

# Part- 6

ICE BREAKERS

# ICEBREAKERS

## **What Are Icebreakers?**

The Encyclopaedia of Icebreakers (University Associates, 1983) says that icebreakers "are tools that enable the group leader to foster interaction, stimulate creative thinking, challenge basic assumptions, illustrate new concepts, and introduce specific material." (pg. 1). As such, icebreakers can be used nearly any time a facilitator has a need to gather a group, get them together, and help them move forward.

Energizers can be used to the same ends, and are generally thought of as best for points in the midst of a meeting, training, workshop, or other group learning experience.

## **The Use of Icebreakers**

Although the following points can easily be overdone, it is wise to consider a few basic elements before choosing (or inventing) and using Icebreakers.

### **Contracting**

First, icebreakers tend to work best when participants have contracted around their participation in the activity chosen by the trainer. Contracting involves giving participants:

1. The rationale for the activity.
2. The objectives of the activity.
3. The structure of the activity.
4. The opportunity to ask questions.
5. The permission to participate at their own level of comfort.

This last point is critical, and is often missed. A single, prominent, announcement at the beginning of a training program (the point at which icebreakers are used!) will often suffice for making the point that participants are not "bound" to participation in every activity. Although this approach may run counter to events where facilitators hope for 100% participation, a bit of explanation may help.

Although participants will not always verbalise concerns to facilitator(s), any given training activity can place undue stress on people for a variety of reasons. Be it the deeply introverted person who is placed in their least resourceful state in high-energy group activities; the person in perpetual physical pain who avoids going "inside" themselves for reasons of pain management; the person with painful memories of a childhood filled with concerns about their physical ability; or, simply, the person who is simply having "a bad day," participants vary in their degree of comfort with

icebreakers and energisers. When they perceive a poor fit between their state of mind and the requirements of the icebreaker, people will either publicly or privately "opt out" of participation. When given the freedom to choose, people tend to take greater ownership of their participation and are less able to claim "they made me do it." Ironically, when given choice, the vast majority of people will choose participation over either public or private opting out.

To maximise genuine participation in icebreakers, it is best to formally state that people have the right to "pass" at any point. When given the explicit option, participants only rarely "opt out."

## **APPROPRIATENESS**

### **Tone**

Icebreakers "set the tone" for some aspect(s) of the event they precede. Given this, it makes sense to choose an icebreaker that is consonant with this tone. Sometimes "more serious" icebreakers inadvertently send a message that "there will be no fun here!" At other times, "silly" icebreakers can have unintended impacts with a particular audience, or provide just the right break at the start of a multi-session program or when used as an energiser. Generally, then, it makes sense to be deliberate in your choice of icebreakers.

### **Length**

Some of the icebreakers in this compilation are best for very short programs, while others make most sense when used in programs that last for several days. As a rough rule-of-thumb, an icebreaker that lasts more than 1/16th of the total time for a program (a half-hour in an eight-hour day, for example) is probably too long (unless, of course, the icebreaker provides in-depth learning experiences that are integral to the entire program).

### **Teaching Points**

Some trainers and facilitators prefer to use icebreakers that contain significant learning that are part of the overall learning objectives of the programs. Others prefer to use icebreakers that avoid relationship to the program's learning points. Likely best is the realisation that icebreakers are dynamic and provide intended, and unintended, learning. A consideration of these potential learning, prior to the facilitation of any particular icebreaker, can help you optimise contracting and process learning experiences.

### **Processing Learning**

Again, trainers differ on the degree to which they prefer to use icebreakers and energisers as teaching opportunities. In general, given the "1/16th" rule-of-thumb (above), detailed processing of icebreakers can disrupt the momentum generated by the application of the icebreaker itself.

### **Safety**

Apart from the type of "psychological safety" described above (under "Contracting"), icebreakers and energisers that require complicated or challenging physical exertion should be considered carefully prior to

execution. Again, though we may carry the attitude of "no one has to participate," such an attitude has little beneficial impact if not shared publicly with participants.

These Icebreakers, Energizers, and Meeting-Starters have been compiled from the various books on training. Information about the reference books is given at the end of this handbook.

### **1. Felt Hats**

Each participant is given a pre-made red felt donut-shaped circle of approximately 18 inches in diameter and given the instruction to form some type of hat out of the felt piece. Participants are given enough time to make their hat, and each person explains the hat they created. This is a quick, and fun, way to "break the ice."

### **2. Names & Adjectives**

Ask each participant to take a few moments to think of an adjective that starts with the same first letter as his or her first name (e.g. "Merry Mahmood"). Start by modelling it yourself. Then move around the group asking each person to state their name/adjective combination. Additionally, participants can be asked to share "where they work," or other pertinent information. At various points during introductions, or at the end, ask volunteers to remember each of the names, with adjectives, that have been volunteered thus far. Reinforce the efforts and successes of volunteers.

### **3. Names & Stories**

Ask participants to introduce themselves, with each person talking briefly about the most ridiculous thing they have done in their working life.

### **4. The Napkin Game**

Ask participants to form groups of equal size. Give each group a napkin and explain to them that their task is to fold their napkin as small as possible, but still large enough for each small group member to place a toe on the napkin.

### **5. The Stone Sharing Exercise**

Requirements:

Enough small, attractive, varicoloured stones for everyone in the group. Have the group sitting in a circle, close enough to each other to hand off and receive stones easily.

Instructions to the group (with rationale):

"This warm-up exercise is designed to help us get in touch with three aspects of life that contribute to our overall health and well-being: a right relationship with ourselves; a right relationship with all other living beings; and a right relationship with the earth."

"After everyone has selected a stone from the basket that I will pass around, we will each share briefly with the group: 1) our full name and some mention of its possible meaning or significance to us, its family or ethnic origin, etc. (expressing right relationship with oneself); 2) an animal that has been special in our life, as a pet, e.g., or as an object of fascination and interest (expressing right relationship with all other living beings); 3) a place on earth that is special to us as a place of beauty, comfort, good memories, inspiration, relaxation (expressing right relationship with the earth)."

"I will start, and when I have finished sharing, everyone should pass their stone to the person on their left and receive the stone from the person on their right. This is the process that we will follow after every sharing. By the time we have finished the exercise, everyone will have had their stone touched by everyone in the group and will have touched everyone else's stone, and we will each end up with our own stone."

"You may keep your stone for the rest of your life, or give it back to the universe at some point. You might keep it in your pocket, your pocketbook, on your desk, or on a shelf and it can serve as a reminder of each person who shared and with whom you connected during the exercise; it can serve as a reminder of this workshop/session/training/experience and of all the things that you will learn from it; and it can serve as a "touch-stone" to rub when you are feeling stressed.

"My name is . . . . . etc."

(You may have to remind and prompt about the way to pass off and receive the stones after your sharing as leader.)

## **6. Variations:**

Right relationship with oneself can be expressed in a variety of ways: "My name is and my favourite colour is . . . and why," "My name is and I was born in (country, city, state, province, etc.)," "My name is and my parents are/were (professions, careers)," "My name is . . . and what gives me great joy in life is . . .," "My name is . . .and when I retire I am going to . . .," etc.

Right relationship with all other living beings can also be expressed in a multiplicity of ways: "My spouse/partner/children/grandchildren/ favorite friend is/are special because . . .," "What I value most in my friendships/co-worker relationships is . . .," "It is easier for me to forgive someone who has wronged me if . . .," etc.

Right relationship with the earth can also be expressed in many different ways: "What I do to care for the earth is . . ." "One way that the earth nourishes me is . . ." etc.

It is useful and helpful to process the exercise a little bit at the end and to allow for some expression of how it felt to do it.

## **7. Ball Toss / Group Juggle**

Icebreaker for Day 2 of a multi-day training session. Good for a group of at least 12 and up to 30 where some people know each other, but the whole group is still getting acquainted:

Have 3 tennis balls ready. Get the group in a circle.

Facilitator tosses 1 ball to someone in the group whose name they know saying their name and then the other person's name (e.g. Khan to Habib). Habib (person who receives the ball) tosses ball to someone whose name he knows (e.g. Habib to Neelum). Neelum tosses to someone whose name she knows and so on, saying both names all the way around the circle. The ball is tossed to each person one time only until everyone in the circle gets it and all names have been said.

THEN, facilitator starts again and tosses the balls to the same person (Khan to Habib to Neelum, etc.) only this time with 2 balls in succession (not at the same time) saying both names, both times. Balls are tossed to the same people they were originally tossed to; first one ball, then the next, all the way around the circle stopping when they get back to the facilitator.

THEN, facilitator starts again only with all three balls this time. Saying names each time, all three balls get tossed, in succession, in the same order until they get back to the facilitator.

By the time there are three balls going, it gets pretty chaotic and fun. By now all names have been said so many times everyone should have a pretty good idea of who's who and they are pretty warmed up and ready to go. If (I should say, when) someone drops a ball, simply give them a chance to chase it down and just pick up where you left off--no need to start again.

## **8. Meeting Warm-ups**

Quick ideas to get people focused in the room on each other; also ready to participate.

Go around the table (or circle) and complete one of these sentences:

Once upon a time, I...  
My ideal vacation is...  
The riskiest thing I ever did was...

The wildest thing I ever did (that I'll admit to ) is...

These are easy to make up and can be topical (what I did on my summer vacation, my plans for the weekend are...)

## **9. Find An Object**

### **Objectives:**

Creating an environment where it is safe for people to talk about who they are in a broader sense than might normally be socially acceptable.

Learning about others in the group.

### **Design:**

Give participants 10 minutes to find an object that represents either how they feel today, what they aspire to, what their job feels like, what they'd like to let go of to be present--the possibilities are wide open.

Participants can either hold on to their object or put it on a cloth in the centre of the room (this assume people are in a circle on the floor or in chairs).

Have each participant share with the group what the object means to them. You can either go in order, let someone volunteer to be first and then go in order or let it go according to whoever is ready (this option often feels best).

### **Some Considerations:**

About size, it can be done with up to 16 people and it probably took 30 minutes. Most people do not go on very long.

It helps to have access to nature because of the greatly increased store of objects to be found there. It could be done in an office environment if people had enough time to wander around looking for something.

It is helpful to emphasise that they do not have to find the ultimate object and they should not think too hard about it but just let objects speak to them, e.g. whatever seems to catch their eye should be considered. This is also a good example of "challenge by choice" in that participants can choose how much they wish to share of their "inner life" based on the notion that learning requires some willingness to risk

### **Alternative**

Each participant introduces themselves and then shows the group an object they brought into the session (It could be from their pocket, purse, briefcase, etc.) They must then tell the group why that object is significant to who they are.

## **10. Interviewing & Introducing**

### **Objectives:**

Learning enough about one other person to be able to introduce them to the entire group. All participants get to hear about other participants from the perspective of a third party instead of hearing from the person themselves. Provides a bit of a stretch for participants to have to ask someone they just met to tell them enough about themselves to introduce them.

### **Design:**

Pair off the audience. Have the teams interview one another. Then have each take a turn introducing the other to the audience at large. Interviews should be timed (begin, end) anywhere from 1-2 minutes to? Depending on how much time, you want to allow for this activity.

### **Comments:**

You can prepare questions ahead of time or provide just general guidelines for the interview. You may want to ask people to pick someone to interview that they don't already know.

## **11. Ha**

This exercise asks the participants to pass the word 'ha' around a circle. This activity is generally more effective when used during the later stage of the training program or session.

Time Reference: Approximately 5 to 7 minutes.

Group Size: Best suited for a group of 20 or fewer participants.

Space Required: A room that has the potential for flexible seating.

Material Needed: None.

1. The trainer first asks the group members to form a circular seating arrangement.
2. When the participants are seated, the group leader explains that the object of this game is for the participants, without laughing, to pass the word "ha" around the circle.
3. The trainer then designates one participant to be the head of the circle. That participant begins the game by saying "ha".
4. The person sitting to his or her right must repeat the "ha" and then say another "ha." The third person must say ha. Ha and then given an additional "ha." In this manner the "ha" continues around the circle.

The game ends when all of the participants. Trying not to laugh (a virtual impossibility), have repeated the "ha's" that preceded them and then added their own "ha."

**Variations:**

1. The trainer may use another word in place of "ha." For example: "yuk," "har," or "tee hee."
2. The group leader may ask all of the participants to repeat the "ha's" stopping only to let the person whose turn it is pipe in with his or her own.
3. The trainer may continue the exercise for five minutes, regardless of how many times the "ha's" go around the circle.

**12. Toilet Paper Go-Round**

**Purpose:** Use for short introductions at the start of a "heavy" or "intense" kind of meeting in order to lighten the atmosphere.

**Material:** 1 roll of toilet paper (if you "borrow" it from an office bathroom, be kind and leave some for your colleagues!)

**Instructions:**

Pass around a roll of toilet paper and say something like "just in case this meeting gets a little messy, everyone needs to take some" (with no other qualifiers or instruction). Then go on with other business (agenda, minutes, "housekeeping" items...) as the roll makes it way around the room.

Some folks by nature will take many "squares" and some just a few. Once everyone has had the roll, and you've finished other business, ask everyone to introduce themselves and share with the group as many "things" about themselves as number of "squares" they took! You can suggest the "things" be generic or make it work-related. You choose.

Have fun!

**13. Two Truths & a Lie**

**Objectives:**

To allow people to get to know and appreciate one another better, through discovering both common and unique interests and experiences.

To help level the playing field within a group through making human connections that aren't related to either organizational or power structures.

To help people begin to be more comfortable talking and listening with one another.

To begin to facilitate the process of people exposing something of themselves and their ideas to a group.

**Design:**

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."

A group of three can easily do this in less than 10 minutes. A group of eight can take from 20 to 30 minutes.

**Comments:**

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.

The first person or two asked to make statements can find it pretty difficult, but after a couple of folks have taken a turn others typically find it easier to do. One way to help alleviate this and make the process run smoother is to alert a couple of people beforehand to begin thinking so that they can be somewhat more ready to volunteer. This type of a "plant" can make it much easier for folks who come later because they won't see someone "struggle" and get "uptight" about their ability to "perform." Another way to get around the difficulty the "first" folks have is to start it yourself.

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 committee or a committee of a national association that has folks from across the country participating. It takes a little longer -- a group of seven I once participated in took a month of calendar time to do an e-mail version of this -- but it provided the same benefits.

## 14. Trainer/Participant Join-Up /Icebreaker

### Background

Early stages of group development are often characterised by pronounced participant attention paid to the "authority" present in the group. In training programs, that authority is often represented (or brought) by the trainer/facilitator. The following activity works with this dynamic as it helps participants learn as much as possible about the trainer(s) in as short a time possible. In addition, this activity helps participants come to know one another better through introductions and attention paid to one another's questions.

### Goal

The main goal of this icebreaker is to help participants work with, and gain comfort with, each other and with the trainer(s).

### Objectives

By the time participants complete this icebreaker, they will be able to describe:

1. The names and affiliations of others in the training;
2. The background of the trainer(s)/facilitator(s) and the relevancy of that background to the training-as-a-whole;
3. Personal characteristics of the trainer that may impact the course of learning throughout the training or facilitation event.
4. Specific nuances of the training that do not emerge during discussion of the training agenda;
5. Specific aspects of the training design intended to maximise their personal "safety" as they participate "at their own level" in activities, discussions, and opportunities for personal disclosure;
6. Answers to any other questions they may have about the training and/or the facilitator(s).

**Audience:** This icebreaker is most useful for medium- to large-sized groups (10-30 participants) during multi-day (three or more) programs.

**Time:** Allocate at least 45 minutes for this icebreaker.

### Design:

1. Display the following newsprint for participants:

Trainer "News Conference"

**Purpose:** To help us get to know one another better and answer any questions you may have about your trainer(s).

**Setting:** A briefing room near you!

2. Break participants into several groups of from four to six people each.
3. Display your own versions of the following Flip Charts after folks have "settled down":

**Task One:** Introduce yourselves to others in your group including names, affiliations, and one thing people wouldn't know about you if you didn't tell them. Take ten minutes for these introductions.

**Task Two:** Work within your group to think of 2-4 questions (depending upon number of sub-groups) you would like to ask your trainer(s) to help you know them better and better understand their hopes for this training (any questions about the training itself should be moved to another sheet of newsprint to be addressed after this opening activity). You will have ten minutes to come up with your questions.

**Trainer Note:** essentially what you're doing here is working to keep questions focused on the person(s) of the trainer(s) rather than on the mechanics of the training itself.

4. After the second ten minutes, set up chairs in the front of the room (one chair per trainer) facing the back of the room. Ask participants to arrange their chairs to face the trainers chairs (to look like a news conference!).
5. Ask each group to alternate the asking of their questions. Trainer(s) answer as honestly as possible and appropriate.
6. Process the activity minimally with brief discussion of participants and trainer reactions to the news conference format.
7. If time permits, have people in groups introduce themselves to the other group(s). Or, see "The Name Game," below.

## **15. The Name Game**

### **Background**

This activity works best with medium- to large-sized groups and can be used in training programs from a half-day and longer in duration. This icebreaker works best if participants are grouped in a large circle.

### **Goal**

The main goal of this icebreaker is to help participants learn each other's names via a quick, low-threat icebreaker.

## **Objectives**

By the time participants complete this icebreaker, they will be able to:

1. Name at least 50% of all other participants in the training.

## **Audience**

The name game is simple, safe, and effective for most training audiences. It should be avoided in mixed training where groups with historical conflict are brought into the same room. In such cases, the failure to remember someone else's name can become a "critical incident" and a source for continued polarisation.

## **Time**

While The Name Game is generally time-efficient, larger groups will require more time. Allot at least ten minutes for smaller groups (5 to 12 participants). Double the time for greater than twelve participants.

## **Design**

1. Explain to participants that you are going to ask them to play "The Name Game." You will ask each person to introduce themselves, going person-to-person either clockwise or counter-clockwise around the group. Each person will be asked to introduce themselves by giving at least their name, their affiliation, and an interesting topic of choice (either you pick a topic such as "Your ideal vacation..." or playfully ask the group-as-a-whole what they would like to know about each other).

2. The main task for each person in The Name Game is to remember enough about each person so they could start from the beginning of the group and remember the names of all those who had introduced themselves thus far. Remind participants they are not to take notes during The Name Game.

3. Begin the introductions. After three or four people have introduced themselves, ask for a volunteer to name all those who had introduced themselves so far.

4. Pepper your facilitation of The Name Game with liberal amounts of appreciation and acknowledgement.

Clapping is encouraged!

5. A nice variation of The Name Game is to break after someone has named all everyone else in the group, and encourage people to break up into "affinity groups" with others they'd like to talk with. In these smaller groups, any number of light topics can be used to help participants get to know each other a bit better.

6. Minimal (or non-existent) processing of this icebreaker is most appropriate.

16. **Favorite T-shirt -**

Ask attendees to bring (not wear) their favorite T-shirt to the meeting. Once all participants have arrived, ask each person to show the shirt to the group and explain how the T-shirt best resembles their personality.

17. **Personal Bingo -**

The host will need to do a little homework before the meeting to find out a few tidbits about each participant (favorite hobbies, books, vacation spots, number of children, favorite foods, etc). Prepare a bingo card (duplicate the card for all attendees to have the same one) with one tid-bit for each square, and instruct the participants to mingle with the group to identify the person for each square. As the information is uncovered, they ask the participant to sign their corresponding square. Keep moving among the guests until all squares are filled. Rules: only open ended questions may be used. First person who fills card wins a prize.

18. **Say Cheese, Please -**

As each participant arrives, take their picture with a Polaroid type camera and hang their photo on a piece of easel paper in the entrance area of the meeting room in groups of two or three photos (depending on size of meeting - you may have only 2 per group or more if the group is large). Use your creativity and decorate the easel paper to extend a Warm Welcome and set the tone of the meeting. Once all participants have arrived, ask them to find their partner(s) from the photo display on the easel and spend about 5 - 10 minutes getting to know the person(s). Then have them introduce their partner(s) to the rest of the group and share something they discovered they have in common.

19. **Famous People/Cities -**

As each participant arrives, tape a 3 x 5 index card on their back with the name of a famous person or city. They must circulate in the room and ask questions that can ONLY be answered with a YES or NO to identify clues that will help them find out the name of the person or city on their index card. EX. Paris, Madonna, Santa Claus, Babra Sharif, Titanic, Casablanca

20. **Sensuous Sam & Inquiring Ida -**

Ask each participant to choose an adjective that begins with the first letter of their first name and one that really matches their personality . Have them introduce themselves just as they wrote it on the card and allow time for others to ask questions.

21. **Dream Vacation -**

Ask participants to introduce themselves and describe details of the ideal, perfect dream vacation or a trip to a nice place.

22. **Favorite Animal -**

As the guests arrive, and before you write their names on a name card, ask them to tell you their favorite animal and three adjectives to describe the animal. As they tell you, write the three adjectives on a name tag BEFORE their name.(omit the name of the animal) Ask them to mingle with the crowd, sharing why these adjectives best describe their own personality. EX. Loyal, cuddly, playful Dan

23 **Birthday Partner -**

Have participants mingle in the group and identify the person whose birthdate (not year - just month and date) is closest to their own. Find out two things they have in common.

24. **Long Lost Relative -**

As a group, 1) ask each person to turn to the person on their right and greet him/her as if they really didn't want to be there. Yeah, you know what I mean - you cannot wait to get out of there! Then everyone (simultaneously to create lots of fun and excitement) turn to the same person and greet him/her as if (s)he is a long lost, deeply loved relative who has just returned home and you're about to see the person for the first time in years! In fact, you thought you may never see this person again until this very moment. Okay, now ask everyone (again simultaneously) turn to the same person and greet him/her as if this person just told you that you won the state lottery for 50 million dollars and you have the ONLY winning ticket!~~

25. **Circle of Friends -**

This is a great greeting and departure for a large group who will be attending a seminar for more than one day together and the chances of meeting everyone in the room is almost impossible. Form two large circles (or simply form two lines side by side), one inside the other and have the people in the inside circle face the people in the outside circle. Ask the circles to take one step in the opposite directions, allowing them to meet each new person as the circle continues to move very slowly. If lines are formed, they simply keep the line moving very slowly, as they introduce themselves.

26. **Expectations Of The Course**

Give each person a letter on a post-it, and ask them to place it somewhere in the front of their bodies (you might want to give more vowels, no x's, z's, q's and also make the vowels a different color than the consonants.)

Give them 5 minutes to form one word with at least 3 other letters/people (a minimum of 4 letter/people per word).

At the end of 5 minutes, take a look at all or some of the words formed, depending on the time you have.

Give each word group a sheet of flip-chart paper and ask them to form a sentence using that word to describe their expectations of the course (if done at the beginning) or how they felt about the course (if done at the end).

Note : this exercise can also be done by giving a letter to all the participants and telling them that the letter goes with other letter that forms a word that in turn goes with other word to create a slogan. There would be enough to form a slogan 8 or 10 times. Good for large group facilitation.

#### 27. **Ice Breaker**

Hand out decks of cards to teams. Each team shuffles the pack of 52 cards (no jokers) and take 25 cards – one at a time – off the top of the stack, placing each card on one square” in a five by five grid. Once placed a card may not be moved. After all have been placed, each row or column of five is scored like a poker hand and all those are totaled to provide the score for that round. The usual plan is to try for flushes in the columns and full houses or fours in the rows.

In the beginning of team building you might see a lot of conflict around decision making, requiring an hour or more, depending on what additional work you chose o do with conflict resolution. If several teams involved this can also lead to discussion of competition. You can have teams do it several times, timing it as they work more and more as a team.

#### 28. **Team Building**

A Fun team building activity that I have used that runs about 45mm to 1 hour goes like this:

Get enough sets of tinder toys for a many 4-6 person groups that you have. Break up into groups and ask each small team to create a symbol of whatever it is you want to get into (i.e. how the team should work together, the attitude about customer service, etc.) give each group about 15-25 minutes to create and then have each group present to the whole group. Debrief by pointing out how different or similar the structures were what the experience was like, e

#### 29. **Listening**

In this practice session the facilitator begins by giving an example of a time when trying to listen to someone. The next person paraphrases what the facilitator said and asks for confirmation. This person then gives an example of when they were distracted and the person to their right paraphrases, and so on round robin style. The main point the group usually picks up on is how hard it is to really listen when they are trying to think of their own “story” which they must tell next. This is in fact what we as humans do most of the time. We forget that it is okay to listen first, take time to think of our “rebuttal” as the person is talking. It is also important to talk about it is appropriate to paraphrase, why and how.

### 30. **Communication Training Exercise**

Blindfold them, put them in a space where they can't bump into anything dangerous, tell them to line up in order of their mothers birth dates SILENTLY. Sometimes the biggest hurdle to learning for highly educated, very accomplished professionals is admitting they NEED to learn something. This is a great, and safe, way for them to experience "hindered communication", similar to what might happen with people whose first language is not English or people new to their workgroup or people outside of their professional field. It can launch some good discussions of communication paradigms, barriers to good communication, etc.

### 31. **One-Way Vs. Two-Way Communication Exercise**

Have the participants to pair up with someone else. If you would like the added benefit of using this as an ice breaker or a networking opportunity make sure they are pairing up with someone they do not know. Ask them to decide which one of the pair is A and which is B. Ask A's to leave the room. Give the B's these instructions, "when the A's come back into the room they will be blindfolded. Your job is to take them by the arm (like if you were leading a blind person) on a little field trip. You may give them instructions; such as, "walk forward five feet". Explain that their job is to get their A safely back to his or her seat.(it takes a little advance planning. You must decide on the route ahead of time. We did this at a hotel and the route was around the pool.)

To the group of A's give these instructions, "you will be blindfolded and your B partner will lead you on a little field trip. They may give you instructions and lead you by the arm but you are not to ask questions or give them any feedback whatsoever. Their goal is to get you safely back to your seat.

This is an interactive way for participants to see first hand the difference between one way and two-way communication. It can be used to make a point and as an icebreaker. It is extremely effective.

### 32. **One-Way Vs. Two-Way Communication Exercises Chain Communication**

Have an ambiguous photo or picture. Take a volunteer aside to show the picture. The group doesn't get to see it. They note (he/she can write it down) 10 things (or # time permits) about the picture. When the volunteer rejoins the group, tell the group and volunteer that volunteer is going to whisper information about the picture to the person on their right. The person listening can only take in the information without questions and without writing. The information is repeated in his way until all people have heard. The last person receiving the information tells the group what they heard. Then the facilitator can read the initial 10 things the volunteer wrote and show the picture. Laugh----and discuss from here

### 33. **The Plain Jacket**

Lay a jacket or shoe or some piece of clothing on a table/chair and gets volunteer. Tell them you don't know what this is or what to do with it and you want them to train you as to its use. Usually people jump right into telling behaviours as the "trainee"; you can distort the instructions like grabbing a button when told to grab the collar. And have the volunteer turn their back on you when giving instructions (like with the line drawings) and don't ask or answer questions. Make it last just long enough to show minimal progress. Difficult times, no feedback, no interaction—I guess one could be very cold if we needed this in subzero weather!

#### 34. **Two-Way Communication Exercises**

Give each member of the group an 8 ½ X 11 piece of paper, the facilitator needs one too.

Have them close their eyes. The facilitator issues the instructions and follows them as well.

No questions are allowed.

Instructions: Fold the paper in half.

Rip off a corner

Fold the paper in half

Rip off a corner

Fold the paper in half

Rip off a corner

The group can now open their eyes and find that there are many different shapes of paper. The debrief covers the need for two-way communication and that the different perceptions of the people caused the many different designs.

If time permits the group can be put in pairs. Have the pairs sit back to back and repeat the exercise using two-way communications and find that the patterns come out closer

#### 35. **House**

The exercise below, called "House" can also be used to demonstrate the value of two-way communication. Before presenting it, the instructor draws a figure on a flip chart or overhead and conceals it. The figure should look something like this:

He or she then tells the group that they will be given instructions to perform a single task and that questions are not permitted. (if someone asks a question, I usually answer it repeating word-for-word what just said). The instructor then repeats the following:

“Place your pencils on the blank space on your page. Draw two parallel lines. At one end of the parallel lines, draw a line at right angles to them. At the other end of the parallel lines, draw an inverted ~V. on one leg of the ‘V’, draw two parallel lines. At one end of the two parallel lines you just drew, draw a horizontal line at right angles to them.”

After the pencils are down, the instructor asks how many got it right, then reveals the picture.

Take the discussion to communication, to giving orders, to all types of topics.

### **36. Prisoners, Vacationers, Consumers, Adventurers**

There are FOUR kinds of participants in most training events. There are PRISONERS, who are there against their will (usually) because their boss told them to show up. There are VACATIONERS, who are there because training is like having time off from work they are relaxed and (hopefully) refreshed and renewed as result of their attendance. There are CONSUMERS, who are trainees who have a specific learning agenda (“really want to learn how to coach my subordinates”), and there are ADVENTURERS, who are like consumers without a narrow, specific agenda. They want to learn whatever is available. I’ve asked people to choose which role most closely resembles themselves, which two roles most closely resemble themselves, which role the trainer becomes if the group is comprised primarily of one type or another, etc. I’ve had groups in mandatory training reveal they are ALL prisoners, and so we have used a few minutes to acknowledge what that is like before plunging into the material.

### **37. Counting The Fs**

If you haven’t encountered this before, give it a go now, and count the F’s. The solution is at the end of the text. Allow about 40 seconds (using an OHP) for this, then repeat the exercise, allowing 50 seconds.

“The necessity of training farm hands for first class farms in the fatherly handling of first class farm livestock is foremost in the minds of farm owners, since the forefathers of the farm owners trained the farm hands for first class farms in the fatherly handling of farm livestock, the farm owners feel they should carry on with the family tradition of fundamental training of farm hands of first class farms in the fatherly handling of livestock because they believe it is the basis of good fundamental farm management.”

There are 38 “Vs” in the above text. In my experience, most people count between 26 and 32. Some get part way through, and guess the result.

### **38. Straw And Paperclip**

Give each group a box of straws (not flexible straws) and a box of paperclips. Check that the paperclips can fit roughly into the end of the straws

Give each group a task (you can use the same one for each group if you want) and let them go.

Samples tasks: build the structure as a group

Tallest, strongest, longest, most creative, most functional etc.

Debriefing included describing teamwork and situational leadership skills used as well as how different models are needed to accomplish different tasks.

### **39. Generalizing**

Hold up cup. Ask audience to look at it and call out what it is. Ask “we all agree this is a cup?” Hold up cup again walking around room. Ask audience what we use it for. Ask “we all agree that this is a cup and it’s used to hold liquid (drink from, whatever group consensus is).”

Explain principles of “generalization”. We as a group “generalize” that this is a cup. Some generalizations are good –if we had to rediscover the purpose of a cup or door each time we encountered one. It’d be a tough world. Some generalizations are not so good—such as “all blondes are dumb” usually gets laughter because I’m blonde—use other examples pertinent to group – maybe “teams don’t work here”

(Get creative here!) Say: while we generalized that this is a cup, it could also be a hat (place on head), a toy (walk it across table top), half of a modern telecommunications system (my client happened to be in that business), etc.

Then say: today, we need you to set aside your generalizations of the way things are done, the way the organization is structured, the way people do their work, etc. Now, I’d like to introduce you to the future of xx corporation.

### **40. Knots**

Tell the participants this exercise is about co-operation, and how it works. Get them to stand in a circle, facing in, groups from 6-12, shoulder to shoulder, closer, closer.! Then tell them to close their eyes, and put both hands into the centre of the circle. Then say “with your right hand, take one hand, take one hand of one other person. Pause “now with your other hand, take a hand of someone else” when all hands are taken 1.1, say “open eyes, and you will see that you are in a human knot”

Ask, do you think that it is possible to undo this knot without breaking hands? (Subtle suggestion of a rule, and a challenge) very often they will start immediately to try and undo it as a group task, and will have a lot of fun doing it. At the end they will often stand around for sometime, still holding hands.

Process the activity by asking the group what they did, what happened, and after getting a couple of whiteboards full, how this is like their working together

in work terms. A very powerful experience, and informative about the actual group dynamics.