Icebreakers

When to Use Icebreakers

1. As a Pattern Interrupt - helps people to stop and focus on the here and now. Ensures people are present and focused before entering in to the substantive part of the dialogue.

2. As a Metaphor or Lesson - by choosing the right icebreaker you can create an experience that speaks to the meeting purpose or the core of the problem or opportunity to be discussed. How people behave during the icebreaker and lessons learned can be reincorporated in the facilitated session to further accentuate a point or intended outcome.

3. To Build Familiarity - especially with people who don't know one another, icebreakers get people talking to those who they may feel apprehensive to disclose personal or emotional information.

4. To Alleviate Status Concerns - icebreakers help people to experience working together on 'common ground' where status or expertise can't take the upper hand.

5. To Set the Tone - a fun icebreaker helps set a lighter tone which may be necessary before entering into a difficult conversation.

When to NOT Use Icebreakers

As Dorothy Strachan states in her book Questions that Work, "you don't need icebreakers when there's no ice." Essentially if people know one another and feel comfortable with their peers icebreakers will be perceived as meaningless or a method for filling time. In these cases it's best to do a starting exercise for the purposes of helping to:

• Reveal meaningful information that can assist in helping to identify expectations

• Uncover potential resistance upfront by identifying concerns and solutions to those concerns for the event

<u>Examples</u>

1. "What If"?

Purpose: To get your group laughing and talking right off the bat.

Materials/Time Needed: For a group of 15-20 people, this exercise will take about 10-15 minutes. No advance preparation is required, but you'll need pens or pencils and note paper.

Process: Give each participant a small piece of paper. Ask them to write a "What if" question, such as "What if the sky was purple?" or "What if we all had three arms?". When everyone has completed their question (encourage them to work quickly), ask them to pass their question to the person on their right. Next, each person writes the answer to the question they've received. They should answer the question as if they had written it. For example, if Tom hands his question ("What if I won the lottery?") to Susan, she should answer the question as if she had won the lottery, not Tom.

When everyone has written their answer, select someone to read ONLY the question they have in front of them. Ask the person to their right to read the ANSWER to their question. They

should then read the question on their paper and the person to their right reads the answer, etc.

2. Alphabet Search

Purpose: Exercise explores how diverse we are - insight into our individual selves. If done as a small group lends itself well to a small team building exercise as the group works together through the alphabet.

Process: Divide the participants into small groups. Instructions: Search your person for objects that you have on you or with you ranging from A-Z. Make a list. First group to get all 26 letters represented wins.

3. Two Truths & A Lie

Purpose: to develop more familiarity within the team
Process: In groups of three to eight (depending on how much time you want to devote to this exercise) have individuals take turns making three statements about themselves -- two which are true; one that is a lie.

After an individual makes their statements, the other folks in the group discuss among themselves, which seem most plausible and what is most likely to be the lie. Once they come to some sort of consensus, the individual who made the statements not only tells which is the "lie" but also provides a bit more background about the "truths" as well as what made them think folks might have thought the "lie" was a "truth."

Groups of three can easily do this in less than 10 minutes.

Note to facilitator - This game works well with groups that are new to one another. It is often surprising how relative strangers can instinctively pick up the nuances between truths and lies based on very little information. The game also works well with groups that have been together awhile and *think* they know a lot about each other.

This exercise can also be done "electronically" with groups that aren't physically located together, but have been "assembled" to work together on some task -- for example a cross-functional task force or a committee that has folks from across the country participating. It takes a little longer -- but provides the same benefits.

4. My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean

Purpose: to get people moving
Process
1. Invite 2 people to come up to the front to demonstrate this first:
   a. Have Volunteers stand up when they sing a B word, followed by sitting down when the next B word is sung.
   b. Volunteers continue to repeat the sequence throughout the song.
2. Have the whole group now do it.

Icebreakers, cont'd

5. Volleyball Game

Purpose: to have people understand the importance of collaboration for improving productivity
Game objective: To complete the maximum number of 'rounds' by the end of 5 timed trials.

Process:
1. There will be 5 trials to acquire as many rounds as possible. Each trial will be timed by the workshop facilitator.
2. For **one** 'round' to be completed, everyone in the group must have hit the ball once, in an established sequence. Additional rounds can then be acquired, each time the same sequence has been repeated.

Rounds

1	2	3**	4	5***	Total
60 sec play	30 sec to strategize, 60 sec play	Add second ball. Both balls must be hit by all members; 45 sec play, double score	Technology breakdown; 15 sec. to strategize; 45 sec play	30 sec to strategize; triple score, 30 sec play	

Debrief:
1. So what was your experience of the game?
2. What happened that allowed you to be successful?
3. What were the challenges in trying to win this game?
4. On the other hand, how willing would you be to share your ideas with others?
5. How is this game and how we played very similar to how we work as teams in our organization?
6. What do we need to change so that we leverage what other teams have to offer? How do we avoid insularity?

Icebreakers, cont'd

Climate Setting Exercise	9:20
	25
		Purpose: Fun and humorous; trust oriented; the importance of having everyone contribute
		Process
		Objective: who can come up with as many uses as possible.
		1. **Round 1**: Everyone gets their own piece of paper. Each person to come up with as many things as possible (i.e. all the uses of duct tape). Get 3 minutes. Determine who has the biggest list.
		    a. Who has the biggest list. Read them off.
		2. **Round 2**: in groups of 5 think of all the uses for a coat hanger. Can't have duplicate actions (i.e. TV antenna, Car antenna, etc.) 3 min.
		    a. Who has the biggest list. Read them off.
		    b. Compare and contrast their experience they had in Round 1 vs. Round 2 (collaborative, laughing, more productivity)
		    c. Plenary the differences. So the benefits of working as a team are …
		3. **Round 3**: go to one table group. Come up with all the uses you have for a pencil. Only one person can talk. The other members cant talk or write anything. Give one minute.
		    a. What happens when one person on a team does all the work or is allowed to dominate? Speaking up, everyone's voice being heard. Unless we all are candid and speak up, we might as well be working individually – we lost the power of the team!
		4. **Round 4**: ask the strongest person in the room and ask him to break the pencil. Then hand the person 20 pencils and ask him to break them all together at once. She/he won't be able to.
		    a. The metaphor is *our strength is when we all work together*.

Visual Explorer	3 min. per person	**Purpose**: To get people thinking out of the box, innovation 1. On the floor have a bunch of pictures 2. Have group members pick the picture that helps them *explain why they're here and who that are?* 3. Ask: *What does this tell you about what we need to focus on today?*