated.” On teamwork: “The individual has been completely neglected. Who is doing the work? Some entity called Team? No, individuals are doing the work.” The world does not revolve around you: “Actually, it does revolve around me. Each one of us is the star of our own movie. Being in control of your own movie is what we call the power of one. We’re individual building, not team building.”

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Repario client Options for Youth, a California charter school with about 250 employees, participated in a Building a Dream program facilitated by Carter and Mariani.

"I think they have a warmth and a genuine way about them that stands to be more effective than team-building organizations that we have used in the past," says Lori Albright, Options for Youth training and professional development manager. "Our teachers were really able to bond with one another and grow."

Building a business

Carter and Mariani met as students at the University of Nevada, Reno. They've worked together in a variety of jobs, from delivering sandwiches to bartending to corporate sales. Repario evolved from a business Carter formed in 2000 where he essentially acted as an agent for training and development facilitators.

So how did these two 30-something employee development heretics from Reno manage to build a client list that includes Fortune 500 companies such as Pfizer, American Express and Johnson & Johnson?

"We've been getting enough momentum together that a lot of our previous clients are helping us sell programs," Mariani says. "It's a lot about referral," he adds, declining to discuss the firm's annual revenue range.

Carter says the two men believe they have to "walk the walk," and stick to their principles — even when it costs them business.

Incredibly, they turned down Google, which approached them in 2005 to organize a beach Olympics event that didn't incorporate some of Repario's trademark elements such as philanthropy. Apparently the frivolity was something the business partners couldn't relate to.

"In retrospect, I'm so glad we did it," Carter says. "But there was a time when we were thinking, 'Wow, was that our opportunity?' They [Google] called us again for 2008, so we'll see [what develops.]"

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