

Breaking the Ice: How to Utilize Ice Breakers and Team Building Exercises for Stronger Teams

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GROUP JUGGLE:

Purpose: teambuilder, group fun, name game

Gear: tennis ball, and 5-8 others assorted soft balls: no basketballs or baseballs

Group Size: minimum 8, maximum per group 16

Procedure:

1. Ask the group to form a circle, but do not tell them the name of this activity yet.
2. Begin with a single tennis ball. The other balls should be close at hand, but not obvious....the group should not connect them with what is about to happen....surprise is key for this activity.
3. Explain that you're going to throw the tennis ball to someone, and you're going to say their name before you throw it to them. When they've caught it, they should say thanks, your name, for example, if Zak is the staff member leading the activity, he would start as follows:

Zak: 'Heron'...(Zak throws ball)

Heron: (catches ball) Thanks Zak!

Heron: 'Olivia' (Heron throws ball)

Olivia: (catches ball) Thanks Heron! *And so forth*

Heron will then throw the ball to someone else, who then throws it to someone else and so on. Everyone can only receive the ball once. To ensure this, everyone should start with their hands in front of them, palms out. Once they've caught the ball once, they should put their hands behind their back as a visual clue. Then we can all see who has already gone, and who is still needs to receive the ball. The person who starts the ball moving will also be the person who receives it at the end after everyone has had it once. The ball will thus travel around to the whole group in an order to be determined by the group, each person throwing it to someone of their choosing who hasn't yet received the ball.

4. Once you have established the order that the ball travels around, stop and double check that everyone indeed received it just once. Ask the group to make quick eye contact with the person they received it from and the person they threw it to, to further cement the order in everyone's minds. Then send the ball around in the same order as before. This time, people should just say the person's name before they throw the ball, but don't have to say the thank you part.
5. You've now sent the ball around twice and the group should be familiar with the order. Say to them "it seems like you've got it, so let's do it one more time...remember to still say the person's name before you throw it to them." Begin a third time, except this time after the tennis ball has passed through 3 people's hands and is on its way, grab a second ball and throw it to the first person in the order. Then a 3rd ball, then a 4th, and maybe a 5th, 6th etc. At some point the tennis ball will come back to you, and you keep it going, along with the other balls. Some will be dropped as people quickly figure out what is happening, but don't know where to look amid

the fun and chaos. The element of surprise when you introduce the additional balls is key, and it's ok if the group doesn't do so well with the first 'group juggle' experience.

6. After a little while, stop continuing the balls, and bring the activity to a halt. At this point you can tell the group the name of the activity but not before. Now they get it, and you're ready to begin again. Ask the group for some suggestions on how they might improve the flow of balls around and minimize drops. They must keep the same order, and cannot reorder themselves around the circle (at least, not yet). Go again, and the group should be much more successful than the first juggle.

Variation 1: now that they've got it, you could reverse the order.

Variation 2: you could go back to one ball, and with the original order, challenge the group to see how fast they can move the ball around in the pre-established order so it starts and ends with the same person, and everyone touches it in order. Pick a timekeeper. This is when they might suggest to re-order the circle, or create a ramp or 'spiral staircase' of hands, or other creative suggestions. Have fun with it!

Processing/ Debriefing: lots of possibilities here as the group will have been on a steep learning curve and will have had to adapt to changing circumstances and brainstorm new ideas and approaches along the way. Any piece of their decision-making, leadership that was taken or assumed, stronger voices, quiet voices, ideas shared or not....any of this is fair game for processing as you see fit....or to keep momentum, you may simply choose to say 'well done', and move on to your next activity.

NAME GAME WITH GESTURES:

Purpose: icebreaker, name game, energizer

Gear: none

Group Size: minimum 8, maximum 100

Procedure:

1. Ask your group to stand in a circle, and make sure everyone can see everyone else.
2. As facilitator, give a demo of the activity. You say your name (or nickname, or whatever you want to be called) aloud, and do a physical gesture or mime of a hobby or activity you like to do in your free time. For example, John would say 'John', and then serve an imaginary tennis ball – but would not say "I'm serving a tennis ball"it should be fairly obvious what the activity is.
3. The whole group watches this, and then repeats: they all say 'John' aloud, and copy the tennis serve mime. Then the next person in the circle goes, and everyone repeats their name and activity mime. Go around the whole circle until everyone has gone.
4. *It is likely that many or at least some of the arts, music, hobby and sports interests that the group mimed will feature in the program design, so you could say that we'll be doing a lot of those activities in the next week or month....volleyball, guitar, writing, painting, swimming, soccer....etc etc.*

Variation: as each person goes, you could do a cumulative response, where the rest of the group goes back to person 1 and says their name and gesture, then person 2, then 3, 4, 5 etc, until they get

to the person who just went. This takes much longer. (It's like that game: "I'm going on vacation and taking an apple, banana, car, dog, elephant, frog, game and helicopter.....i.e., saying and doing all the responses that have already gone..")

Processing/Debriefing: none needed....you could challenge someone to say the names of everyone in the circle if they've learned all the names

SHAKY JAKE – An easy energizer to get a group moving

Purpose: energizer, wake up, group fun, physical warm up (great for combating post lunch food coma)

Gear: none

Group Size: minimum 4, maximum 200

Procedure:

1. Ask the group to stand up and find or make some space around them.
2. Explain that you're going to do a quick physical warm up exercise to increase our energy.
3. Start slow with shaking your right arm in a slow punch in the air 8 times. Count down aloud...8,7,6,5....
4. As soon as the right arm is done, switch to the left arm x8, then do 8 low kicks in the air with the right leg, then 8 with the left leg.
5. As soon as the round of 8 is done, repeat the right arm, left arm, right leg and left leg x 6, then x 4, then x 2 and the x1. Count down each time, and encourage the group to count down aloud with you. The pace and energy increases with each round, and the x1 round will look like some kind of weird karate kid move!
6. When you're done, shake it out and resume or continue with your activity.

Processing/Debriefing: not necessary

HULA HOOP PASS & COMPETITION:

Purpose: fun game, group interaction problem solver, spirited group competition

Gear: several large hula hoops, at least 3 feet in diameter, different colors preferable

Group Size: minimum 10, maximum 100

Procedure:

1. Ask your group to form a circle and hold hands. If you've got a massive group (60+), you should divide them in half and create two smaller circles.
2. Ask two people to temporarily break hands, then place a hula hoop between them and then they take each other's hands inside the hula hoop. The hoop now rests on their connected hands, or on someone's wrist or arm. The whole group now forms a closed loop, with the hula hoop inside that closed loop.
3. The task is to move the hula hoop the whole way around the circle without anyone breaking hands, and to do it as quickly as possible. It's good to start with a practice round for everyone to get the hang of it. You can then introduce multiple hoops into one circle and have them going in different directions. The hula hoops have to pass each other in opposite directions at some point, and that creates a fun (and doable) problem-solving task for folks.

4. Once the group has had fun moving the hoop around and navigating several hoops at once, you can choose to have a competition between 2 or more groups. They must have exactly the same number of people for fairness (the students will count!). Each group has one hula hoop. They start moving the hoop around their circle in a direction of their choosing when you say go. Be sure to mark the beginning place in the circle as that is also the ending point. GO! The groups will really get into it, and it can be a VERY loud activity, so make sure you're in a space where volume is ok! The students will likely want to have a rematch, or do a best of 3.

Processing/Debriefing: Communication Skills, what worked, what didn't; this can also be good to talk about the role and place of competition in our society and places where it is beneficial, or harmful. Some cultures are very competitive, while others are more collaborative. Why is that? Does competition have a place in school or in programs or camps like these?

HELUM HOOP:

Purpose: group interaction problem solver

Gear: several large hula hoops, at least 3 feet in diameter, 1 hoop per group

Group Size: minimum 10, maximum 100

Procedure:

1. For Larger groups, divide into smaller groups of 10-13
2. Instruct participants to form a circle surrounding their hula hoop
3. Each group member needs to place their pointer finger from each hand underneath the hula hoop; the end result is that the hoop will be balancing on top of the groups fingers. *Thumbs or other fingers should not be used to hold the hoop in place. This is for balance.*
4. Starting with hoop balancing on group members pointer fingers; at chest height (4-5 ft off ground); participants are instructed to slowly lower hoop to the ground.
5. As a facilitator you can add in other parameters that the group needs to follow – such as if someone loses contact with the hoop the process needs to start from the beginning again. Typically groups can get frustrated by this activity, as they figure out how to control the hoop and lower it to the ground.

Processing/Debriefing: Group Communication, teamwork, sharing a collective task, reaching a collective goal, leadership.

ULTIMATE ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

Purpose: fun, large group game, good finale for a session of teambuilding, fun competition

Gear: none

Group Size: minimum 20, maximum 100

Procedure: Ask the group if they know the popular game **rock, paper scissors**. This is known to many cultures around the world. Review the gestures and 'what beats what' for rock, paper and

scissors to get everyone on the same page, plus the timing of when you reveal: the most common is to gently punch your own open palm twice, 1, 2 and on 3 you reveal your rock, paper or scissors. It's important that everyone does this the same way.

It's good to have a small group of staff demo this activity in front of the group. Everyone will pick a partner to begin with, and play one round of rock, paper, scissors. If both people reveal the same item, they play again until there is a winner. Then, the winner proceeds to the next round and goes in search of another winner. The person who lost is out, and becomes the biggest fan of the person they just lost to. They follow their person around to the next round, cheering wildly for them. If their person wins again, the person they just beat and their fan, now join the fan club of the victor. If someone keeps winning, they keep proceeding to the next round, seeking other winners. Once someone loses, they and whoever their fans are, becomes instant fans for the victor. The number of losers and thus fans, grows exponentially.

This activity takes a lot longer to explain and set up than to play: once it gets going for real, it moves rapidly, with great pace, volume and energy. Before long, there are just 2 victors remaining, with everyone else part of their 'fan entourages'. The grand finale has a lot of yelling, screaming, energy, and in short order, someone is crowned the grand champion. It is exhilarating and loud!

Processing/Debriefing: not much required, other than to calm the group down, and make sure the victory doesn't go to the victor's head. The group may want to play it again, and if you have time, go for it!

Food, Friends and Fireworks

Purpose: Icebreaker, pair fun

Gear: None | Group Size 10 to 100+, done in pairs

Time: 5-10 min

Procedure:

1. This is a quick and simple ice breaker with three motions. Begin by introducing the motions and sounds to the group.
 - a. Food: Rub your belly and say "mmmmmmmmmm"
 - b. Friends: Hold out both arms wide and say "heeeeeeeeeeyyyyyyy"
 - c. Fireworks: Clap both hands over your head and say "shhhhhhhhhhhh" as you
 2. Ask everyone to find a partner - and make sure everyone knows their partner's name. They stand back to back. Tell them that they are going to try to match one of the three motions and sounds with their partner. There is no talking or planning.
 3. Countdown 3-2-1 and say "Go". On GO both partners turn and face each other and immediately do one of the motions and sounds.
 4. If the pairs match, they give a resounding "Yes!!" and pump their fist in the air. If they do not match they say "D'OH" and lightly bump themselves on the forehead.
 5. After a few rounds with the same partner, mix up the partners and go again. Do several rounds with different partners. Slowly lower your arms to your sides.
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Walk and Talk

Purpose: Icebreaker, get to know you activity

Gear: None | Group Size 8, maximum 200

Time: 5-15 min

Procedure:

1. Ask the group to get into pairs. If you have an odd number, have the facilitator stand in as a participant.
2. Give the pairs a question to discuss for a few minutes together. They can stand in place or stroll together around the space.
3. After a set period of time, ask the group to thank their partner and stroll around the room and locate another partner. Present a new question or topic to the group and talking continues. This activity can be repeated and continued as long as needed.

Tip: Start with 'easy' questions, but then build up to questions related to AFS or the workshop topic.

Sample Questions:

- Why AFS? Why are you here?
- Name one quality or virtue that you admire in one of your AFS colleagues?
- What has been your biggest Ah-Ha or Learning moment as an AFS volunteer?
- If you could get on a plane tomorrow, and go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?
- Using your cell phone, share a photo that you have taken within the last week. Explain to your partner why you took it; what does it mean to you.

Variation: After partners thank each other; have them give each other a High 5 or variance prior to departing. Example High 5s include: Traditional High 5; Double High 5; Hand to Foot High Five; Salmon High 5; and Turkey High 5.

Variation 2:

Equidistant

Purpose: Teambuilder, metaphor builder, problem-solver, rich processing activity.

Gear: None | Group Size: 10 to 200

Time: 15-20 min, *Make sure that you include enough time for processing!*

Procedure:

1. Gather the group in a large circle.
2. Ask each person to silently, and without letting anyone know, pick two people in the group. As facilitator, you should not be one of their two individuals. Ask each person to have those two people in their mind.
3. Explain that when you say go, that they are to move and physically place themselves equidistant (AKA equal distance) AND in the middle of their two people.
4. A physical, visual demo is vital here. Step into the circle, pick any two people in the circle and as a facilitator, place yourself equal distance and in the middle of your two people.

When you are there – ask the group if you have correctly followed the instructions – to get verbal confirmation of understanding.

- a. Say that if either of your people are moving, you will need to move as well. Demo this by asking one of your demo people to move a little, and then you adjust accordingly. Ask the other demo person to move and adjust accordingly.
 - b. Reemphasize that you must always be equal distance and in the middle of your two people throughout the activity, or until they are instructed to stop.
5. Check for understanding. Any questions?
 - a. Remind the group that you are cannot be one of their selected two people. Step out of the circle and say GO.
 6. The group will move together, trying to see their two people not all being able to move where they want. Let this flow for a few minutes or so and then call STOP.
 - a. Ask for a few volunteers to indicate who their two people were.
 - b. Ask the group to take a mental snapshot of what the group looks like; and how it felt. Then ask the group to step back into the big circle, standing anywhere – because we are going to do that again.
 7. Once back in the big circle, ask participants to once again select two people; again silently and without letting the selected individuals know. This time, when you say GO, participants need to place themselves equidistance from their two people, but not necessarily in the middle of those two people. *This is the key change from round 1 to 2.*
 - a. Demo this change, by selecting two volunteers and placing yourself equal distance from them. Show the group that you can be in the middle of your two people if you want, but you can also step back and as long as you are equal distance from them, you are following the rules.
 8. Check for understanding. Any questions?
 - a. Before saying GO, give the group an added challenge for this round to see if they can get to a point of equilibrium or balance; where everyone is in the ‘correct’ position per the instructions – and no longer moving.
 - b. Encourage the group to move a little slower this round.
 - c. Step out of the circle and say GO.
 9. The group will automatically move a little slower, and 99% of the time be instinctively quieter than they were in the first round. They will spread out a little more as well as there are more options.
 - a. Encourage the group to find equilibrium – possibly by moving a little slower. This will take a several minutes – let it flow. When it looks like everyone or almost everyone has stopped, call STOP.
 - b. Ask a few volunteers to indicate who their two people were to test if the group was successful.
 - c. Ask the group to take another mental snapshot of the result, how it felt and what happened. Then ask them to step back into the big circle.

Debriefing: Vital for this activity!

1. Ask the group to reflect on the two rounds, and to try and draw out some symbolism, metaphor or connection between what happened and INSERT QUESTION OR METAPHOR OF YOUR CHOOSING.
 - a. This is a very versatile activity that can be used to draw out and process many aspects of group-work, teamwork, leadership, cultural adjustment, group dynamics, etc. You do not want a straight recounting of what actually happened in

the movement of people, but to try and draw bigger connections, conclusions or metaphorical observations. *There are not right or wrong answers here.*

2. You could ask participants to draw connections between what happened in the two rounds of the activity and:
 - a. Their experience adjusting to a new place and new culture
 - b. What happens when a group that doesn't know each other comes together to work on a project
 - c. What happens when a group is having a difficult time communicating with each other
 - d. What happens when a group is learning about teamwork
 - e. The dynamics in a multicultural group of leaders.
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Other Resources:

- Many icebreakers, games, songs and more. The site has many video options so that you can learn by watching and not just reading a lesson plan. www.ultimatecampresource.com
- **Ubuntu Cards:** are a multi-functional deck of cards that encourage a group to interact, find connections and have fun. The cards offer limitless reflection opportunities through metaphor, but we have also discovered that they also offer just as many opportunities for group interaction and creative play.
 - The directions include instructions for 13 different games and initiatives, but there are limitless ways to utilize them.
 - <http://high5adventure.org/store/games-props/ubuntu-cards/>

