

CAN TEAM BUILDING GET YOU SUED?



Alison Green of the Ask a Manager blog recently had a great column in Slate (see bit.ly/slatenews) about over-zealous employer team-building activities. I strongly recommend that you read it. Meanwhile, I will focus on the legal implications for employers who are too pushy about ensuring that everyone smells like “team spirit.” There are potential legal ramifications to making poor team-building choices and making employees feel that they can’t opt out without damaging their careers.

TOP 4 LEGAL RISKS

No. 1: Disability, pregnancy, age, religion claims. Escape room exercises, extreme sports (or even non-extreme but physically demanding) and mandatory yoga are all examples of activities that employees with average or below-average physical fitness may not be able to manage.

Although being out of shape is not a “disability” within the meaning of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act or most state or local disability rights laws, some employees may have bona fide ADA-protected disabilities that make participation difficult. And depending on the nature of their real job, they may have never had the need to disclose that to you. So now they will be forced to (A) disclose their disability so that they can opt out, or (B) just opt out and be seen as “not a team player.” The same could be true for pregnant employees who aren’t ready to “announce” yet.

Or you might decide to have a traditional office party where alcohol is served. And one of your employees has alcoholism (an ADA-protected disability) and believes it is prudent to avoid events where the booze flows freely.

Extreme or strenuous activities may also be difficult for some older employees.

And, finally, about the yoga classes: Yoga is a Hindu spiritual practice, and even the Americanized “exercise” versions sometimes result in religious objections.

No. 2: Sexual harassment. I’ve heard of employer-sponsored employee sleepovers and swimsuit events. Seriously? I guess alcohol wasn’t risky enough.

No. 3: Workers’ compensation and tort liability. If you sponsor a team-building activity that involves a physically demanding activity, what if an employee participates and gets hurt? At the very least, you would be liable for the employee’s workers’ comp claim. Depending on the circumstances, though, the injury might fall outside workers’ comp, leaving you potentially liable for negligent or intentionally tortious conduct, with the possibility of jury trials and significantly higher damage awards.

No. 4: Wage-hour. I’ve assumed the participants in these team-building exercises are exempt under the Fair Labor Standards Act and state wage-hour laws. If so, then no wage-hour problem with requiring the employee to attend an after-hours or weekend social event.

But if there are participants who are non-exempt, or misclassified as exempt, you have to pay them for all “hours worked.” If they are required to attend the event – or “strongly encouraged” to do so – then that will be “time worked” for wage-hour purposes.

The same applies if non-exempt employees are “voluntold” to help out at the event. That is “time worked,” and it has to be paid. If it’s overtime, you have to pay overtime.

TOP 4 SOLUTIONS

Fortunately, all four of these risks are pretty easy to avoid.

No. 1: There’s no “survival of the fittest” in “T-E-A-M.” When you choose a team-building activity, think about your least-fit and oldest employees, as well as any employees with disabilities or pregnancies. Would they be able to safely and comfortably participate in the activity?

No. 2: Let employees opt out. Leave the door open for employees to send their regrets. Don’t make them feel they are jeopardizing their careers if they don’t attend.

No. 3: If possible, schedule the event to take place on regular work days and during regular working hours. Based on all the wage-hour stuff I have already discussed.

No. 4: Don’t keep it a secret. Apparently some employers think it’s cute to invite employees to a “mystery” team-building event without telling them what will happen. It’s not. If employees don’t know what is going to happen at the event, then they won’t be able to make an intelligent decision about whether they can participate or under what circumstances.

No. 5: (BONUS) Oh, and one other thing, which you already knew. If you do serve alcohol, take all the usual precautions.

Source: Robin Shea, partner with the law firm Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete, LLP, and editor and primary author of the blog Employment & Labor Insider, www.constangy.com/employment-labor-insider.

GOVERNMENT & LEGISLATIVE

ON OUR RADAR

Approved regulations and other issues that we’ve been following:

- **DOL resurrects self-report program** – The Department of Labor (DOL) has resurrected a program that allows employers to self-audit, voluntarily report and resolve certain statutory violations of FLSA or FMLA laws. For more information, see the articles at bit.ly/Self-audit and bit.ly/littlerpaid.
- **Minimum wage increase** – On January 1, 2026, California’s minimum wage will increase to \$16.90 per hour and the minimum salary for exempt employees will increase to \$5,858.67 per month (\$70,304 per year). That said, be aware that higher minimum wage rates apply in many local jurisdictions as well as in some industries.
- **Sick leave for outside salespeople** – A recent California Court of Appeal decision confirmed that paid sick leave for outside salespeople can be calculated using the employee’s base hourly pay, excluding commissions – provided this is how your firm calculates other forms of paid leave.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

EVERYDAY MEMBER QUESTIONS: EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENTS



Q: Does PIA offer assistance to members who need help regarding employment agreements, especially across state lines?

A: Yes! As one of the many valuable benefits of membership, PIA offers a service for employment agreements through Jinji HR. Jinji HR provides employment compliance services and guidance to members in all 13 of the states that PIA serves. To reach them, call PIA at 323-728-9500 and let the PIA associate who answers know that you need HR assistance.

MEMBER NEWS

ConnectUp

NETWORKING EVENT

Wednesday
November 5, 2025
4:00PM - 7:00PM

PLEASE JOIN US
For
DRINKS

Inland Group
4305 E. La Palma Ave.,
Anaheim, CA 92807

Sponsored by

INLAND GROUP TO HOST “CONNECT UP” EVENT

At 4:00 pm on Wednesday, November 5, Inland Group will open its doors to host a PIA “ConnectUp” networking event. PIA members are invited to enjoy delicious appetizers and drinks, do some networking and take a plant tour to check out some of HP’s latest equipment.

PIA’s ConnectUp events are great opportunities to meet with other printing industry professionals while keeping up with industry trends. RSVP and mark your calendar now!

Date: Wednesday, November 5, 2025

Time: 4:00 to 7:00 pm

Location: Inland Group, 4305 E. La Palma Ave., Anaheim, CA 92807

Cost: Free for PIA members

RSVP: Please RSVP to Karissa Melara at karissa@piasc.org or Kristy Villanueva at kristy@piasc.org.

BILL’S SHORT ATTENTION SPAN SALES TIPS: QUIT RUNNING THAT PLAY

Let’s say there’s a football play called “24 Blue.” You run it once, nothing happens. You run it again, still nothing. Then, your quarterback calls it a third time – and you’re thinking, “Seriously? Same play, again?”

Sound familiar?

Too many salespeople in the graphic arts are stuck running their own version of “24 Blue.” Same pitch,

same clients, same services. Over and over. It’s safe, it’s known – and it’s a great way to slowly go broke.

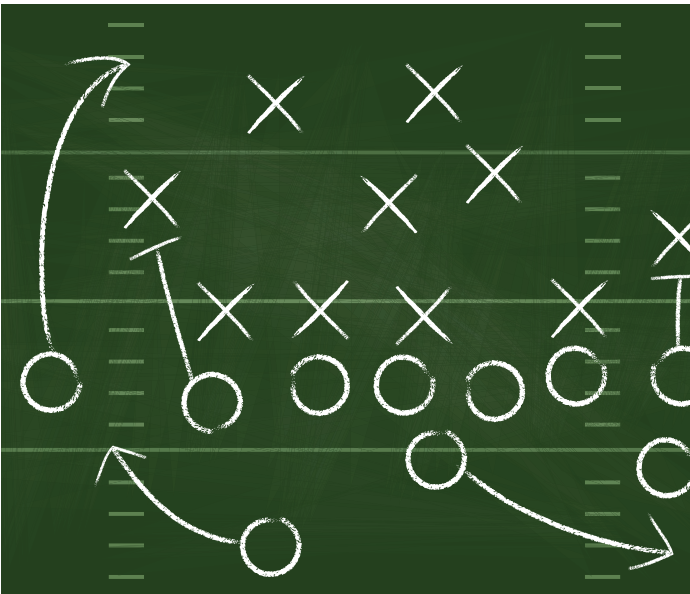
A ‘wicked smaht’ man once said, “70% of your future revenue will come from customers you don’t have today, buying things you don’t currently sell.” How many printers heard that and just... ran “24 Blue” again?

Be different. Switch it up. Don’t wait for the market to shift – it’s already shifting. As such, you need to shift your approach.

The job of sales is no longer about repeating yesterday. It’s about constant reinvention. You’re not a route-runner. You’re the quarterback. The playbook is in your hands.

Are you going to run “24 Blue” one more time and hope for different results, or is it time for a change play?

Source: Bill Farquharson, The Sales Vault, <https://SalesVault.Pro>



DE-ESCALATION TRAINING



Conflict happens – even in the best workplaces.

But when tensions go unchecked, they can derail teamwork, erode culture and in some cases, spark safety risks or even violence.

A study by CPP Inc, estimates unresolved conflicts cost employers over \$350 billion every year in lost productivity, absenteeism, turnover and legal expenses.

In office settings, lingering disputes can fuel disengagement and drive good employees to quit. On the factory floor, a disagreement near heavy equipment doesn’t just hurt morale – it can create dangerous conditions and increase the risk of accidents.

Research shows employees spend nearly three hours every week dealing with conflict instead of doing their jobs. Multiply that across your workforce, and it adds up to more than a full workweek lost per person, per year. The average workplace conflict costs about \$2,000 per incident, which is an expense most organizations never plan for.

Younger workers tend to feel less confident navigating tense situations. Traliant’s 2025 Workplace Violence Survey Report (bit.ly/traliantsurvey) found only 41% of Gen Z and 47% of Millennials feel confident in their de-escalation skills, compared to 58% of Boomers and 54% of Gen X. This confidence gap signals that younger employees need more support and training to build these essential skills.

What effective de-escalation training looks like

De-escalation training isn’t just for frontline employees who interact with customers. It’s just as valuable for resolving conflicts between co-workers, whether across cubicles or assembly lines. The right program gives employees tools to spot conflict early and defuse it before it spirals.

- **Awareness and early detection** teach employees how to recognize red flags, like raised voices, sarcasm, tense body language or stress triggers (deadlines, delayed shifts).
- **Communication and framing** use techniques like reflective listening, neutral phrasing and empathy. For example, language like, “I see why this is frustrating. How can we solve it together?” can shift arguments into problem-solving mode.
- **Self-regulation tactics** like pausing before responding or taking a brief time-out help employees stay calm under pressure.
- **Role-play scenarios** – from an office disagreement during a performance review to a shop floor dispute over equipment – enable employees to practice realistic situations to make new skills stick.
- **Clear escalation protocols** help employees know when it’s time to involve a supervisor or HR instead of letting issues fester.

- **Post-conflict recovery** helps rebuild relationships after an argument ends.

Equipping your workforce with these skills is a proactive step toward building a safer, healthier workplace. It reduces stress, strengthens teamwork and psychological safety and keeps employees focused on doing their best work, instead of managing conflict. It can also help control costs by reducing absenteeism and turnover, and in jurisdictions with workplace violence prevention requirements, it shows proactive compliance.



...UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS COST EMPLOYERS OVER \$350 BILLION EVERY YEAR IN LOST PRODUCTIVITY, ABSENTEEISM, TURNOVER AND LEGAL EXPENSES

How Traliant can help

We offer 10-minute interactive training that equips employees with practical, easy-to-use techniques to defuse heated situations. There are versions that are tailored for Office (bit.ly/De-escalationoffice) and Industrial/Manufacturing (bit.ly/De-escalationManu) environments, each designed around the unique challenges employees face there.

Through realistic, relatable scenarios, learners practice how to spot early warning signs, apply proven de-escalation techniques, redirect conflict toward solutions and know when to seek support from HR or management.

Source: Traliant, www.traliant.com

BY THE NUMBERS



73%

of companies always or frequently use direct mail as part of their marketing strategy.

Source: United States Vertical Visions Multi-client Study, Keypoint Intelligence 2024

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EVENTS CALENDAR

For full list of events, please visit www.piasc.org/events

AMERICAS PRINT AWARDS

October 16, 2025
Broadcast live on YouTube at 12:00 PM PT
www.youtube.com/@americasprintawards

PRINTING UNITED EXPO

October 22 – 24, 2025
Orlando, FL
www.PrintingUnited.com

R.A.I.S.E. ANNUAL SURPLUS DRIVE

October 30 – 31, 2025
9:00 AM – 2:00 PM PT
Anaheim, CA
For more information contact Kristy Villanueva at kristy@piasc.org

MANAGEMENT SKILLS – FROM RECOGNITION TO RESOLUTION WEBINAR

November 5, 2025
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM PT
bit.ly/MANAGEMENT-SKILLS

SPOTLIGHT EVENT

CONNECTUP NETWORKING EVENT
Wednesday, November 5, 2025
4:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Inland Group
Anaheim, CA

Delicious food...refreshing beverages...great networking... and an opportunity to see HP's latest equipment up close. Don't miss the chance to enjoy all of this and more! For more information or to RSVP, contact Karissa Melara at karissa@piasc.org or Kristy Villanueva at kristy@piasc.org.

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