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Allan Myers partners with Philadelphia Outward Bound School to take team building to next level



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Challenge and adventure encourage team building in ways that expand far beyond traditional workplace experiences, and Allan Myers, a heavy civil contractor and materials provider based in Worcester, saw this firsthand recently.

Philadelphia Outward Bound School, a non-profit educational organization, brings people of all ages and backgrounds together by way of challenging learning expeditions, and the company partnered with POBS who brought their Outward Bound Professional (OB Pro) program on the road. The expeditions promote self-discovery and team growth, both two incredibly important aspects of a successful working environment.

While Outward Bound typically focuses on school-aged groups, there are many different opportunities for adults and professional organizations to participate in team-building events with OB Pro. Activities are reworked to focus on the challenges and pitfalls of adult life. Comradery is imperative at any age, in

all walks of life, and the goals of OB Pro are to actualize professional compassion in the workplace and to create synergy between employees through effective communication, all grounded in a healthy adult mindset.

Intrigued by the lasting successes of the POBS programs, Bruce Wilkinson, director of Learning and Development for Allan Myers decided to bring them in for a recent program. The civil contractor serves areas throughout the mid-Atlantic with employees of all ages and backgrounds and offers an Accelerated Development Program (ADP) for people who are recently out of school, typically within their first two years of employment.



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As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has been virtual for the past two years. Current students of this program “oriented during COVID, and this is their first time being able to come on campus and in-person,” according to Wilkinson. In the construction industry, the value of hands-on work is incomparable to other forms of training. “It’s really important for us to put our hands and hearts into the learning to make these lessons real and memorable,” said Wilkinson.

POBS intertwines fun and camaraderie with learning and experiential growth, and this is what attracted Allan Myers to the idea. The goal of bringing programming to the ADP students is to give everyone in the company the opportunity to meet and connect with each other. Given the large size of Allan Myers as a company, it is likely that students and employees alike will not always get the chance to meet in meaningful ways. POBS’ flexibility and willingness to bring adventure to the Worcester campus was a crucial aspect of the success of the experience.

Customization and functionality are two aspects that POBS prides themselves on. The concept of each excursion is very personal to the school or company participating. “We build the progression of activities followed by the opportunity for debriefs,” explains Philadelphia Outward Bound’s Associate Director of Specialty Programs, Sam Barnhart. “Each experience is given greater meaning when we can uncover how physical trust during these activities can mimic trust in the workplace. After working with companies of all sizes across the region, we realized that there truly is an Outward Bound experience for everyone”.

The OB Pro program enables all participants to build connections that will help them both personally and professionally; establishing lasting relationships is key to a successful and satisfied team. A large part of Outward Bound’s programs pertain to the notion of overcoming adversity. “We are also reinforcing the message of grit and success through overcoming challenges and failures,” Wilkinson continued, “We want our team to support each other in learning how to overcome challenges. It builds those muscles that affirm ‘I can overcome, I can handle hard things’”.

Classroom learning is tried and true, however in a setting such as that of a contracting site, much of what is learned in a classroom simply cannot translate into hands-on work. The teamwork and support that is needed to be both given and received by all members of a particular construction team is also often set aside when learning from a textbook. At Allan Myers, the OB Pro instructors facilitated problem-solving activities, beginning with ice-breakers since the employees didn’t know each other well at that point. Taking place both inside and outside, one of the favorite activities was a pipeline game in which employees had to work together to pass a ball through a pipeline.

According to Wilkinson, “The real magic of OB Pro lies in connecting the classroom learning with hands-on experience. Unfortunately, classroom-based learning can have a limited power for stickiness so to be really effective you’ve got to get some glue. A lot of times these hands-on experiential exercises are the glue that causes the knowledge that is passed out in the classroom to stick in the minds and hearts of the people who are involved in these experiences”.

POBS is an educational institute at its core, so the desire for intentional growth with each partner is imperative. Their OB Pro program focuses on issues such as multitasking challenges, the potential to be overwhelmed and inundated with work, what to do when someone else is perceived to be struggling, how to be a sufficient support system, and how to correct without ridicule. The objective is to learn, adapt, and overcome through real-world scenarios.

Aside from personal and professional growth, the main goal of bringing the OB Pro program to Allan Myers’ ADP students is to establish skills that last a lifetime. “This kind of learning is something for the long term. We’re building some blocks in their overall wall of success, and ten or 15 years from now, some of the people in this group will be very, very successful and they might look back on this experience and say, ‘wow, that was that was just one of those many pieces in the wall of Allan Myers building me,’” said Wilkinson.