

**Team Spirit**



Reviewed by Bill Ellet, editor of *Training Media Review*; wellet@tmreview.com

Although teams may be the preferred work unit of the new century, everyone isn't equipped to work well in one. Training is part of the answer, and producers are rushing to fill the need. Here

are two of the more notable videos in the teaming masses.

*Fish Sticks*, video, 1999, 17 minutes, ChartHouse International Learning; 800.328.3789, www.charthouse.com. Purchase US\$590. Other material: leader guide, participant guide, facilitator guide, stuffed fish.

*Implode!* video, 1999, 15 minutes, Enterprise Media; 800.423.6021, www.enterprise-media.com. Purchase \$595. Other material: leader guide, participant workbook.

**Look Out for Flying Fish**

In 1998, ChartHouse International Learning put out a video that even it wasn't too sure about. It was peculiar for several reasons.

The original *Fish* was too short (17 minutes) to be considered a full training program, but it was too long and too expensive to be considered a meeting opener. And it featured a strange business. Shot in Seattle—home of such corporate stars as Starbucks, Amazon.com, and Microsoft—this video was about a fish market. Even stranger, the content fell well outside mainstream training: having fun at work. *Yeah, right.*

Naturally, it was a hit. The producers were slack-jawed with amazement. *Go figure.*

Actually, it isn't that hard to figure. *Fish* is fun to watch. That immediately sets it apart from the majority of training videos. And while you're laughing and enjoying the show, you quickly realize that if people can have fun selling fish, you can have fun doing whatever it is that you do.

*Fish* rode the same zeitgeist as *Fast Company* when it retooled itself as a movement, not just a magazine. Likewise, *Fish* is built around making work

**RATINGS KEY**

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★½	Very good
★★★	Good
★★★½	Above average
★★	Average
★★½	Below average
★	Poor

more meaningful, including having a good time. So is *Fish Sticks*, the sequel. But does it escape the usual peril of a sequel not being up to the original? If anything, it's better. The fun's still there, but there's more substance.

The fishmongers of Pike Place Fish have perfected selling as performance art. It has the distinction of being probably the only fish market on the planet that's a tourist destination. The genius of the performance is that it pleases employees and customers alike. Johnny, the owner, says that the former owner "used to hate the business." As an employee, Johnny pitied the old guy. When he took over, Johnny found he hated it, too. He was barking at employees "when a shrimp fell on the floor." And that started the fun.

The video portrays the few essential concepts Johnny and his employees have embraced to make their business a shared responsibility with potential to yield much more than just money. (Note to bottom-line managers: The market does make money, more than before.) The video lets the fish sellers tell their story, in their own words.

Some talking-head content is interspersed with footage of team members providing service as entertainment, including their famous fish-throwing act. The video doesn't just energize content delivery; it energizes viewers. But if you must meet a standard of political correctness, you're on notice that the Pike Place Fish team members are all male and mostly white.

The facilitator's guide could do more to help you start your own fun revolution. Although it has a nice graphic design and its other production values are

good, especially for a training program ancillary, the content is slender. It could be that in this case less is better. The guide offers a few good questions that keep the focus on the fundamentals.

Just opening the package is fun. It includes the video, a t-shirt, a CD of "The Fish Song" (not memorable, but who cares?), a fish-shaped pen, refrigerator magnets, and a stuffed fish. Since when was opening a training package like opening a present? This video starts making a point about fun before you put it in the VCR.

**Fish Sticks**

★★★★★	Holds viewer interest
★★★★★	Acting/Presenting
★★	Diversity
★★★★★	Production quality
★★★★★	Value of content
★★★★★	Instructional value
★★★	Value for the money
★★★★★	Overall rating

**Blow In**

*Implode!* is a blast. It's got an odd but winning combination of tongue-in-cheek humor, a sublime visual effect, and some down-to-earth lessons.

This brief video, resplendent in a canary-yellow case, features a work team in the ultimate niche business: demolishing buildings by imploding them. You could say that's the ultimate job for boys who never grow up, except you'd then have to account for Stacey Loizeaux, a woman and key team member. She knows her way around explosives. All of the team members do.

You may be scratching your head wondering what a team that blows up buildings could possibly have to do with your business and teams. Plenty. Few teams require more communication, trust, and teamwork. Those qualities aren't just for pleasing customers and getting a bonus; they're for making sure team members live to blow up another condemned building another day.

The Controlled Demolition team could be said to overcommunicate. They talk to each other, and they talk to other parties—incessantly. They also listen carefully. The team cross-trains and ro-

tates jobs. Everyone knows how to do every task. The competence and coordination that result from understanding the big picture are important to the team's success and safety.

This team also has an unsentimental, and increasingly unfashionable, approach to trust: You earn it. Team members are trained and tested in the field under close supervision. If they perform well, they receive trust. This isn't Internet time in which you get raw recruits, give them a title, and assume they'll do the job just fine.

This video is more visual than most. Yes, it has talking-head interviews, all done in the field but with an undertone of humor, as if the folks are about to burst out laughing and ask, "Can you believe we do this for a living?"

The big visual appeal, though, is the sublime sight of large buildings, sometimes whole blocks of them, crumbling into neat piles.

The participant workbook and leader guide support the program in about the depth you'd want from a 15-minute video. There's something on each key point for viewers to respond to and think about. The facilitator is provided with a simple agenda, discussion topics, and group exercises. The guide, by Stewart Clifford of Enterprise Media, is succinct, clear, and humorous.

If the nearly \$600 price seems high for a brief program, try a rental first.

### **Implode!**

★★★★1/2	Holds viewer interest
★★★★	Acting/Presenting
★★★1/2	Diversity
★★★★	Production quality
★★★★	Value of content
★★★★1/2	Instructional value
★★★★	Value for the money
★★★★	Overall rating

### Recommendation

*Fish Sticks* offers fun and personal responsibility as a strategy for team success, by showing real people who are following those principles. They aren't Gen X millionaires in Silicon Valley wearing Gap clothes, but just working-class guys in hooded sweatshirts and

overalls who enjoy tossing sturgeons at each other and customers and making people laugh. Anyone who doesn't get caught up watching this video is terminally cynical. Your challenge will be to form teams that are as creative. It's too bad that the facilitator guide isn't all it could be. The price could also be an obstacle, though we think there's value.

*Implode!* shows that teams that take down orders have important things in common with teams that take down buildings. It cleverly exploits the value of entertainment—in this case, the awesome sight of buildings collapsing after having their structural knees knocked out—to get a training message across. Price (nearly \$600), however, may seem high for the length (just 15 minutes).

### Training for the Real Thing

Reviewed by Kim Slack, a training consultant based in Boston, with extensive experience developing simulations and creative learning models; kimatcds@libertybay.com



Team Leadership, *online library*, MBAGames.com; +44 0 1425 461072, [www.mbagames.com](http://www.mbagames.com). Purchase \$24 for one adventure; \$80

for all five adventures. Other material: none.



Test Your Management Skills, *online library*, MBAGames.com; +44 0 1425 461072, [www.mbagames.com](http://www.mbagames.com). Purchase

\$40 a month. Other material: none.

MBAGames.com has developed a winner and has convinced this cynical reviewer that there is good content on the Web.

First, let me say, substance wins over frills any day in my book. When Bill Ellet of *Training Media Review* told me about this Web-based training site that features games, my reaction was: "Oh great. Another piece of so-called training about as substantive as a survey in *Cosmopolitan*. You know: Rate your leadership skills in 10 easy questions. You scored high? So did I!"

I admit, I'm getting crabby looking at the avalanche of time-wasting,

Web-based training on the Internet. MBAGames, a British Web-based training firm, is different. After playing its *Team Leadership* game, I realized quickly it had engaged me more deeply than I expected. In the game, you select among five adventures. For example, there's handling an impertinent team member or coming back from a vacation and finding morale low. I chose the adventure about heading up a task group to plan community activities.

After reading a paragraph about how the "chairman" selected me to head the task group, I was asked to choose among three alternatives. After doing so, I was asked whether I would like to note why I made the choice I did. That seemed like a waste of time at first, so I continued on to the next scenario.

Building on the first decision, there are several choices. Instead of the usual feedback—"Good selection, you've scored three points!"—you're greeted with mixed results that are surprisingly realistic. I conducted the meeting I wanted, but not everyone went along with my brilliant idea. At first, I was stunned. If I made the right choice, shouldn't I get rewarded with praise? But if I had gotten a pat on the back, I wouldn't have learned as much and would've had a false sense of accomplishment.

Each adventure continues through four decision points. At the end, you get a sober description of the situation. I realized that it wasn't at all what I wanted to happen. I was encouraged to try again. I was hooked. I had to figure out how to change the result. I went back to a couple of the decision points and, this time, noted my reasoning. After a few more dead ends, I found the result I was looking for. And I learned not to trust my gut instinct so much. But best of all, I didn't just mindlessly select alternatives. I began to build a theory of how to handle similar situations.

That's often what managers lack: a theory, a way of handling themselves in a variety of situations. Much programmed and online learning attempts to provide a formula: "When eating steak, use a fork and knife." Not only is that approach boring, it isn't effective. In addition, the richness of the situation or case lets you see how social and tech-

nical issues are often intertwined. The approach increases the likelihood that when we encounter similar situations, we'll recall the theory we developed and try it out.

I also tried another game called *Conglomerate*. It involves teams making decisions that affect marketing, manufacturing, and other business areas. After reading a scenario, you decide where to manufacture, sales goals, and management priorities. Such games are used effectively to teach strategy, and this Web-based version makes playing accessible. A detailed trainer's guide prepares participants and sets up the exercise.

The part I liked the least was the management survey. It's traditional, in which you're asked 10 questions about six types of situations. As I said before, I'm not a big fan of those types of surveys. But for people who love to take tests, have at it. The questions require that you fire some neurons in the gray matter, so there is value. You receive feedback as you go along, but I doubt anyone's likely to jump up with a big "aha!"

Games and simulations can be powerful learning experiences. They engage people in discovery, provide practice in safe settings, and develop cognitive

<b>Team Leadership</b>	
NA	Installation/use
★★★★	Ease of navigation
★★★★	Holds user interest
★★★1/2	Production quality
★★★★	Interactivity
★★★★	Value of content
★★★★	Instructional value
★★★★	Value for the money
★★★★	Overall rating

<b>Test Your Management Skills</b>	
NA	Installation/use
★★★	Ease of navigation
★★★	Holds user interest
★★★1/2	Production quality
★★★★	Interactivity
★★★★	Value of content
★★	Instructional value
★★	Value for the money
★★★1/2	Overall rating

and behavioral abilities—all at the same time. But you need to ensure that learners are ready for this kind of learning, especially if they're used to classroom lectures. And you should make sure that the content addresses their needs.

**Recommendation**  
Check out MBAGames. The *Team Leadership* program is a winner. Sure, it could benefit from video and audio components, but there's substance at a reasonable cost. Explain to managers that the games are interactive mini case studies, not *Monopoly* or *Solitaire*. Invite them to play at a public session. Show them one of the adventures in the team leadership area.

Compared to other interactive Web-based programs, *Team Leadership* is well worth the money, particularly if you spend time setting the experience up for people unfamiliar with online learning or games.

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