

# What's Next

Jim Cain, Ph.D.  
Teamwork & Teamplay

For 32 years now I've been active in the field of adventure-based learning (and along with it the many other names that this style of education includes, such as: experiential learning, experience-based training, teambuilding, leadership development, ropes and challenge courses, and most recently, active learning). During this time, there has been a flow of ideas, grass root programs, curriculum development, research and general discussion that has allowed this field to mature and proliferate. Adventure-based learning now spans the extremes from collaborative and cooperative games played by children on the school playground and at summer camps, to experiences that test the leadership principles and alter the culture of international corporations in their boardrooms.

With such a rich history, and a strong presence in our modern society, the obvious question is "What's Next?" I believe that in order to answer this question for the future, you must first look at the past.

Ten years ago, a challenge course professional could approach local businesses and corporations and mention the word 'teambuilding' and easily attract business. More recently, the focus has changed from teambuilding to exploring leadership issues. Corporations want to take existing employees and help them achieve the skills they need to become leaders within the organization. To this end, many of the activities used for adventure-based teambuilding have been reformatted to focus not only on the team completion of a task, but also on the leadership talents utilized during the project. Even more important in this transition, is the change from simply accepting what a challenge course offered, to corporations requesting facilitators to frame activities and initiatives around a central theme or goal. In many cases, the actual activities used in each of these cases is the same, but the facilitation of these activities has dramatically changed. Corporate audiences have become 'informed consumers' of adventure-based training, and often request specific outcomes for each training session.

For a number of years now, I believe that traditional Human Resources (HR) and Organizational Development (OD) professionals have been looking at the adventure-based and active learning communities, and 'borrowing' some of our best materials, repackaging these in more traditional lecture style formats, and positively impacting their corporate training presentations. It is now time for adventure-based facilitators to borrow the best from the HR and OD fields, and apply it to our programs. By delivering 'content rich' programs, which focus on key corporate initiatives (such as clear communication, creative problem solving, consensus building, decision making, resource management, conflict resolution, teambuilding and leadership), we are able to bring the best training technique known (experience-based education and active learning) to our clients, with confidence that we can help them achieve their training goals.

With this in mind, it is now time to revisit our initial question from above, "What's Next?" While the following opinions and comments are certainly my own, there are an enormous number of authors who agree with me. The reference and resource listings in my upcoming book on this subject contain more than 200 books, publications, journal articles and websites. Many of these references did not exist just a decade ago, and are the result of expanding interest and perceived value in this arena.

***I believe, as we go forward, that the next wave in adventure-based programming and active learning will be shaped by the word 'connection.'***

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (the study funded near the time of the Columbine High School tragedy a few years ago) had two not-so-surprising results. Students that felt a connection to their families, and students that felt a connection to their schools, were incredibly well insulated from nearly all of the traditional risky behaviors associated with adolescence. Corporations have

discovered that employee retention and engagement improves as an employee feels a sense of connection in the workplace. Even our current conventional wisdom on organizational effectiveness shows that there are three things required for highly effective teams:

1. A clearly identified, articulated and worthy task.
2. The opportunity for growth, advancement and building new skills
3. The opportunity to create connection and maintain relationships with other members of the group. Sometimes referred to as the 'social capital' of the organization.

The third item mentioned above clearly demonstrates the need for connection in our corporate world. The NLSAH results show similar needs in the world of our children. And additional studies, such as the Alameda County Study (1979) by Dr. Lisa Berkman of Harvard University, show that for even the elderly in our communities, personal health and the quality of their lives improve with the amount of connection they have to the other members of their community. For more information about these subjects, see the references listed at the end of this article.

***It is time for us to do what we have always done well - build unity, community and connection through activities that utilize a wide variety of life skills and that open the door to meaningful conversations about subjects that matter.***

I would encourage each of you that read this article to find the following information at your local library, on-line or at your local bookstore, and learn how to apply it in your pursuit of the next wave in adventure-based and active learning. And, if you would like a publication that is a bit more specific to the corporate adventure-based learning field, you can review a copy of "The Value of Connection - In the Workplace" by Jim Cain and Kirk Weisler. Available in the fall of 2006.

### **Reference Articles**

Connect - 12 vital ties that open your heart, lengthen your life, and deepen your soul, 1999, Edward M. Hallowell, Pantheon Books, New York, NY USA ISBN 0-375-40357-4 Connection improves the quality and length of your life, and here is the information that proves it!

The Value of Connection in the Workplace - You can become the catalyst for building community and creating a positive work environment in your corporation, 2004, Jim Cain and Kirk Weisler, Learning Unlimited, Tulsa, OK USA Telephone (888) 622-4203 [www.learningunlimited.com](http://www.learningunlimited.com) "A new classic in creating the kind of unity, community and connection in the workplace that you always knew was possible, in an active, fun and productive manner. This book contains the philosophy, research and easy-to-follow activities for anyone to have a positive impact on their own organization." Available November 2004

Exploring the Stages of Group Formation Using Adventure-Based Activities, Jim Cain, Teamwork & Teamplay website [www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com), 2003.

Peer Harassment, School Connectedness, and Academic Achievement, Marla Eisenberg, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer and Cheryl Perry, *The Journal of School Health*, Volume 73, Number 8, October 2003, pages 311-316.

Protecting Adolescents From Harm: Findings From the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, Michael Resnick, Peter Bearman, Robert Blum, et.al., *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, Volume 278, Number 10, September 10, 1997, pages 823-832.

Social Ties and Susceptibility to the Common Cold, Sheldon Cohen, William Doyle, David Skoner, Bruce Rabin and Jack Gwaltney, *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, Volume 277, Number 24, June 25, 1997, pages 1940-1944.

The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health - Preliminary Results: Great Expectations, Jonathan Klein, *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, Volume 278, Number 10, September 10, 1997, pages 864-865.

### **Some Information about the Author**

Dr. Jim Cain is the author of the teambuilding texts, *Teamwork & Teamplay*, *The Book on Raccoon Circles*, *A Teachable Moment* and *Teambuilding Puzzles*. He is a former Executive Director of the Association for Challenge Course Technology, Senior Consultant to the Cornell University Corporate Teambuilding Program and the Director and creative force behind the adventure-based training company, *Teamwork & Teamplay*. Dr. Cain makes his home in Brockport, New York and frequently serves as a visiting professor and staff development specialist on subjects ranging from experiential education to challenge and adventure-based activities, and from creating connections to leadership, structural engineering, chaos and powder mechanics. Dr. Cain has presented teambuilding and active learning sessions in 43 states and 10 countries in the past 5 years, and generally has more equipment and adventure-based books in his library than most developing nations. His most recent project is the new book “The Value of Connection - In the Workplace.”

Jim Cain, Ph.D. *Teamwork & Teamplay* 468 Salmon Creek Road Brockport, NY 14420

Phone (585) 637-0328

[jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com](mailto:jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com)

[www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com)