



Wake Up Your Team!

Highly Effective Ways to Begin Meetings

"Boring meetings are not OK - no one has time for them. Meeting check: does 50% of the agenda involve collaborative decisions?"

Agendas with only updates are destined for disaster!"

Marilyn Laverty

Have your team meetings gotten into a rut? You can raise the level of motivation and productivity by opening meetings with activities that help people get focused, energized, and connected with each other.

Ice breakers (also known as energizers, warm ups, and meeting openers) are structured activities that invite your team members to interact with each other. They help create a playful, friendly environment where team members are motivated to participate. They also help people focus their attention so they are ready to work and are not preoccupied with the other matters. AND, if you regularly start your meeting with them, they encourage people to get there on time!

ICE BREAKER BASICS

Ingredients

- Clear, simple instructions.
- Activity that can be completed in less than seven minutes.

Steps

1. Depending on the activity, have people pair up or get into groups of three. In general, you want to get each person to work with others they don't usually work with or know as well. The pairing up activity could be to find someone with the same eye color as you (or born in the same region of the country, or share the same month for their birthday - commonalities that help them learn more about each other...)
2. After people are partnered, then give the instructions. If you haven't done this sort of thing before, practice ahead of time so you can give the directions with a few, well chosen words. Simple and brief

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A Powerful Question to Open Your Next Meeting

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Terry was seen as reserved and aloof by the people she worked with. The team often needed to have project meetings after hours, but she was never available and a bit terse in her response to requests.

One day, Carolyn, the team leader, decided to start the meeting with the "Philanthropist" question. (referred to in the body of the article). Jean was Terry's partner in the activity and was amazed to watch Terry open up, and even tear up when she explained, without hesitation she would give Aunt Kathleen's \$100,000 to the Parkinson's Foundation.

It turned out that Terry's brother, Phil, had Parkinson's and he lived with her.

Carolyn went around the table and invested another 8 minutes for 8 team members

instructions are best. Then, ask the team if they have any questions to make sure they understand you before launching into the ice breaker.

3. Time the activity and let them know in advance how long each of their turns will be. People tend to be much more relaxed about trying something new if they know it will be only for a short, defined time period. (for example: "You will each have 2 minutes to respond - and I will let you know in two minutes when it is time to trade").
4. When it's over, briefly have a few team members report insights from their conversation. This gives people a chance to get to know each other better, even if they weren't partners, and helps bond the members through their shared experiences.

share with the team their philanthropic interests.

The team gained a new respect for Terry. They empathized with her commitment to family and her brother, Phil. They understood why she chose to take work home and could not attend meetings after 5 p.m. stay for late night pizza system tests.

The team went further, they made sure Terry could work at home occasionally, and included her in conference calls so she could weigh in on decisions made after hours.

Now, a Few Examples of Great Meeting Openers

Vacation

This ice breaker is good for brand new groups, as well as more seasoned teams. Have everyone pair up, inform them they will be taking turns answering a question and they will each have 2 minutes. While one person is talking, the other uses their active listening skills. Ask: "If you had an unlimited budget for a two week vacation, where would you go and what would you do?" (We recommend you pre-write the question on a flip chart - it saves you time and folks can refer back to it easily).

Set your timer, and call "switch" at the end of 2 minutes. After the second round, ask "who wants to update us on your destination?" Take another 3 minutes to hear from everyone if there is 5 or less in the meeting. If you have a larger team, solicit vacation ideas from several.

Philanthropist

This question is helpful for more experienced teams - everyone will probably learn something new about the others.

To tee this up, you will say: "Here is the situation: Your Aunt Kathleen has died and in her will she specified that as her favorite niece (or nephew) she wants you to choose the not-for-profit cause that will receive the \$100,000 from the sale of her art collection. She knows you have strong values and can trust your choice for the right recipient."

For this question, we recommend hearing from everyone - 30 seconds each - where they would donate the money.

Two Truths and a Lie

This is fun for experienced groups. Hand out index cards and ask the team members to write down two facts about themselves and one plausible lie (of course not in that order). For all day off site sessions you can read several cards right after the breaks - people will be sure to be back on time. Read the 3 statements, have everyone guess who wrote it,

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"We used the question, What has been working well in the last month?"

It was incredible. We had a tough quarterly close and this question got us thinking about our successes rather than about our problems.

I felt renewed and this question launched us into developing a cool checklist that would prevent these issues next quarter. We moved right into being pro-active!"

Tim, Team Lead
Insurance Company

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New Team-Building Resource!!!!
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Building High Performance Teams

Our clients have been asking for quick accessible references to support them

then have them guess which is the lie.

There is always tons of humor because some of the truths are less believable than the lies! Lies we have enjoyed include:

- I flunked second grade
- I played trombone in the marching band back in high school
- I found out after I was married, my spouse was related to me - we are cousins
- I have been married 4 times
- I have traveled to all 50 states
- I once had a job wearing tights at the Shakespeare Festival (this one was true for a male team member)
- I was voted class president 4 years in a row (the truth was only 2 years)
- My grade school was a one room school house with 32 kids (also true)
- I am fluent in 4 languages (also a true one)
- I was a trick rider with the Westernaires (true)

Good meetings and inspired teams don't happen by accident. They require people to be relaxed, energized, and connected to the shared mission as well as to each other. Ice breakers can help you set the tone of your work environment right from the beginning. Since they help people get to know each other, individuals are then more likely to speak freely in your discussions ... and during breaks and lunch!

For more suggestions about ways to open and energize your meetings, go to www.TeamsOnTarget.com and click on "Quick Business Tools" for a list of resources including our collection of "Meeting Openers and Ice Breakers."



Success Formula: Learn 3 meeting openers and jot them down - be prepared! Over time build your own short list of the best way to open a meeting, get every voice in the room and engage people with an insightful question or activity!

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P.S. Want help taking your organization to the next level of productivity?

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building their teams. This program se is based on the same model we use o site when we consult with companies. is for you if your answer is yes to any t the following questions:

1. Are you hitting resistance to neces: changes in your organization?
2. Are you tired of low participation in your meetings?
3. Do you have untapped potential on your team?
4. Do you want to increase collaborati and productivity?
5. Are you failing to receive the recognition you deserve for your work?

Help is on the way! Look for the launch of the new program series on the web in May:

Building High
Performance Teams

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