



Book Review Editor: Theodore J. Weidner, Ph.D., P.E., CEFP, AIA

The summer is over, students have returned to the campus, and with luck you've

successfully navigated any changes needed to address the reality of your new operating budget. Now it's time to focus on longer-term issues such as whether your team is working together well or how you can help an employee who didn't get a good performance review last spring and needs assistance getting on the right track. Here are two books for your consideration.

QUICK TEAM-BUILDING ACTIVITIES FOR BUSY MANAGERS, 2ND ED.

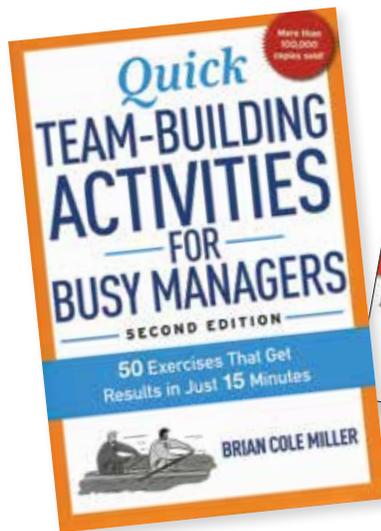
Brian Cole Miller, Amacom, New York, 2015, 182 pp., softcover, \$18.95.

Facility leaders are no different from other organizational leaders, except that they may be more technically focused and have fewer “soft skills” to deal with staff and team issues. Fortunately for them, Brian Cole Miller has provided an updated edition of *Quick Team-Building Activities for Busy Managers*.

Depending on your position in the organization and the overall atmosphere in your organization, this book may be right for you. I've found the need for team-building in several situations. I've either had good people who couldn't get along with each other, people who would become better if they didn't compete with each other, or people who were just tired from years of stressful work and needed a time-out.

Although I have frequently sought out professionals to assist with my team-building needs, I realize that not everyone has the resources or the support for professional assistance (or the time required). *Quick Team-Building Activities* will fill that void, but I suggest the title should include “budget constrained managers” as well as “busy managers.”

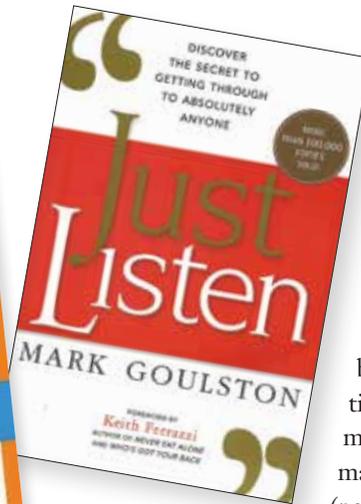
The difference between a professional team-building consultant and this book is somewhat obvious. The book requires you to complete four tasks: select the exercise, do the preparation, oversee the



activity, and summarize the results. That said, even using a consultant, the leader must provide some kind of summary to get the point across and helpfully make the team-building exercise stick.

Miller makes the first three tasks—selection, preparation, and oversight—easier, with a good introduction explaining how the book works and what kind of effort must be expended to make the subsequent exercises effective. He also spends an equal amount of time outlining what can go wrong with the exercises and how to take corrective action. The corrective action is focused not only on what to do after something has gone wrong, but how to prepare for errors and minimize bad outcomes.

After focusing on the preparation, Miller offers six categories of team-building activities that address most workplace issues. There are 50 activities in all, obviously not evenly divided



among the six categories. Each activity is laid out in the same manner, which is explained in the beginning of the book. In addition to being quick, the activities do not require much in the way of materials or equipment (perfect for constrained budgets).

Are the 50 activities Miller includes everything that you need to be a successful leader? Perhaps. They represent more than what I used in my career. If they don't address all your needs, they should at least get you started. Whether you have some kind of team-building activity once a month or only when needed, this is a handy reference that can help keep your organization running despite the many challenges of budget, time, and service demands.

JUST LISTEN

Mark Goulston, Amacom, New York, 2009, 221 pp., softcover, \$17.95.

There's seldom enough time to get things done, and the growing pressure in educational facilities to “do more with less” and be “customer-focused” on a shoestring budget doesn't help. Add to this the continuing demands to measure what is done in a manner that will prove

your organization is adding value or doing things right. As you think about these pressures, what comes to mind? The need for action? Quick thinking? Results?

These may be normal responses to stress. But Mark Goulston argues in *Just Listen* that these responses are your amygdala (reptilian brain) taking over and interfering with your frontal cortex (logical, higher brain)—often resulting in poor decisions, continuing problems, and lack of insight. As humans, we all have these reactions, from our bosses and subordinates to our peers. The way to break this cycle of panic-flight/fight-rest-panic is to find a better solution.

In *Just Listen*, Goulston provides us with nine ways to get through to someone who has “amygdala hijack,” which often inhibits your ability to help them. He shows us how to move to a

higher-order discussion and search for effective solutions that use the frontal cortex. As the title suggests, it is important to listen to what is happening and to how a person is responding, and then shift the conversation to something that will result in a solution rather than the continuation of the problem.

Having shown us how to identify communication problems in a calm, logical manner, Goulston also provides 12 tools to get buy-in for the solution and concludes with seven fixes for challenging situations.

There are some great ideas and techniques provided in *Just Listen*. The examples ring true for different situations I've been in as a facilities officer. They also match a great deal of what is taught in APPA's Leadership Academy: development of individual effectiveness, recognition of interpersonal issues, and

managerial and organizational effectiveness. Obviously, as a mass-market business book, *Just Listen* includes many situations that do not necessarily relate to facility operations, but that's a minor issue.

Just Listen is an excellent resource for any leader's bookshelf. The index also allows quick look-up of scenarios and solutions if you're like me and can't remember all the techniques, or need a quick refresher before tackling a difficult situation at work. 

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