**Icebreakers – Uses and Ideas**

**What are icebreakers?**

Icebreakers are simply short and (hopefully) fun activities that may or may not be related to the training itself. Icebreakers can serve a variety of purposes, including:

* To get participants thinking “outside the box” to ready their mind for new information
* To get participants thinking differently about a particular topic
* To help people get to know each other to make them feel comfortable being around one another
* To build teams (although if the key purpose of the training is teambuilding, these might be also used as exercises).

**When should I use icebreakers (and when should I avoid them?)**

Don’t waste your time using icebreakers if they have no purpose or goal to them. For example, when interactions are unimportant (say a brief hands-on training on how to enter sales information in the new computer application), there is no need for an icebreaker. However, icebreakers are very useful for overcoming training obstacles, and they also help to make training fun. Some of the benefits are:

* Helping participants get comfortable with each other to encourage sharing
* Creating a “break” between work and training to allow the mind to shift and focus on the new topic
* Preparing participants to learn by encouraging creativity or logical thinking

**Which icebreaker should I choose?**

Icebreakers should have a purpose. Therefore, identify the obstacles to your training’s success and see if icebreakers can help with that process. (See our list below.) Do not overuse icebreakers – you don’t need five icebreakers to start a meeting. Sometimes an exercise that is specific to the topic can serve as both an icebreaker and a training tool.

**How should I introduce an icebreaker?**

Generally, icebreakers are done at the beginning of a training. Explain that the purpose is (generally) to get to know each other, have fun, and get everyone’s minds open to training.

Let them know that you want them to share personal information, but to avoid anything too “over-the-top”.

**Icebreakers to loosen people up and feel comfortable with one another:**

These types of icebreakers give staff a personal connection with other participants to make them feel a bond which can help as they enter small group discussions or participate in other activities. These icebreakers can be useful if you are trying to merge or bond two teams or members of a new team.

* Two Truths and a Lie – This icebreaker can de done in many ways. For example, you might split the larger group into teams. In the small groups, each member tells “two truths and a lie” about his or her life. The other members of the team guess which one is the lie, and the person sharing lets them know if they were right. The winner at the table is the one that had the fewest correct guesses. Then, perhaps the larger group hears each “winner” and a final winner might be selected.
* Who Could It Be? – Similar to the above exercise, people choose a strange truth about themselves, write it on a slip of paper and put it in a box or hat. As each item is drawn, people vote on who put in the piece of paper. (This is best done in small groups.)

**Icebreakers for loosening “tight” minds (creativity exercises);**

* Marshmallow Challenge - Developed by Tom Wujec, this icebreaker is commonly used to spark problem-solving, but it can also be used to discuss the value each team member brought to the exercise to emphasize how a diverse team can be more effective. Therefore, this icebreaker can also be used as a bonding icebreaker. To facilitate: split into groups of between 3 and 5. Give each team 20 sticks of spaghetti, one yard of tape, one yard of string, and one marshmallow – Let them know that the highest structure will win, but it has to stand on its own for at least 5 full seconds. They have 18 minutes to achieve their goal.
* Random Genius Generator – This is a good small group (10 or under) exercise, so break larger groups into small groups if using this icebreaker. Give two post-it notes to each participant. Ask each participant to think of one object and one activity that object can be used for. They should write the object on the first sticky note and the action on the second. Ask all staff to pass the activity post-it note to the right (so the person next to them will now have their original object and a brand-new activity). Each participant must then explain how the new object/action duo will work together.

We could list icebreakers all day, but you will find it easy to find some specific to your company’s needs – just search icebreakers and your purpose for the icebreaker in an online search. There are lots of free options!

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