

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas

1. The Game of Possibilities

Time: 5–6 minutes

Purpose: To stimulate conversation, ideas, and laughter

Participants:

- Small groups
- This can be done with one group or multiple groups at the same time.

Materials needed: Cloth napkins

Instructions:

- Give a napkin to each group of five to ten participants.
- One person at a time stands and demonstrates a use of that napkin.

Rules:

1. Person demonstrating cannot speak
2. Must stand while demonstrating
3. Demonstration must be original

Desired outcome: Participants experience the infinite ways to use a napkin and translate this to the infinite ways to solve problems, use resources, motivate a team, etc.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

2. Drop the Ball

Time: 10–12 minutes

Purpose: Cooperation and healthy competition

Participants: Small groups

Materials needed: Golf balls, straws, tape

Instructions:

- Each small group receives 12 straws and 18 inches of masking tape. They get ten minutes to build a container that will catch a golf ball dropped from about ten feet.
- Each group selects a 'ball dropper' — that person stands on a chair, holds a golf ball at eye level. That group places its container on the floor under where it thinks the ball will land. Each group gets three attempts.
- The group that gets a ball to go in and stay in its container wins.

Desired outcome: Teams can use their experiences in the game to overcome work problems and relational issues.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

3. Winner/Loser

Time: 5–6 minutes

Purpose: Negative to positive perspective

Participants: Partners

Materials needed: None

Instructions:

- One partner tells the other partner about something bad that happened to them. This can be personal or work-related and can have occurred recently or years ago., but it must be something that is over. They can take about two minutes to do this.
- The same partner then tells the same story but this time relates the good things that came from this experience. The listening partner can help them explore the good that came from the bad.

Desired outcome: Participants experience a way to let go of negative attitudes and emotional baggage.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

4. Ten Ways to Kill a New Idea

Time: 2–3 minutes

Purpose: Keep meetings positive

Participants: All

Materials needed: Poster paper, markers

Instructions: A list of negative phrases and words is posted in the meeting room. During meetings, anyone who uses any of the 'idea killer' phrases must put a quarter in the 'nega-jar.' When enough money is collected, it can be used to buy the team lunch.

Desired outcome: Team members learn to offer suggestions in positive ways.

5. Mission Statement

Time: 15 minutes to several hours

Purpose: Creating focus, passion, and group buy-in

Participants: All

Materials needed: Pens, paper, and any team requests

Instructions: Each person finishes the sentence, "My vision of a team that works is ..."
The entire team now creates one statement or visual that represents the total of these vision statements.

Desired outcome: The team finds commonality of purpose and is more willing to cooperate.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

6. Lifeboat Game

Time: An hour

Purpose: Discover how emotions effect the success of our negotiations

Participants: One or several small groups

Materials needed: List of 15 people in a yacht

Instructions:

Give the team or teams a list of 15 people who are on a yacht. Tell them that the yacht developed a leak and is sinking fast. There is only one lifeboat and it will accommodate only nine people — not one more can fit and there are no more life boats or life jackets.

The group must then come to an agreement as to which of 15 people gets to go in the lifeboat and be saved. However, they must also list those they save in order of importance — because if they run out of food and water the “less important people’ will have to be dumped overboard. Of course this is often the more difficult job.

The key for this game is to make the 15 people on the list as controversial as possible. For example include a priest, minister, rabbi or all three! A pregnant woman, powerful leaders from both major political parties, an ex-convict, a male physician and a female one, a political lobbyist, people of different ethnicities, etc — the more emotionally charged the list the better.

Give them a period of time to work out the problem. Make it long enough to get into heated discussion but short enough to be pressed for time. I usually allow six to ten minutes.

The discussion afterward should be in depth and include everyone on the team. You can facilitate with questions. Such as ...

- What problems did you experience?
- How did you resolve these issues?
- Was it the best way?
- How else could you have resolved your differences?
- Why did these problems occur in the first place?

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

Then...

- How does this exercise reflect your day-to-day relationships?
- What are the similarities between what you just experienced and negotiations at work and at home?

After fully exploring these questions ask your team — or teams — to reconvene. This time they will list three things they would do differently now that they have had this discussion. Be sure to tell them that this follow-up exercise is not about the lifeboat or anyone on it — it is about the process of negotiation.

Desired outcome:

The critical take away here is that negotiation often fails because each participant wants to get his or her way. A better method may be to first learn the needs and intents of others. Understanding fosters a spirit of cooperation and therefore agreement.

Use the three things each team determines they learned as a guide to create better understanding in future meetings and discussions.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

7. This Is My Life

Time: Few minutes to 1 hour

Purpose: Learn personal backgrounds in a fun setting

Participants: All

Materials needed: Decks of cards — picture cards only

Instructions: Cards represent different stages of life; i.e. Jack is childhood, Queen is teen years, King is young adult, Ace is now. As each person draws a card, they must tell one story about the period of their life that corresponds to the card.

Desired outcome: Team uncovers common interests and opens dialogue.

8. Recall Game

Time: 20 minutes

Purpose: Test after a training event

Participants: Small groups

Materials needed: Paper and pens

Instructions: Break into teams of five to ten people. Each team has ten minutes to list as many facts or skills as they can remember from their training. A representative from each team then reads the list and gets points for each correct fact remembered. All other teams can challenge any point.

Desired outcome: Instructor learns what was important to the group and how much was retained. The group takes a test that is fun, engaging, and creates team cooperation.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

9. **Cartoon Character**

Time: 2–3 minutes

Purpose: Creative introductions

Participants: Partners

Materials needed: None

Instructions: Everyone introduces themselves to one other person as the cartoon character they would be if they were not who they are.

Desired outcome: Creates a relaxed atmosphere

10. **Theatre of Excellence**

Time: Half to full day

Purpose: Enhance learning, develop solutions, learn to work together in a nonthreatening environment

Participants: Small groups

Materials needed: Varies

Instructions: Each team is given a 'title' for their play that represents the challenges and issues dealt with at work. The team then has X period of time to gather props and music and to write and rehearse their play.

Desired outcome: Employees act out challenges and find solutions in a nonthreatening and fun environment.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

11. **Relate to People**

Time: 2–3 minutes

Purpose: Learn new things about co-workers

Participants: All

Materials needed: Pens and paper

Instructions: Group is given a list of characteristics and instructed to find people in the room that have those characteristics that differ from them. For example: different gender, weight by 20 lbs, height by seven inches, marital status, etc.

Desired outcome: Learn new things about co-workers; encourages conversation, breaks down perceived barriers

12. **Airplane Caper**

Time: 1–2 minutes

Purpose: Lighten up a tough day; re-energize

Participants: All

Materials needed: Paper

Instructions: Two teams are formed on opposite sides of the room; each person makes a paper airplane. Everyone begins to throw her or his airplane to the other side at once. The goal is not to let any planes land on the floor.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

13. Animal Game

Time: 1–2 minutes

Purpose: Break from the ordinary, communicate in new ways

Participants: Partners

Materials needed: None

Instructions: Each person tells a partner what animal they would be if they could be an animal; they can't talk or write, but must only act and sound as that animal.

14. Hit the Mark

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: Relieves stress and demonstrates the power of team encouragement

Participants: All

Materials needed: Piece of paper, marker, tape (prizes optional)

Instructions: Place a poster high up on a wall. One person runs across the room and jumps up, placing a mark as high as they can. Then they are told to try again but place it higher. This continues until the person is absolutely convinced they can't reach any higher. Then the team is told they will be rewarded (ice cream, longer lunch hour, etc.) if they can get this person to make the mark higher. However, they cannot do it for the jumper and can't touch them or provide a chair or other booster — they can only do this through encouragement.

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15. Push-Push

Time: 1–2 minutes

Purpose: Releases anxiety and reinforces idea of cooperation

Participants: Partners

Materials needed: None

Instructions: Partners face each other and place hands palm to palm. Partner A is told to push as hard as possible. Next, Partner B is told not to push but to move their hands in a gentle swaying motion.

Desired outcome: When you push, others push back; when you dance, others follow your lead.

16. Ten Things I Do Well

Time: 1 or 2 minutes

Purpose: Reminds players of their personal and professional strengths

Participants: Any number of players in partner pairs

Materials needed: Paper and pen for follow-up assignment

Instructions: Each player has 15 seconds to tell their partner ten things they do well. Follow-up assignment is for each participant to make two lists: one, a list of ten things they do well professionally and the other a list of ten things they do well personally. They must take each list and post in a conspicuous place — one at home and one at work. The action plan is to read one or both lists every day — forever!

Desired outcome: Those who complete this assignment will feel a greater sense of confidence and pride within 21 days.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

17. I Admire Others

Time: A few minutes

Purpose: To develop models of behavior

Participants: Any number of players

Materials needed: Paper and pen

Instructions:

Everyone writes on a piece of paper the words, "I admire others who ...". The game now has four steps:

1. Instruct players to think of people they admire and why.
2. Give the players one minute to finish that sentence. Ask them to use positive language; for example instead of writing, "I admire others who are not negative," write "I admire others who are positive."
They are to continue to write free form for one minute without regard to punctuation, grammar, or spelling — just a constant flow of thoughts as they think of others they admire.
3. Have a few volunteers read what they wrote starting with the introductory words, "I admire others who ..."
4. Now ask that they draw a line through the words, "I admire others who ..." and insert these words: "I am powerful when I ...". Ask volunteers to read again, this time using the new introductory words.

Desired outcome: Participants understand that what they most admire in others they can do themselves. It encourages others with simplicity and ease to be the best they can be.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

18. Flower Garden Gift

Time: Half-day or longer

Purpose: Do something meaningful for others

Participants: The whole team can play

Materials needed: Varies

Instructions:

- Select a site where a garden can be planted. This could be outside the building where the team works or at a school, hospital, nursing home, playground, community center.
- Gather the necessary materials — digging tools, seeds, water, fertilizer, plant food, etc. and create a flower garden.
- Variations of this game can be painting a room, decorating a wall, serving food at a shelter, or any other deed the whole team can do together to bring joy to others.

Desired outcome: The amazing uplift one experiences when we give without thought of getting

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

19. Dress-up Monday

Time: All day!

Purpose: Change the “dreaded Monday” mentality

Participants: Everyone who chooses

Materials needed: Your best clothes

Instructions:

- Request that everyone who wishes to play should dress up in their very best outfits on Monday. Have a small celebration like coffee at the morning break; take pictures of the group; have a parade through the rest of the office; give prizes for brightest colors, longest skirt, sleekest tie, etc.
- Do this only occasionally — a couple of times a year. Every Monday is too much and detracts from the uniqueness of the event.

Desired outcome: Your team feels better about Mondays — energy and renewed interest will follow.

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20. What's in Your Treasure Box?

Time: Half to one hour

Purpose: Players realize all the things of value they have in their lives

Participants: Any number can play

Materials needed: For each player: a small box, several pieces of paper and a pen

Instructions:

- Each person writes everything they want in their life — things they have as well as things they don't yet have — but only one thing per piece of paper.
- Ask them to take ten minutes to complete but they must pretend that when they are done only things they wrote will be theirs for life. Anything they forget, they will never have. For example, if they forget to write 'good health' they will not have it in their lives. So suggest they write fast and include essentials first.
- When complete, ask them to put all pieces of paper with things they have inside their 'treasure boxes.' Their assignment is to put one action step on the back of each paper for something they don't have, which will help get it in the box.

Desired outcome: The marvelous discovery we already have much of what we truly value and clarity on how to start acquiring the rest.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

21. Ready, Set, Relax!

Purpose: Loosen up tight muscles right at your desk

Participants: Alone or all together — any number

Materials needed: None

Instructions:

Do five repetitions each of the following — all done in seated position:

Hunch up shoulders to your ears, roll them back, down, and forward making large circles.

- a. Bend your neck so that your right ear moves toward your right shoulder, straighten, move your left ear toward your left shoulder, straighten; tilt head forward until chin touches chest, straighten; head back to look at ceiling.
- b. Raise right arm over your head, bend your elbow so right hand is behind your head, and bend to the left as far as you can; repeat with left arm, hand, and side.
- c. Lift your right arm over your head and straight up; move it forward, down, and back drawing a large circle; repeat with the left arm.
- d. Squeeze your face, eyes, mouth, cheeks, making them all tight and small; now quickly open your eyes and mouth as wide as possible.

Desired outcome: Relieves tension, feels good — gets a laugh if anyone is watching!

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

22. Nerf Ball Break

Time: Seconds to minutes

Purpose: Stress reliever, team energizer

Participants: Any number of players

Materials needed: One or more nerf balls

Instructions

- Throw a nerf ball at someone. They can respond or not. You can have just one ball per team, or everyone gets one.
- A variation of this game is to throw the ball only to signal a particular event. For example if your team hates to get a certain question on a call like, "why can't I get this in green?" or every time they make a sale they get to throw a nerf ball.

Desired outcome: Adds fun, lightens up the atmosphere, and connects team members

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

23. Walk This Way

Time: 10–15 minutes

Purpose: Encourages risk

Participants: All can play — one at a time

Materials needed: Music

Instructions: Everyone stands in a room leaving a path through the middle of the group. One person at a time walks or dances through the path from one end to the other. Each person in turn must follow, but each walk or dance step must be different than any that have been done before.

Desired outcome: As one person said, “After you’ve behaved like an idiot, for the rest of the day you’ll take any risk to get the job done!”

24. Tailgate Party

Time: 1 hour plus

Purpose: Reward for job well done

Participants: Everyone

Materials needed: Food, truck, music, sports equipment

Instructions: For lunch, have a party in the parking lot using the tailgate of someone’s truck. Provide food; let the radio blast music, have Frisbees or other sports paraphernalia, and play ball!

Desired outcome: A time to relax and regenerate both mentally and physically

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

25. Contract Run

Time: 30 minutes

Purpose: Release energy

Participants: All can play — teams of five to ten

Materials needed: One to three flip charts on easels, markers

Instructions:

- Small groups take one person at a time. That person yells out a string of adjectives that describes them — must be neutral to positive. For example, “I am a smart, persuasive, effective engineer.” Or, “I am a warm, loving, happy woman.” The group must demand the highest level of energy possible.
- When the group believes the speaker is sincere, they all [the speaker surrounded by their small group] run as one unit to the other side of the room and write quickly on a flip chart what they said and sign their names.
- The group then takes the next person in the group, repeats the action, and continues until everyone has completed the process. The two critical factors of this game are speed and energy — not accuracy.
- These ‘contracts’ are then presented to each person at a follow-up meeting and can be hung in their cubicles/offices to remind the world of who they are.

Desired outcome: Fun, revealing, and good physical exercise.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

26. Time Out

Time: Takes 3 seconds

Purpose: Reverse a bad attitude

Participants: Anyone at any time

Materials needed: None

Instructions: If anyone within hearing says something negative, you make a time-out signal with your hands. But you must be sensitive to the other person's problems by smiling broadly while doing it.

Desired outcome: A simple but effective way to keep conversations positive.

27. Hula Hoop Fortune

Time: Less than a minute

Purpose: Stimulate creativity

Participants: All can play

Materials needed: Paper and pens

Instructions: Pretend you have just inherited a warehouse full of hula hoops. In 30 seconds, write what you would do with them. Share ideas when done. Now turn to the 'real' problem you're trying to solve.

Desired outcome: Breaks up tension and blocked thinking

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

28. Whaddya Know?

Time: A few seconds

Purpose: Reinforce knowledge, liven up a boring meeting

Participants: Any number can play — one at a time

Materials needed: List of questions

Instructions:

Bring a list of ten questions to a meeting. They can be questions about your business, the people you serve, your products — things your team should know but nothing too easy.

Without warning, pop a question to the group or direct it to one individual. Every correct answer gets a candy bar or some other small reward.

Desired outcome: Employees learn more about the business they are in — and meetings take on a little mystery.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

29. Wear Your Attitude

Time: A few seconds

Purpose: Encourages all to be conscious of attitudes they are displaying

Participants: Everyone can play

Materials needed: Attitude buttons

Instructions:

Have buttons or laminated cards with a variety of attitudes on them; such as happy, angry, friendly, generous, sad, worried, excellent, etc. As each person enters work, allow them to pick the attitude they would like to display. People who pick unattractive ones can be avoided and the pleasant ones will get all the smiles, encouragement, and positive attention.

Anyone can change their 'button attitude' at any time.

Desired outcome: Bring awareness about how transparent our moods are and what we get as a result.

30 Team-Building Games, Activities, and Ideas, continued

30. Purpose Mingle

Time: One minute

Purpose: Focus participants before the meeting begins

Participants: Everyone attending the meeting

Materials needed: None

Instructions:

Before the meeting begins, everyone must stand up and tell as many others as they can in one minute what they hope to contribute to the meeting.

For best results, offer a simple prize for the most people contacted and a bigger prize for the most generous contribution expressed.

Desired outcome: Allows players to think about what they will give to a meeting rather than what they will get. Encourages participation from the start.