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leads the group and who stands in the back of the room," says Blue Ribbon director Vanessa Johns-Webster.

One of the center's most popular team-building activities is the Iron Chef competition. Groups of four to five students are given a grocery bag of ingredients and 90 minutes to plan, cook and garnish a meal to serve eight. The team that designs and prepares the most well-rounded and tasty meal wins.

Blue Ribbon's popularity has grown in recent years, with clients ranging from small companies such as HomeStone Mortgage and Precious Little Ones Daycare to giants Costco and AT&T Wireless. The school experienced 100 percent growth in business the year after its move to Lake Union, says Johns-Webster, and has continued to grow every year since.

## Time out for fun

At John Chen's PlayTime, the key ingredient in all of the company's team-building exercises is fun. Now in its 10th year, PlayTime combines technology and adventure activities to create change within a company.

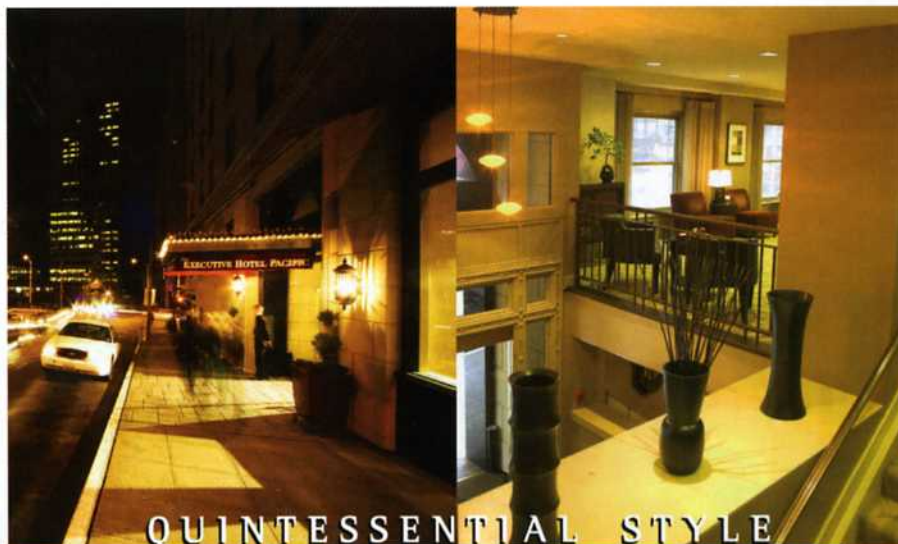
A former Microsoft software developer, Chen launched PlayTime after attending numerous corporate retreats and applying the lessons learned when he returned to the office. His exercises are geared mostly toward cross-team collaboration—teaching different groups or departments to work together to achieve company goals.

One of PlayTime's most popular activities is "geo-teaming," a spin on the increasingly popular sport of geocaching, which involves searching for hidden items in a defined area, using hand-held GPS satellite receivers, Pocket PCs and predetermined coordinates. Chen's group custom-designs its courses for its clients, which include Microsoft, Adobe, Prudential, Baja Fresh, Starbucks and other area firms.

While participants are busy having fun, they subconsciously apply strategies and habits that can be directly tied to the workplace. Chen debriefs the teams mid-event, then again at the end, to discuss how competitive behaviors can so easily become detrimental in a team environment.

"People know they should be collaborating, but they really end up turning it into a competition," Chen says.

Once the participants figure this out, the real learning begins. They return to the office armed with new strategies and modified behaviors that help them work more effectively with other groups in their companies. **SB**



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