

# Ice Breakers & Team Builders



Icebreakers and team builders are meant to build group cohesion and open the door for communication. Icebreakers are most useful with a group of people who have not met before and you want them to share a little bit about themselves. Team builders tend to work best with a group who must work together or might be facing adversity. Team builders tend to make group members complete a mini project together as opposed to sharing information in an

icebreaker.

When picking an icebreaker or team builder, it is important to think about the group's dynamics. Will they be excited to be here and want to expend some energy? Will the participants be working together in the future and need to learn about each other's styles? One of the tricks to a successful icebreaker is timing. It should not be too long or it will impede on the seriousness of the meeting. At the same time, if the icebreaker is too short group members may feel that it was routine and perfunctory. Timing also depends on other factors including number of participants, overall length of the event, and purpose. An all day retreat could have a much longer and intense icebreaker than a one-hour meeting. Here are some ideas that you could use. Some of the best icebreakers are created by you!

## Ice Breakers:

-**Train wreck** requires that all group members sit on chairs in a circle except for one person standing in the middle. That person begins by introducing himself such as, "Hi, my name is Joe from Dayton and I work in a button factory. I like people who are wearing blue jeans." At that point, everybody who is wearing blue jeans, including Joe, have to find a new seat at least two away from where they were previously sitting. The person without a chair is now in the middle and introduces him/herself. The person in the middle could say, "...and I like train wrecks" at which point everybody is required to get up and find a new seat. The activity ends once everybody has gone or at the discretion of the group leader.

-**Evolution** is a game in which everybody progresses through three different stages of life (i.e., caterpillar, cocoon, then butterfly) after winning rock, paper, scissors against another person in the same stage of life. The winner is the person who wins two of three tricks, and then advances to the next stage of life. After the final stage, the participant has reached enlightenment and can observe the other group members.

-**Caw caw** is the sound a crow makes. Everybody stands in a circle. The first person (randomly assigned) turns to his left or right and says caw caw. That person can either caw caw back to the first person or turn to the other side and caw caw the next person. The goal is to get somebody not to respond by acting ridiculously or going so fast they cannot caw caw back. Eventually the group will wither down to two remaining participants who try to get the other to mess up.

-**Two Truths and a Lie** is an easy icebreaker which does not require prior preparation. Have participants say 3 things about themselves - 2 true and 1 lie, others guess what the lie is. The game ends once everybody has gone.

-**Celebrity:** Have everyone write on a piece of paper their answers to these questions: What is your favorite food, animal, TV show, hobby, and color? Write your name. Don't let anyone else see the answers. The leader then reads the answers to the whole group, and members try to guess whom each set of answers belongs to. Award one point for each right guess. The person with the most points wins a prize.

-**Human Bingo** can sometimes be considered a diversity exercise with proper discussion afterwards. However, for an ice breaker, the leader must create a Bingo sheet (usually a 5 x 5 grid) with different categories in each square such as "Find someone that was born in the same month", "...someone who lives in your state", or "...drives the same model of car". A prize is awarded to the participants with the most in common or the first done.

#### Team Builders:

-**Pulse** usually requires a big larger of a group of at least 12. Have the participants stand in two lines facing each other. If there is an odd number, that person can stand at one end holding "the object" which is usually something not destructible (eraser, bandana, etc). At the other end, the leader of the game tells everybody to close their eyes and hold hands. After the leader flips the coin, he will call out what landed face up. If it was heads, the first person has to squeeze the hand of the next person and so on down the line (this is the pulse). The last person has to grab the object. The line that got the object first gets a point. Both lines then move down one person and the first person rotates to the back. If a team accidentally sends down a pulse, they automatically lose. The first team to ten is the winner.

-**Four Corners:** Write the words "agree," "disagree," "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" on separate pieces of paper and post them on four different walls of the room. Then make a statement such as "our organization can change the world" and have everybody move to the part of the room that matches their opinion. Have the group discuss why they chose their response. Repeat several times as appropriate with the group.

-**Telephone:** With everyone in a circle, have someone come up with a short story that they whisper to the person next to them, and so on. Have the last person recount the story aloud.

#### Simple Lead Ins:

-Ask participants to state one or two "burning questions" they hope will be answered in this session.

- Have participants describe one strategy/resource they have used successfully (relevant to the topic of the meeting/training).
- Have them state their personal definition of the topic (e.g. in a marketing meeting ask people to finish the statement "Participation marketing means...").