

TEAMBUILDING AND ICEBREAKERS

"Human beings possess the unique capability of working together to produce a result that is greater than the sum of the individual talents which enter into the task."

Joe Paul

Why Use Icebreakers and Teambuilders?

The primary goal for an icebreaker or a getting acquainted exercise is the development of an environment which is anxiety-reducing and which allows individuals to "break the ice" or get acquainted by having fun. A non-threatening environment initiated at the beginning of the development may make way for more meaningful interaction and relationships during the life of the group. Be sure to assess the level of risk that you think people in the group are willing to take, and plan your icebreakers and teambuilders accordingly. Here are some things to remember about icebreakers and teambuilders:

1. They can be excellent devices to help people feel more comfortable with themselves and with others and feel more "at home" in a group.
2. They can break up the "cliques", invite people to form random groupings, and help individuals meet others in a non-threatening and fun way.
3. They can promote laughter and reduce tension.
4. Through teambuilding group members are given the chance to examine the way they interact with and relate to one another.
5. Members can observe the group process in both how they work together as a team, and how they work as individuals within the team.
6. Members can increase the confidence and trust that they have for one another.

Icebreakers and teambuilders can make group members feel more comfortable with one another, make individuals feel as though they are part of the group, help members gain trust for one another, and teach members how to work together as a group. Plus, they can be a lot of fun!!!

Groups may have a tendency to suppress open expression of feelings. Teambuilders can create communication and build a cohesive, supportive, trusting group where members feel free to express feelings and ideas. As members develop the trust and feeling of belonging to the group they make a commitment to the group and take responsibility in group participation. As group members get involved things begin to happen, and the group begins to accomplish and produce *greater than the sum of the individual talents* in the group.

Don't be surprised if there is impatience with this teambuilding process during the early stages. You may hear such "encouraging" comments as, "Forget this stuff. What are we going to do about our finances?" If this does occur, which is very likely, assure the members of your group that these experiences will help the group be more effective in tackling such problems and issues.

Teambuilding and Icebreaker Exercises

*The following pages include a variety of exercises to try out with your group.
If you want more ideas, go to the Leadership Library in the Activities Center, VU 425.
The first steps in planning to develop your group through teambuilders are:*

- *assess where your group is and what level of risk they are willing to take
- *begin with low risk activities, and build progressively to more challenging experiences
- *consider that timing is critical to the successful use of teambuilding
- *unless otherwise agreed, information generated during an activity should be kept confidential
- *although the group leader may encourage total participation, each person must understand that he or she has the right to refrain from participation in any activity that appears too uncomfortable or awkward

Lifelines (self-disclosure - materials required: newsprint, markers)

Each member draws a line on paper to represent the highs, lows, significant events, turning points, etc. of his/her life to date (can also project into the future). Indicate peaks, dips, . . . and label areas of the timeline to help explain it. Participants then share their lifelines.

Collages (self-disclosure - materials: old magazines, scissors, glue, tape)

Members can work on individual collages, or as a group on one project. They can cut out pictures, words, articles from magazines that reflect themselves or a theme. The theme could be the goals/purpose of the group, a personal collage, how the group wants to work together, a representation of accomplishments, . . .

Toss a Name (name game - props include 4 tennis balls)

Standing in a circle, have everyone introduce themselves, then the person with the ball calls someone by name and tosses the ball to them. When the other person catches it, they say "thank you _____" (the name of the person who threw it to them), and then call upon another person to toss the ball to. After the ball has been tossed for a couple of minutes, start a second ball going at the same time, then a third, and finally a fourth.

Balloons (icebreaker - props include balloons)

Prepare balloons with questions or sentence completions and give each participant a balloon. Each person pops their balloon, then reads and answers the question out loud.

Human Knot (ice breaker, communication, teamwork)

The group forms a circle. Each person hold out their right hand and grasps another hand as if shaking hands. All then extend left hands and grab another left hand. They should not have both hands of the same person, or hands of person on either side of them. The goal is to untangle themselves into a single circle without releasing hands.

Gossip (communication)

The group sits in a circle and Gossip begins with the facilitator sharing a secret with the person next in the circle. The secret is passed as each person shares it with the next person. In telling the secret, it may not be repeated twice to the same person (so the listener must get it all the first time). When the secret is finally back to the facilitator, it is shared out loud. The facilitator then reads the original, and a comparison is made.

Secrets

(ice breaker - materials needed: paper, pens or pencils)

After the group introduces themselves, the facilitator will give everyone a piece of paper and a pen/pencil. In 15 minutes time (may vary depending on group size), each person must introduce themselves to everyone else in the group and tell a "secret" about themselves that that person could not possibly know. A person may not use the same secret twice. They should write down everyone's name and secret. When the time is up, the group will come back together, form a circle, and as each person takes a turn standing, the rest of the group will tell what secrets were found out about the person.

Nametag

(ice breaker - materials needed: nametags, markers)

At the start of the meeting, have everyone make a nametag that includes a picture on it that says something about themselves (a caricature, cartoon, symbol, place, . . .). Go around the room and have each person explain their nametag.

Living Name Tags

(ice breaker - materials: pre-cut nametags, string, pens)

Materials needed include paper nametags cut in the shape of a person, string, pencils, and pens. Have each member of the group write their first name on one side of their nametag. On the other side, each person individually writes the answers to the following questions, placing their answers on different parts of the body. You can change the questions to best meet the needs of your group.

- A. Name, hometown, major (head)
- B. Describe a significant person in your life (left arm)
- C. One thing you like about yourself (right arm)
- D. One positive characteristic or strength you will bring to this group (heart)
- E. One thing you value in a relationship (left leg)
- F. One thing you want to be remembered for (right leg)

Then have the group break up into pairs, choosing someone they don't know well, and share their answers. Come back as a large group and have people introduce the person they were paired up with by going through their living nametag and explaining their responses.

Dyad Introduction

(icebreaker)

Have people pair off with someone they don't know well. Allow 2-5 minutes each to introduce themselves to one another. Then have partners introduce each other to the group or another dyad.

Name Games

(icebreaker)

Have people introduce themselves, say their name and hobby, favorite food, how they got their name, their favorite fun fact, where they're from, what they're looking forward to, . . .

Hometown

(icebreaker)

Have a large outline of the state of Washington taped on the wall. Leave border space for those born outside the state. Have participants put their hometown and first name on the map. Then ask them to share about their hometown and how they decided to go to WWU.

Name Memorization

(icebreaker)

Have participants sit in a circle. Have someone begin by telling their name. The person next to him/her has to repeat the first person's name, and then say their own. Third person repeats first and second person's names, and then says his/hers. This continues until the last person has said everyone's name in the circle. This exercise can be expanded by having each person add an adjective, food they like, . . . that starts with the first letter of their name (ex., talkative Tom).

Important Item (teambuilder)

Have each person bring something to the meeting that means something special to them, and then take turns telling about it. Could have people try to guess who items belong to.

My Life as an Orange (or leaf, rock, peanut, etc)

Choose a common set of objects that have subtle differences between each individual item (for example, no two oranges are exactly the same). Distribute one object to each person and have them identify characteristics/symbolism of the object similar to their own lives. With oranges, for example, people may talk about the green areas as underdeveloped, bruised areas as difficult times, etc. Then have each person share the characteristics with the group. After everyone has done so, ask each to put their object in the middle. Mix them up, then ask people to find their object. This can lead into discussion of differences among us, despite obvious similarities.

M & Ms (icebreaker, introductions)

Everyone loves M&Ms, so when the group is meeting for the first time, bring a large bag of M&Ms to help introduce group members. Sit in a circle, pass the bag around the circle, and ask people to help themselves to the M&Ms, but not to eat them yet. When the bag has been around the circle, each person must tell one thing about themselves for every M&M that they took. (This exercise can also be done with other candy, a roll of toilet paper, . . .).

Wind in the Willows (teambuilder, trust, support)

Have the group stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Have one member of the group stand in the center. The object is to have the group support the person in the center as the person slowly falls backwards, forward, and side to side, with knees locked, using their heels as a pivot. Arms should be crossed across the chest, and eyes closed. Care must be taken to use teamwork and concentration. Everyone must pay attention.

Blindfolded Hike (teambuilder, trust, communication)

Blindfold your group and have them join hands. Lead them over safe terrain with interesting obstacles. Carefully lead your group through areas with each member responsible for communicating what is ahead to the person behind them.

Concentric Circles (icebreaker or teambuilder)

Form two equal circles, one inner, one outer, with circles facing each other. Read a question aloud, and have people facing each other respond to that question to one another. Then have the inner circle rotate by one person, ask another question, and continue for as long as you like.

Poetry Introductions (icebreaker)

Have group divide into pairs. Have each pair spend about 10 minutes getting to know each other. Then give a specified amount of time for each person to write an 10-12 line poem about what they learned about their partner. Then have each person read their poem to the rest of the group.

Human Scavenger Hunt/Bingo

Develop a list of items including such things as the following: is a graduate student, owns cross-country skis, likes to swim, has been to Europe, etc. Have the group mingle for a while, and get signatures of group members by items that are appropriate. This can also be done as a bingo sheet.

Photo Scavenger Hunt (need a camera)

Break the group in half, & give each group a list of places at which to get a group photo taken - and everyone needs to be in each photo! Meet at a designated time/place, and compare photos!

Closure Exercises for Groups

As important as it is to build a sense of team throughout the year, it is equally important for groups to have the opportunity to bring some closure to their experience at the end of the year, or end of their time together. Following are some exercises that could be utilized to help groups put closure on the year and say good-bye to one another.

Regrets

Imagine driving away, looking in the rear-view mirror at the building, meeting place, group of people, whatever you are leaving. Imagine what you would regret not having said or done. Discuss this and/or do it with the group.

A Penny for Your Thoughts

Have everyone bring 10 or so pennies to the last meeting/get-together. Each person will have the opportunity to give a penny to those members of the group that they'd like, and share their thoughts about how that person has been special or had an impact on them during the course of the year.

Appreciation Notes

Have a small paper bag for each person. Give the group an opportunity to write notes of appreciation/thanks to each person in the group. Everyone puts the notes in the appropriate person's bag.

Music/Songs

Have each person bring a song or piece of music that expresses what saying good-bye is like for them.

Favorite Quotes/Poems

Have each person bring a favorite quote or poem, or write an original poem about what this year has meant to them, how they feel about saying good-bye, words of wisdom they want to pass on, etc. Have everyone read theirs to the group. Have everyone bring enough copies for the rest of the group.

How We've Changed

Ask participants to sit in a circle. Give people some time to think about how they've changed or developed as a result of being a member of the organization. Go around the circle and have everyone share their observations.

Door Prizes

This exercise is a good for ending the year or experience on a playful note. Create a list of awards and think of silly objects that would be appropriate as the "door prizes." This can be done by the group leader, or can be done by the whole group or a committee. For example, to the person who:

grew the most. . .a ruler
was most patient. . .an egg timer
is the most tired. . .a pillow

"gave" the most. . .a rubber band
helped us laugh. . .a joke book
was outspoken. . .a soapbox