



Team Building Ideas

The following are several suggestions/ideas of team building activities that can be used in an organization meeting or retreat.

1. Barometer

All you need is a set of paperclips or a “large as life” barometer and you can assess people’s opinions, emotional investment, agreement, or self-assessment. This is a great way to start a training experience, especially a retreat. It lets you and the group know, in visual terms, where you are beginning your team adventure. It can also be changed throughout the retreat.

2. Pass the object

Use this to establish that we all see the same things and yet we find creative ways to interpret them in different ways. Passing around an object, you invite each member to silently find a use for the object. Watch as people scratch their backs, make musical instruments, and find other crazy uses for the same object. Spend time talking about creativity, differing viewpoints, and non-verbal communication.

3. Why are you named what you are named?

This is a good way to start with a new group or to recharge an old group that doesn’t know much about each other. Ask people to give their full name and tell why they are named what they are named. This may introduce cultural definitions, family stories, and other important folklore. You might learn some interesting facts about people in this exercise. It also helps in remembering people’s names!

4. Schematic diagram of you and the group

Use this at any time. Ask people to draw the group, using any diagram or symbol(s) they wish. Then ask them to place themselves in their diagram of the group. After the drawings have been completed, ask the individuals in the group to describe their drawings. This exercise will allow you to see how members perceive the organization.

5. Sentence stems

This is a way of letting people say what needs to be said without “owning” it. Give people sentence stems such as, “I see this group as . . .” or “What I like about this group is . . .” or “If I could change anything about this group it would be . . .” and then ask them to write down how they would complete that sentence. Let people toss the completed sentences into a hat. Everyone draws out one of the sentences and reads it out loud. Since you don’t have to read your own, people tend to be a little more honest. This is a very good way of getting the “tough stuff” on the table.

6. Humming into a group

Sometimes, you just need a break after a long day working. Finding an old action song (from camp) is one great way to break the tension. It is important to find creative ways to get people into groups. You may write easy song titles on cards and pass them out. With five to ten people all

with the same song title, the groups set out to find one another by humming their hit. Songs like “Row, row, row you boat” are always popular.

7. **Boasting**

It is hard to get people to tell about their past . . . particularly the stuff that is very good. We have all been conditioned not to brag. If this is a new group, ask everyone to write down three things about themselves of which they are proud. Ask them to share those three things with one other person. Then ask everyone to get up and go around the room boasting. The recipient of the boast then responds positively. After the exercise, process with these questions:

- i. How did it feel?
- ii. Were some people easier to share with than others?
- iii. How did you share . . . proudly, tentatively, embarrassed?
- iv. Did you believe what you were saying?
- v. How did people react to you?
- vi. How are you feeling now?

If the group knows each other, restructure this exercise and suggest that they write down responses to the following five questions and then follow the same format. Questions used might include:

- a. What is the grandest accomplishment in the organization?
- b. What difficult issue have you been wrestling with in the past six months?
- c. What positive benefits do you receive from this group?
- d. What are you doing best right now?
- e. What troubles you when you think of this group?

8. **Value shields**

Another drawing exercise, this one can help people tell about themselves. You name the question . . . and then ask people to draw the appropriate response about themselves. Questions or prompts may include: people who matter most in my life; things that make me angry or frustrate me; how I see myself in five years from now; or, the happiest day of my life.

9. **Chairs . . . collaborative vs. competitive**

This is a group visual way of helping groups see how collaboration and competition affect group goal accomplishment. Ask the group to break into two. This is all quiet . . . no talking! Now ask one group to arrange the chairs into rows and ask the other group to arrange the chairs into a circle. Watch them set off to do their task. In the end, the group either competes within itself or finds a way to collaborate to form the chairs either in rows, a circle, or a new form. Process this for the experience and for the deeper meaning.

10. **Member contracts**

Having members write contracts is valuable. At the beginning of each term, ask members to write two or three goals . . . one might be a personal goal, “What do you hope to achieve this semester in your academic career?” Perhaps you ask, “Name one thing you want you personally accomplish this year.” Then ask members to identify one group goal, “What one thing do you hope we accomplish this year?” If possible, ask people to identify one goal they will accomplish for the group during the year. Collect the cards and pass them out once a month. Ask people to grade their grade accomplishment every time they see the cards (e.g. 50% complete, 15% complete, etc.)

11. **Storyboard**

This is a tough one to describe in one sentence. Finding it hard to get people to offer suggestions for activities or solutions to problems? Give everyone index cards or *Post It* notes and ask them to

write down items and post them on the wall. Everything goes here! No one is allowed to say, “But we tried that last year and it failed,” etc. After working through the idea generation, give everyone an imaginary 10 pounds of manure (stars or colored dots) and ask them to distribute their manure where they are willing to commit their energy and/or ideas to ‘fertilize’ the new ideas or programs on the wall.

12. Forced choice

Whether wrestling with values or trying to understand people better, it is often easier to visualize. Get people to define themselves through a series of forced choices. Ask people to go to one side of the room or the other if they are:

- active vs. passive
- pessimistic vs. optimistic
- deliberate vs. impulsive
- aggressive vs. obedient
- ridged vs. flexible
- accepting of authority vs. fights authority

You can also do this with real issues . . . its called voting with your body. If people are comfortable, ask them to talk about where they are on the continuum, and why.

13. Picture of the group and its values

Acting alone, ask people to come up with the values of the group. Break into small groups and give the groups newsprint and markers and ask them to draw a picture – as a group – that might be used in a magazine or newspaper to advertise your group . . .focusing on the values.

14. Expectations of members

Sometime, you want to know what members expect of the group or of each other. Often the best thing to use in this case is the sentence stems suggestion. Work on this and talk it through after the exercise.