Six Great Ice Breakers for High-Performance Groups

Description

Group sessions and workshops can be quite powerful. Whether coworkers are meeting to collaborate on a project or community leaders are coming together to brainstorm a revitalization initiative, the variety of perspectives and voices can generate some amazing ideas. But before the magic can happen, you must first get people talking and thinking creativelyâ??and that means finding a way to get them comfortable and engaged.

I have been to many events in which ice breaker exercises were used to introduce people to each other, get them reflecting and thinking creatively, or just â??warm them upâ?• so conversation will flow more freely. And when I conduct workshops in company or community settings, I rely on these activities, too. They can take the positive energy in the room to an incredible level. Today Iâ??d like to share some of the best ones Iâ??ve discovered over the years.

The Gratitude Huddle. Provide everyone a note card and have them write down something theyâ??ve been grateful for in the past week. If there are more than eight people, have them divide into smaller groups. I like to keep the groups no bigger than seven. Have them huddle up and share with those in their group what they wrote down. This quickly leads to people getting to know each other better and to feel more at ease when they go back to the task at hand. Best of all, it helps them feel more grateful. Gratitude helps us get into a positive mindset that improves our creativity, productivity, decision-making, and connection with others.

The Appreciation Papers. This exercise works best with groups who already know each other. Have each person write their name on the top of a sheet of paper. Then pass the papers around to everyone in the room. Each person will write down one thing they appreciate about the person whose name is on the top of the paper. (I tell them that if they canâ??t think of anything, they can just pass the paper alongâ??but this has never happened in my experience.) Depending on how many people are in the room, it can take a while. This is good. As the papers go around the room, you will feel the energy and sense of fun increasing.

When the papers have made it all the way around so that each person as their own paper back, give them time to read the comments. Ask everyone to share how reading the comments felt. Then discuss how easy it is to think our coworkers know how we feel. Itâ??s easy to get so busy we forget to take time to show appreciation. Have everyone take their paper with them when they leave. This exercise is fun, and it makes people feel good about themselves and each other.

The Circle of Positivity. Divide the group in half. Place chairs in a circle and have half of the people sit in a chair. Each person in the other half should stand behind someone sitting in a chair. Ask the people sitting to close their eyes. Then have the people in the back think of something positive about the person sitting in front of them and whisper it in their ear. Then have the standers move around the circle until the sitters have heard a positive comment from each of them. Then switch it up, so the people sitting are now standing and vice versa. Now the standing people will share positive comments with each person sitting in the circle.

People will be a bit anxious, and you will hear some laughter. This is fine. After the exercise is completed, have the group discuss what they felt and learned. You will hear things like, â??It felt great.â?• You will also hear from some that they were uncomfortable hearing the positives. This is a good time to discuss letting the positives in and the need to accept compliments from others.

In 1982-83 I was experiencing a very dark time in my life and sought help. I went to a therapist named Amy Storm. After a few sessions, she asked if she could share an observation. She told me that she noticed when she provided positive feedback to me, I turned to the side in my chair and overall did not accept the positive. She then said, â??You tend to filter out the positives and let in the negatives. When you do that, you feed your negative self-perception.â?• That day changed me for the better. While it was and still is difficult to accept a compliment, I realized I needed to be better at this or I would always feel bad about myself.

Do you pay more attention to the negative than the positive? Do you filter out the compliments? I find at times when I compliment someone, they will reduce the value by their own statement. They say things like, â??I could have done better,â?• or, â??Youâ??re just being nice.â?• I could provide a whole list. We hear plenty of negatives. Make a promise to yourself to not filter out the positives. The above exercise has many wins. People get energized, feel better about the others in the group, and engage in healthy conversations about receiving and giving compliments.

The Adjective Game. Ask each attendee to come up with an adjective that starts with the same letter as their first name. Then have everyone introduce themselves using that adjective: for instance, Jolly Janet, Awesome Andrew, Bodacious Barbara, Anxious Anna. Afterward, have each person share why they picked that adjective. It leads to some very good and heartfelt conversation. In my case, I introduced myself as Queasy Quint. When I explained why, I shared that I was nervous to be in the group for I did not know anyone. It made a difference.

The Job Justification. At the start of a session with a company, break people into small groups of five to seven. Have each person share why they picked the job they are doing. For example, at the beginning of the 2018 school year, I was asked to meet with education staff. Having been a teacher early in my career and having co-written the education book *Maximize Performance*in collaboration with Dr. Janet Pilcher, I enjoy being with those vital difference-makers in the schools. Each person in their group shared with the others why they chose the role they did: teaching a certain subject, working in food service, working in environmental services, doing office work, serving as speech pathologist or counselor, etc. It was a fun and positive experience.

When this is going on in a group, itâ??s evident people are learning more about each other than they had known before. Again, the energy increases. I then say, â??You can do that job elsewhere, so share why you are working here.â?• All sorts of positives come out: things that most people felt but perhaps didnâ??t say often enough. This exercise works in all settings. It leads to a great atmosphere for learning and sets a very positive tone.

The 90-Day Promise. Have each person write on a piece of paper something they are going to do for themselves in the next 90 days. It can be something that benefits them professionally, physically, or emotionally. Then have them address an envelope to their home and put their note to themselves in it. Collect the envelopes. Right before the 90 days are up, stamp the envelopes and put them in the mail. After you feel confident everyone gets their letter, have a meeting and have the group share if they had followed through. This helps people think about why they should better care for themselves and leads

to healthy conversations on the subject. Like they tell us in an airplane, when the oxygen masks drop, put yours on first and then help others. We canâ??t serve others if we donâ??t first take care of ourselves.

I hope you use some of the activities above. You will not be disappointed. When you give them a try, please drop me a note to share how they went and what you learned. If you have other ice breakers or activities that work well for you, please send them. I will share them with the readers.

My best and thank you for letting me be in your life. As always, I am grateful.

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