Icebreaker and Team Building Guide

Icebreakers

Adjective Name Game: Have everyone in the group think of an adjective that describes their personality and starts with the first letter of their name (example: Terrific Tiffany). Everyone says the names and adjectives of those before them and then their own. The last person will have to repeat each name.

Ball Toss: Have everyone get into a circle. Have everyone say their name before the game begins. Then as someone throws a ball to someone he/she says that person’s name. The receiver calls another person’s name and throws the ball to him/her and so on.

Beach Ball: Get a large inflatable beach ball and use a permanent marker to write questions on it. This becomes the "icebreaker ball". You can use it in a large group and throw it around. The person who catches it has to answer the question touching their left thumb. Have them say their name first then answer the question and throw it to someone else. Below are some example questions.

1. What is your favorite movie line?
2. If you were to treat yourself to the "finer things" what would you treat yourself to?
3. If your life was being turned into a feature length movie, who would play you? And why?
4. What is your "15 minutes" of fame?
5. If you were invisible where would you go?
6. Fill in the blank: When I dance, I look like __________.
7. What two television channels do you watch most frequently?
8. What is your greatest phobia?
9. What celebrity irritates you the most?
10. If you owned a yacht, what would you name it?

Birthday Alignment: Have everyone stand up, then without speaking they have to align themselves from January to December by their birthday (month and day). They have 5 minutes to do so. After 5 minutes have them stop and go down the line to say their birthday. A discussion on communication can follow if time permits.

Categories: Have a lead person that calls out different categories such as favorite color, food, sports team, etc. The participants will group themselves based on their answer to see who has similar interests.

Celebrities: Facilitators put nametags of celebrities on every person’s back. Players then move around the room asking other players questions to find out who they are.

Finish the Sentence: Go around the room and have each person complete one of these sentences (or something similar):

- The best job I ever had was...
- The worst project I ever worked on was...
- The riskiest thing I ever did was...
This is a good technique when starting up an organization for the semester and you want everyone to introduce themselves, you can have them complete “I joined this organization because…”

**Important Item:** Have each person bring something to the meeting that means something special to them or that they would not have left home without, and then ask them to take turns sharing.

**Interviews:** Ask participants to get into pairs. Each person then interviews his or her partner for a set time while paired up. When the group reconvenes, each person introduces their interviewee to the rest of the group. You can prepare a list of questions or let them create their own.

**M&M Game:** Pass around a bag of M&M’s. Have everyone take one (don’t eat them!). Then everyone tells something about himself or herself according to the color they chose. You can have them take more than 1 M&M if you wish.

- Red: Something stupid you’ve done.
- Brown: Something about your hometown.
- Yellow: Something about your family.
- Blue: A long-term goal.
- Green: A special event in your life.
- Orange: Why you chose Virginia Commonwealth University.

**Name Sign:** Have everyone get into a circle. Each player makes a motion or physical sign to illustrate his name. As each player must demonstrate the signs and names of those before him and then his own. The last person demonstrates all the signs and names.

**Neighbors:** Everyone circles up with a sheet of paper (home) under them. Facilitator starts in the middle of the circle and asks someone what he likes about his neighbor. The player picks a quality (hair color, sneakers, gender, etc.) and everyone (including that person) that has that quality must move to a new home. The new home cannot be directly beside the old one.

**Peek-a-Boo:** Group into two teams. Use a sheet, tarp, etc. to divide the groups. Facilitators hold the sheet up as one to three people come up to the sheet on each side. As the sheet is dropped the players must say the name of the person opposite them. Then a new group comes up to the sheet and so on.

**Problem Solvers:** Ask participants to work in small groups. Create a simple problem scenario for them to work on in a short time. The topic can be related to the organization, University, or random. Once the group have analyzed the problem and prepared their feedback, ask each group in turn to present their analysis and solutions to the wider group.

**Self-Introduction Exercise:** Before the meeting, type up the following paragraph and make enough copies for everyone in the group. Have each individual complete the paragraph and then, if they feel comfortable disclosing, have them share answers with the rest of the group.
Hello, my name is __________. I am ____ years old and I am majoring in ________. My hometown is ______________ and I really ________ it there because ________________. I always dreamed that someday I would ________________, and that dream has ______ true. I feel __________ about it now! Some things I like to do include ______________. There are many things I am good at and one of them is ______________. I did a really interesting thing once and that was ______________. My family consists of ______________. If I could change one thing about myself it would be ______________. Still, I am really glad to be here right now because ______________. I would really like to get together with anyone who be interested in ______________. The one thing I want to be remembered for is ______________. As far as future plans are concerned, I hope to be ______________ someday.

The Little Known Fact: Ask participants to share their name, position or role in the organization, length of service in the organization, and one little known fact about themselves. This "little known fact" becomes a humanizing element that can help break down differences.

Three Truths and One Lie: Everyone writes 4 different things about themselves down, 3 of which are true and 1 that is a lie. Students take turns presenting their 4 items while others guess which one is the lie. Leave enough time for everyone to explain their truths. They can be very interesting!

Toilet Paper Game: Get a roll of toilet paper and explain to your group that they are going camping and need to take as much toilet paper as they think they may need for a two day trip. Once everyone has an ample supply, explain to the group that for every square in their possession, they must share something about themselves.

Where Were You: Pick a year or a date before the meeting and then give each person a chance to tell what they were doing on that date (NYE 2000, Summer 2005).

Who am I/Famous Pairs: In this exercise, group members will be asked to identify the names of famous people. The leader tapes the name of a famous person on the back of each participant. (i.e. Fred Flintstone, Cher, Bill Clinton, etc.) The group member is not to see who is taped to their back. Their task is to find out who they are. The participants’ walk around the room asking others yes/no questions. If the member receives a “yes” answer, they can continue to ask that individual questions until they receive a “no” answer. When a group member figures out who they are, they take off the tag, put it on the front of their shirt, and write their own name on it.

Who Done That? Prior to the meeting, make a list of about 25 items relating to work and home life. For example, a list for a group of students might have some of the following:

- Started a student organization
- Has been a coach
- Is a mother
- Enjoys hiking
- Has started their own business
- Served in the Armed Forces
- Is a European History major
Ensure there is plenty of space below each item (3 or 4 lines) and then make enough copies for each person. Give each person a copy of the list and have them find someone who can sign one of the lines. Allow about 30 minutes for the activity. This activity helps them to learn about each other.

**Team Building**

**Back-to-Back Drawing:** Divide your group into pairs, and have each pair sit on the floor back to back. Give one person in each pair a picture of a shape, and give the other person a pencil and pad of paper. Ask the people holding the pictures to give verbal instructions to their partners on how to draw the shape – without actually telling the partners what the shape is. After they've finished, ask each pair to compare their original shape with the actual drawing, and consider the following questions:

- How well did the first person describe the shape?
- How well did the second person interpret the instructions?
- Were there problems with both the sending and receiving parts of the communication process?

**Ball Challenge:** The facilitator arranges the group in a circle and asks each person to throw the ball across the circle, first announcing his or her own name, and then announcing the name of the person to whom they are throwing the ball (the first few times, each person throws the ball to someone whose name they already know.) When every person in the group has thrown the ball at least once, it's time to set the challenge – to pass the ball around all group members as quickly as possible. Time the process, and then ask the group to beat that timing. As the challenge progresses, the team will improve their process, for example by standing closer together.

**Commercials:** Divide into two or three groups (depending on size). Give each group a few minutes to prepare a commercial for your organization. Perform the commercials for each other. Props can be provided.

**Helium Stick:** Have the group line up in two rows that face each other. Introduce the Helium Stick- a long, thin, lightweight rod. Ask participants to point their index fingers and hold their arms out. Lay the Helium Stick down on their fingers. Get the group to adjust their finger heights until the Helium Stick is horizontal and everyone's index fingers are touching the stick. Explain that the challenge is to lower the Helium Stick to the ground.

The catch: Each person's fingers must be in contact with the Helium Stick at all times. Pinching or grabbing the pole is not allowed - it must rest on top of fingers. Reiterate to the group that if anyone's finger is caught not touching the Helium Stick, the task will be restarted. Let the task begin....Warning: Particularly in the early stages, the Helium Stick has a habit of mysteriously 'floating' up rather than coming down, causing much laughter. Participants may be confused initially about the paradoxical behavior of the Helium Stick. The facilitator can offer direct suggestions or suggest the group stops the task, discusses their strategy, and then has
another go. Eventually the group needs to calm down, concentrate, and very slowly, patiently lower the Helium Stick - easier said than done.

Processing Ideas
- What was the initial reaction of the group?
- How well did the group cope with this challenge?
- What skills did it take to be successful as a group?
- What creative solutions were suggested and how were they received?
- What would an outside observer have seen as the strengths and weaknesses of the group?
- What roles did people play?

**Hope, Fears and Expectations:** Best done when participants already have a good understanding of their challenge as a team. Group people into 2s or 3s, and ask people to discuss their expectations for the event or semester ahead, then what they fear and their hopes. Gather the group’s response by collecting 3-4 hopes, fears and expectation from pairing or threesome.

**Human Web:** The facilitator begins with a ball of yarn. Keeping one end, pass the ball to one of the participants, and the person to introduce him- or her-self and their role in the organization. Once this person has made their introduction, ask him or her to pass the ball of yarn on to another person in the group. The person handing over the ball must describe how he/she relates (or expects to relate) to the other person. The process continues until everyone is introduced. To emphasis the interdependencies amongst the team, the facilitator then pulls on the starting thread and everyone’s hand should move.

**Impulse:** Divide into two facing lines (each holding hands). The facilitator holds the hands of the first person in each line. The facilitator sends an impulse (squeezes the hands) at the same time. The impulse moves down the lines. At the end of the line a ball is between the two teams. The first end person who grabs the ball wins a point for their team. Then the end person moves to the front of the line. The winner is the first team to get 10 wins.

**Machine:** Form two teams and have them go to opposite sides of the room. Each team creates a machine using nothing but each other. Everyone must participate and no sounds! Give each group a few minutes to get it together. Then each group presents their machine while the other guesses.

**Marooned:** Have everyone break up into small groups. Each group is stuck on an island. What five items would you have brought with you if you knew there was a chance that you might be stranded? Note that they are only allowed five items per team, not per person. You can have them write their items on a flip chart and discuss and defend their choices with the whole group. This activity helps them to learn about other's values and problem solving styles and promotes teamwork.