

Local Team Development CEO Speaks Out Against Waste On “Trainertainment”

Potomac, MD April 16, 2012 . . . In a statement released today before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, John Kolm, CEO, Team Results USA, blames much of GSA’s wastage at the Las Vegas conference on a combination of an unregulated market and naïve spending.

According to Kolm, ongoing team and leadership training is necessary for good governance. He says, “We must invest in teamwork training, because the government is a team game. So often, teamwork and good communication is the major product of government. Public servants require access to qualified and legitimate training in team and leadership skills in order to make good decisions and to avoid bad decisions. But more intelligent buying practices need to be in place to avoid further wasteful spending. Building 24 bikes at a cost of \$75,000, as one example, just doesn’t cut it.”

As evidenced in the GSA Inspector-General’s report on the 2010 Las Vegas Convention, Kolm notes that it is possible to game the system by buying entertainment that is packaged as training, yet confers no useful training benefit. He says, “I coin the word ‘trainertainment’ for such expenditures. ‘Trainertainment’ is defined as the purchase of entertainment disguised as training in order to make the employer cover the cost. Spending money on ‘trainertainment’ is wrong, unethical, valueless, and a legitimate cause for disciplinary action when done in government.”

In pointing out the difficulty for the majority of well-intentioned people in the GSA and elsewhere in government to purchase from an unregulated industry, he says, “Suppliers of ‘trainertainment’ are adept at making sales. When faced with a well-intentioned but naïve government buyer in a totally unregulated industry, many salespeople are skilled at appropriating the language of legitimate experiential and other proven training models in order to close a deal.”

Kolm says that government training buyers and senior officials at the GSA and elsewhere need a better understanding of what real team and leadership training looks like. He adds that team training has advanced since the simple games and classroom approaches of the 1960s - not that the training provided at the 2010 Las Vegas conference rose to even this level - and that government must learn to buy more discerningly.

To provide a guide for buying legitimate team training services, even when innovative, modern and in part activity-based, Kolm offers the following tests: “The supplier includes all fees in the proposal; they meet a team’s specific goals; they offer solid productivity gains against a team’s own success gauges; they provide financial gains and positive shifts in attitudes, practices and barriers; they offer skilled facilitators with a track record of success in the field; and they track and measure results over time. Any team development company worth its salt will offer these basics and more.”

Kolm observes that the story of the wastage of taxpayer funds in Las Vegas is the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. He says, “Well-intentioned but naïve buyers who are sent into the big world are, regrettably, often taken advantage of.”

He concludes that hard-working GSA and other civil servants should not be blamed for a general lack of sophistication and knowledge as they deal with an unregulated industry. In addition to the improved training in acquisition rules recommended by the GSA Inspector-General, Kolm recommends that all Government decision-makers be familiarized with the concept of “trainertainment” and taught how to tell the difference - using the criteria above - between this and legitimate training.

John Kolm is the CEO of Team Results USA, a Washington-based team and leadership training company well known among over 35 federal agencies. He is also the author of Crocodile Charlie and the Holy Grail (Penguin), a best-selling book on teamwork and leadership.