

Virtual Team Toolkit

Introduction

Every organization wants to succeed at their goals, achieve desired results and continuously improve. At the core of succeeding, achieving and improving are teams. Teams and teamwork have become an essential part of working environments.

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success”-Henry Ford

This proverb of Henry Ford highlights the importance of teamwork. Teamwork creates synergies; the sum of the part is greater than the individual contributions. It maximizes strengths, fosters learning and flexibility and increases motivation and employee engagement. In order to maximize the benefits of teams and teamwork, employers need to invest in team building. Team building builds trust, mitigates conflict, encourages communication, and increases collaboration.

In an era of changing organizational structures and increased work-life balance programs, traditional teams sitting in the same office are diminishing, to be replaced with geographically disbursed teams, sitting across the country or the globe. With this change brings a unique set of challenges for these virtual teams. One of which is the increased difficulty of building trust at a distance and keeping employees engaged. With this new virtual structure, many traditional team building exercises are not effective because they rely on physical interaction of the participants. Similarly, other exercises, such as meeting ice breakers and staff conferences designed to improve teaming and increase team trust and engagement, are not most effective in a virtual environment.

To address this need, our inter-agency Excellence in Government fellowship team has developed a Virtual Team Toolkit. We have modified or created ice breakers and team building activities which can be used in a virtual teaming environment and have provided ideas and considerations for executing a virtual staff conference. Finally, we have provided some general tips for managers and employees to consider when working as a virtual team. We believe the use of these tools will improve employee engagement and build trust in virtual teams.

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Ice Breakers – How to Use Them

Ice breakers typically don't take much time and are useful in kicking off a meeting. Ice breakers are effective for many different scenarios, you just need to know what ice needs to be broken. This can sometimes depend on the setting in which you are using the ice breaker. One goal might be to get to know team members in order to build trust and start to gain an understanding of individual members' background and experience.

Another way to use ice breakers is to introduce a topic you will be discussing during your meeting or activity or to bring attention to a problem you are trying to solve. To maximize the benefit of using ice breakers:

- Identify the objective or category of the ice breaker and select the right ice breaker
- Determine if your team needs to prepare for the ice breaker in advance of the meeting, if so, provide preliminary information
- Explain the ice breaker activity and make sure everyone understands how it works
- Send out any advance material in time for use in the ice breaker

Icebreaker categories include:

- Communication
- Driving Results
- Innovation
- Decision Making
- Guiding Change
- Vision

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Ice Breaker: Favorite Things

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: Ask participants to share their favorite _____. Examples include favorite food, vacation destination, sport, hobby, or holiday.

Discussion: Draw the group into the discussion, asking questions and sharing common interests.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Sharing favorites creates the beginning of an understanding of your teammates. This is a simple way to brainstorm and build team cohesion.

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Ice Breaker: First Job

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: Ask participants to share their first paid job, what they like and what they disliked about it.

Discussion: If you have a smaller group, you can ask other questions related to this, such as how it launched them into their current career.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Sharing this type of information helps break down barriers and allows team members to get to know each other better in order to work better as a team.

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Ice Breaker: One Word

Group Size: Any (break into smaller groups of 4-5)

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: Let participants know they have 10 minutes to generate and discuss a one-word list describing their leadership styles or any desired topic associated with your event/meeting. Ask for a volunteer to read his/her team list. Continue until each team has a chance to participate.

Discussion:

- Were your answers (words) similar to the other teams?
- What emotions do the words generate?
- Are the words reflective of the current or desired attributes of your office or team (applicable if you used the leadership example)?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

This is a simple way to brainstorm and build team cohesion.

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Ice Breaker: Same and Different

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: Break group into teams of 6 to 8 people. Ask participants to list something that the group has in common, and something that is unique to each person in the group. At the end of 10 minutes, ask for a volunteer from each group to read their list aloud.

Discussion:

- How do members feel about discussing their similarities and differences?
- Did any of the answers surprise you?
- What do you take away from the exercise?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- Did you encounter any barrier when communicating with your group because you don't know much about individual team members?
- What are some ways understanding similarities and differences can improve on communication?

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Ice Breaker: Sharing Photos

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes

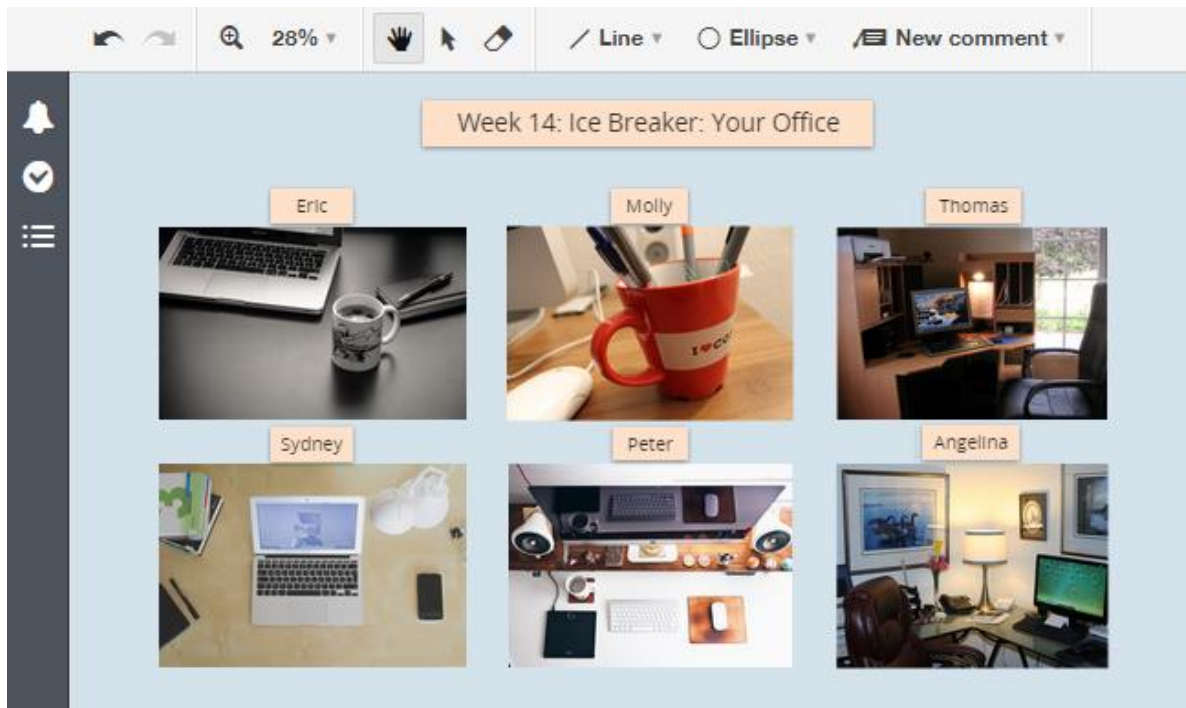
Category: Communication

Activity: Since virtual teams do not work face-to-face, sharing photos with the group is a great way to start building relationships. Participating in this exercise will give your team members an idea of your likes and dislikes, while also showing them where and how you work.

Every week the team could have a different theme.

For instance, everyone can share a picture of his or her workspace or a specific item on his or her desk. This can be a picture of an award, their favorite mug, or any item that offers meaning to him or her.

Example:



Make sure to give everyone enough time to take a picture before the meeting begins. Exploring workspaces and shared interests spark non-work related discussions that will carry over into better communication in projects and tasks.

Discussion: What were some common elements, different elements, or unique ones? What can be further explained and talked about?

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Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

This icebreaker has the team members communicating and sharing their likes as they post images for others to see. Builds understanding of the team members by getting real insight each other's likes which can be influenced by their locale.

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Ice Breaker: The Artist Game

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: Participants have 5 minutes to go to the Web and find an image or screenshot that best conveys who they are and then email it to the facilitator. The facilitator flashes each image on the screen one at a time and participants have a minute to guess to whom it relates. Each person then has a chance to explain why he or she chose that image.

Discussion: Take a few minutes to discuss.

- How would you describe good/effective communication?
- What are the greatest challenges to good communication?
- How do you encourage effective communications?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Team communication is crucial for collaboration and productivity. This activity is a good way for team members to learn more about each other.

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Ice Breaker: Time Capsule

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: In advance of the meeting, ask participants to think about the year they were born. Have them research two historical things or notable characteristics from that year to post or share at the meeting. For example, man landing on the moon or a gallon of gas costing 25 cents. If you have an advanced group you could ask them to post an audio clip of a number 1 song from that year, a graphic from a number 1 movie that year or maybe even a picture of themselves when they were young to illustrate the time period through clothes, hair style....etc. Encourage participants to get creative and use hints above and beyond basic facts. Regardless of your focus make sure team members don't actually reveal the year they were born with their initial post. It will be the job of the other participants to read the clues and try to figure it out.

Adaptations: In an online environment you could use a message board to have users complete the activity. This activity is mainly geared for teams if you have mixed age groups or people from a wide range of locations. You can adjust the user requirements based on the skill of your participants.

Discussion: If you have participants that are concerned about revealing the year they were born you can easily modify the focus of this away from a year and to a location instead. Change the title to *Where in the World* and have participants post clues to where they live or where they were born and go from there.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*) The main focus of this exercise should be getting people to start interacting and giving them a way to connect personally with one another.

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Ice Breaker: Better Listening = Better Decisions

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Decision Making

Activity: In advance of the meeting, choose a category of words for participants to practice active listening. For example, numbers, colors, places, or other words of interest falling in a specific category. Then write a 50-word paragraph about something falling into the chosen category. Active listening could be listening for numbers, colors, places or other words of interest.

During the meeting, ask participants to listen for words that fall into the chosen category. Read the paragraph and have participants share which words they heard in the category.

Here is an example:

Ask participants to listen to the following paragraph and identify words that could describe the American flag.

“Last year I went to the beach for a day. The sky was a brilliant blue over the ocean with the sandy beach glowing white. The afternoon sky turned to a red sunset that was like a picture postcard. It was the end to a perfect day!”

Active listening would pull the colors from the reading, “blue,” “red,” and “white,” the colors of the American flag.

Discussion: How often do we miss an important fact because we tune out of a conversation for whatever reason (good or bad)? Or we miss the point because the speaker may clutter the salient points with jargon or frivolous words that distract us from the real points we need to hear? And then we use this partial information to make critical decisions.

- How easy or hard was it to focus on the salient point?
- Are you confident you can maintain focus on what the speaker is saying?
- What did you do differently to be an active listener?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Focusing, taking time to hear salient points and “being here” or “showing up” can save time and lead to better decisions. When you have the correct, salient points, you can make better informed decisions.

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Ice Breaker: Cognitive Biases

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Decision Making

Activity: Briefly discuss one or more of the following cognitive biases that could impede rational decision making. This can be done as a stand-alone exercise or as a brief introduction in a series of brainstorming/decision-making meetings.

- Confirmation Bias: This is favoring information that conforms to your existing beliefs and discounting evidence that does not conform.
- Self-Serving Bias: This is the tendency to blame external forces when bad things happen and give yourself credit when good things happen. When you win a poker hand it is due to your skill at reading the other players and knowing the odds, while when you lose it is due to getting dealt a poor hand.
- Attentional Bias: This is the tendency to pay attention to some things while simultaneously ignoring others. When making a decision on which car to buy, you may pay attention to the look and feel of the exterior and interior, but ignore the safety record and gas mileage.
- Actor-Observer Bias: This is the tendency to attribute your own actions to external causes while attributing other people's behaviors to internal causes. You attribute your high cholesterol level to genetics while you consider others to have a high level due to poor diet and lack of exercise.
- Functional Fixedness: This is the tendency to see objects as only working in a particular way. If you don't have a hammer, you never consider that a big wrench can also be used to drive a nail into the wall. This could extend to people's functions, such as not realizing a personal assistant has skills to be in a leadership role.
- Anchoring Bias: This is the tendency to rely too heavily on the very first piece of information you learn. If you learn the average price for a car is a certain value, you will think any amount below that is a good deal, perhaps not searching for better deals.
- Misinformation Effect: This is the tendency for post-event information to interfere with the memory of the original event. It is easy to have your memory influenced by what you hear about the event from others. Knowledge of this effect has led to a mistrust of eyewitness information.
- False Consensus Effect: This is the tendency to overestimate how much other people agree with you.
- Optimism Bias: This bias leads you to believe that you are less likely to suffer from misfortune and more likely to attain success than your peers.

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More information can be found here: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-cognitive-bias-2794963>

Discussion:

- Do you see evidence of this cognitive bias on our team?
- How could this cognitive bias show up in our current work/problem/assignment?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Discussing cognitive biases will give participants a vocabulary to identify faulty logic or implicit biases in decision-making for themselves and the team.

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Ice Breaker: Results Based Accountability

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Decision Making

Activity: Results Based Accountability helps teams identify the role it plays in agency-wide impact by identifying specific customers who benefit from the services the team provides. Results Based Accountability asks three simple questions to get at the most important performance measures.

- 1) How much did we do?
- 2) How well did we do it?
- 3) Is anyone better off?

For this activity, first reiterate the specific Strategic Goals or Performance Goals that are applicable to your team. Then, introduce the concept of Results Based Accountability and ask each of the three questions above.

Discussion: Ask each of the three questions above, allowing time for discussion of each. Encourage open discussion and document any specific actions that are identified.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Results Based Accountability helps teams focus on whether customers are better off as a result of its services. It also encourages a deeper look at the quality and efficiency of these services.

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Ice Breaker: What Would X Do?

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Decision Making

Activity: Ask the team to imagine that they are world famous and a world problem has been handed to them by a Non-government Organization – which also announced to the media that it is their problem to deal with and solve.

Topics can be serious, such as: climate change, fossil fuel usage, mandatory fitness/exercise on a national level, or fun issues that pose a problem such as: in 10 years the coffee bean will no longer exist, therefore, we must....

The following are examples.

1. You are a famous opera singer. In four years' time the art of the opera will no longer be performed in the United States due to lack of interest. Only the Kennedy Center in Washington DC will perform opera. How can you, as a world famous opera singer, help reverse this situation?
2. You are a famous Olympian, winning 8 gold medals. The Olympics will be disbanded in six years due to a lack of funding, expense overrides and low attendance. With your fame, how can rally the public, governments and corporate donors to reanimate their interest and keep the Olympics going?

Discussion: Ask each person the following questions as time allows.

1. What options would they consider?
2. How would they plan to solve it or provide a path forward to lessen its impact?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*) This exercise shows innovative thinking and idea generation that we may not otherwise think of as “un-famous” citizens. However, from this we can learn to think outside the box to any situation and evaluate different options to make an informed decision.

For instance, when we have a *big problem* we can leverage colleagues we know of who are well connected to effect change. The paths to the top are endless and we are only limited by our own self-constraints.

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Ice Breaker: What would you do?

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Decision Making

Activity:

Create an anonymous online poll through Google Forms or other media asking the following question:

What would you do if you hit a parked car and the owner was not around?

The possible responses would be:

- A. Leave a note with your phone number
- B. Wait for the owner to return
- C. Drive away like nothing happened

Ask participants to take the poll at the beginning of the meeting. Share the results over the phone or with a visual.

Discussion:

- Did the results turn out like you expected?
- Did you answer differently than you would have if the poll had not been anonymous?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Discuss how transparency in decision-making can change results and behavior.

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Ice Breaker: Candy Love

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 Minutes (depending on how many you choose)

Category: Driving Results

Activity: Either ask each participant to choose their favorite candy or assign a specific candy to the entire group. Share the corresponding question depending on the candy chosen and then ask the participants to share their responses. These questions are primarily designed for a leadership team, but can be modified for a broader participant group.

- **Twix** - a challenge you are facing and your plans for addressing this (you might need to use a Twix from up your sleeve)
- **Snickers** – one of your best management tools (you Snicker about what a great tool it is)
- **Peanut M&M** – one thing you would like to see management do or change (a Peanut in your MM)
- **Whoppers** – a goal you have for your team (what a whopper of a year it will be)
- **M&M** - one thing you love about your job (MM, its great)

Discussion: As participants share their responses, ask all participants to consider the responses and whether there is anything they can incorporate into their jobs.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Use the session to initiate thoughts on how to drive results and improve processes, or identify processes which are working well that need to be shared more broadly.

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Ice Breaker: Fill in the Blank

Group Size: Medium

Time: 20 Minutes

Category: Driving Results

Activity: Create an information “treasure hunt” sheet with 5-10 trivia questions. Some sample questions are below. Divide participants into small groups of 3-5 people. Assign each group a separate teleconference line or webinar breakout room URL.

At the beginning of the meeting or during a break, send each group their breakout room information and the “treasure hunt” sheet. Tell participants they have up to a set time (10-20 minutes) to figure out how to divide the work of answering the questions and return with the correct answers. The team that returns to the main meeting with the correct answers first “wins”.

Discussion:

Discuss the importance of developing a plan of action before diving into the work. Ask if any teams had trouble agreeing on how to divide the work, or if teams ended up doing double work because they were not organized.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- Results are achieved faster and more efficiently when a plan is developed before moving forward

Sample trivia questions:

1. What comes up when you type 6 “A”s into the Wikipedia search bar?
2. Who is alphabetically the first state department senior official listed in the biographies on State.gov?
3. What is the FLOTUS’s birthday?

More sample questions



Trivia Ideas

Also, there are websites like <http://www.agoogleaday.com/> that have fun, searchable, trivia questions

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Ice Breaker: Left Brain/Right Brain

Group Size: Any

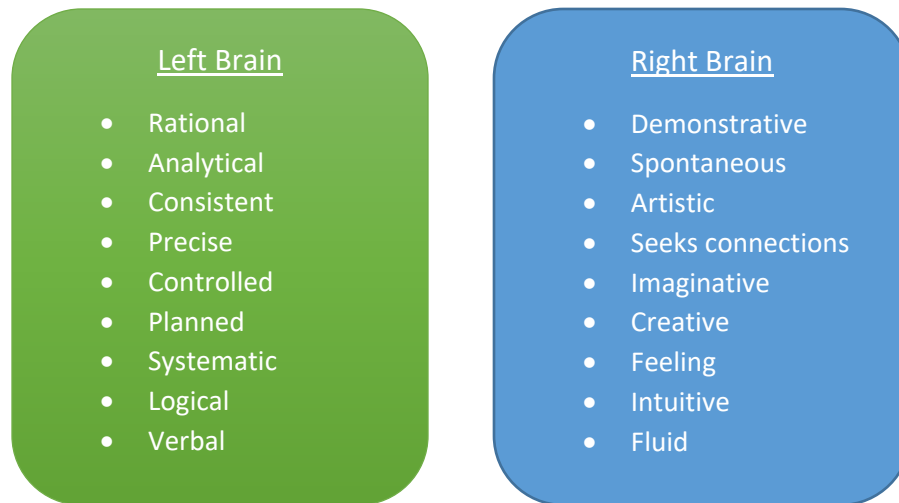
Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Driving Results

Activity: Share the following information with participants. This can be done verbally during a meeting, or the following visual can be shared prior to the meeting.

Our brains consist of two sides or hemispheres. Each side is responsible for processing different types of information. Often, people notice that the functions of one side of their brain is stronger.

Are you Left-Brained or Right-Brained?



Discussion: As participants share their responses, ask all participants to consider how having both left and right brain thinkers on the team can help drive results.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Use the session to initiate thoughts on how the team can work together and leverage each other's strengths to accomplish team goals.

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Ice Breaker: Results Show and Tell

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Driving Results

Activity: Encourage every member of the team to share something that they have accomplished recently in their personal lives. Ask that team members limit their response to two sentences. Examples:

- 1) "I recently ran five miles for the first time since college."
- 2) "I finished painting my dining room. We had been putting it off for months, but it's finally finished."
- 3) "I organized an event for my church on Saturday. It went really well!"

Optional: Encourage team members to send in a picture related to their accomplishment and compile in an email to send out before the meeting.

Discussion: Note that the skills to attain results in our personal lives are often the same as the skills to attain results in the work place. Perseverance, dedication, and a sense of purpose serve individuals in all areas of life.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Highlighting personal accomplishments can help motivate employees to achieve results in the workplace as well. It also helps colleagues get to know each other better, and potentially work better as a team. This exercise could also serve as an opportunity to remind team members about the types/quality of results that the team is looking for.

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Ice Breaker: Round Robin Recognition

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 Minutes

Category: Driving Result

Activity: At the beginning of a virtual staff meeting, everyone shares two shout-outs: one for something amazing he or she did the past week, and one for something amazing another team member did. The acknowledgment can be as simple as staying on top of email correspondence, assisting with a project, or providing feedback on an assignment, etc. The important thing is setting aside time to acknowledge contributions made to the team.

Discussion:

- What motivates you to go above and beyond at work?
- What is your most recent accomplishment at work?
- Has a manager given you any recognition in the past month?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- What are some other ways to boost team morale?
- How did each team member feel about receiving his/her compliments?
- How do you encourage driving results?

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Ice Breaker: Can You Guess?

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Guiding Change

Activity: Assign one group member or an outside party to be the facilitator for this activity. Ask participants to email a “little known fact” about themselves that the rest of the group does not know to the facilitator before the meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator should pick someone in the group to go first. Have the facilitator read one of the facts aloud and that person then tries to guess the author’s identity, as well as provide a reason for the guess. If the person guesses correctly, the facilitator picks another person to guess and the process repeats. If they guess incorrectly, the facilitator gives everyone else a chance to guess. If no one guesses correctly, then the author of the secret must reveal who he or she is.

Discussion: Discuss the assumptions people made about the “owners” of the secret facts when making their guesses. Discuss how assumptions about people’s personalities and traits can impact a leader’s ability to guide those people through change. Discuss the importance of understanding your group and their personalities when guiding a group through change.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

- People are not one-dimensional and often their multiple dimensions are not on display at work
- Change management requires a good understanding of the people in the group you are leading through a change
- Leading change requires multiple approaches and practices to be successful

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Ice Breaker: Cross your Arms

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Guiding Change

Activity: After the introduction of the “change” subject, ask the participants to “cross their arms.” Define “crossed” as folding their arms together, as if they were bored or waiting for something. Once they have completed this task, ask them to “fold their arms the other way,” reversed of what they just performed. Listen for laughter or grumblings of the difficulty in switching arms. This can be done with people on camera to capture facial expressions if the meeting is online and fairly small.

Discussion:

- How did it feel when you were asked to cross your arms the other way? Did it come naturally or did you have to stop and think about it?
- Were you comfortable with doing this differently from your normal process?

When people cross their arms, they do so naturally, without even thinking about it. When they are asked to fold them the other way they will stop, refold their arms again and then try to figure out which arm was on top, which arm moves first and so on. Ask participants to share their own personal emotions related to making changes.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- What are some things that make people resistant to change?
- What can you do to make it easier for people in your organization to accept the change?
- How do we make people comfortable when their current way of doing things is so natural to them?
- What kind of support is necessary to maintain the changes that will be made?

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Ice Breaker: How to Change the World

Group Size: Any

Time: 5 Minutes

Category: Guiding Change

Activity: Watch the video “How to Change the World (a work in progress), Kid President” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z7gDsSKUmU>); recommend watching the first 2:15 minutes of the video

Discussion: Discuss the fact we are not trying to change the world, but everyone does have a responsibility to make sure the change we are attempting is successful. We can complain about the current situation or let people with titles make the change, but to be successful, everyone in the organization needs to do their part.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Change can be small or large and if we want improvement, we need to be part of the change.

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Ice Breaker: Positive and Negative

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Guiding Change

Activity:

Using a list of change-related words (see examples below), create an online poll that shows participants each word one at a time (Most webinar software will allow this feature). Ask participants to vote whether the term is a positive or a negative consequence of change. Then, share the poll results online with the group.

Discussion:

Ask the group these questions:

1. Does everyone agree?
2. Are the results split? Why might this be?

Open the floor to discuss each word's positive or negative connotations and why. Guide the discussion to focus on intuitive reactions towards change and how it might be possible to regard change in a more positive light.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

This exercise is great for groups to understand their intuitive reactions to change and that collectively they have the power to choose a positive attitude towards change. Allowing time for a thorough discussion of each term will also give employees the opportunity to express their concerns and shed light on what management can expect.

Sample Change Word List:

PLAN	COMMUNICATION	RESISTANCE
RESTART	IMPLEMENTATION	SUCCESSFUL
TEAM	RESTRUCTURE	EVOLUTION
IMPROVEMENT	PROCESS	NEW DIRECTION
CANCEL	MODERNIZATION	TECHNOLOGY
LEADERSHIP	STRATEGY	DIGITAL
ASSESSMENT	VISION	TRANSFORMATION
UNCERTAIN	INITIATIVE	GROWTH

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Ice Breaker: Create a Holiday

Group Size: All

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Everyone loves a Federal Holiday, usually we earn paid time off and we can recharge a day to hit the ground running when back at work. This exercise is a good one to do right after we have had a holiday.

A day before the meeting send an email to each team member and ask them to choose a topic -- and make it a holiday, giving it a name and date.

For this exercise do not choose a person; keep the subject of your holiday to a favored idea, social cause or concept that everyone can experience in a positive why.

Ask some team members or all, depending on the size of your group to share their holidays.

Discussion:

- What is the subject of your holiday? Why did you choose it?
- Why choose these dates/times?
- Is it a day off work, or a day to work? Why?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

This exercise shows *innovative thinking*, to go beyond the obvious selection of an admired person. How each member arrived at their concept and date should be interesting!

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Personal Scavenger Hunt

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: In advance of the activity, ask participants to e-mail three personal things about themselves to the facilitator. At the conference call or meeting, the facilitator display a unique clue for each person on the screen. Ask the participants to identify the team member who fits each scavenger clue description (youngest worker, worker with the most siblings, worker with the most pets, and so on). This allows everyone to know each other better on a personal level.

Discussion:

- What was the most surprising facts that you learn about your coworkers?
- What is your takeaway from this exercise?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

This is a good way for team members to learn something personal about their peers.

- What are some ways you encourage innovations?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breakers – The Time Machine

Ice Breaker: The Time Machine

Group Size: Small

Time: 20 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Ask the following question to the group: "If you were able to travel backward through time:

- Where would you go?
- To which time period? Why?

Discussion: If time allows, ask the following additional questions:

- If there was a person you could go back in time and meet, who would it be, and why?
- Would you just want to visit and come back, or would you stay?"

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

- How do you encourage creativity and innovation?

Additional Consideration: If you have participants that are concerned about revealing the year they were born you can easily modify the focus of this away from a year and to a location instead. Change the title to "Where in the World" and have participants post clues to where they live or where they were born and go from there. The main focus should be getting people to start interacting and giving them a way to connect personally with one another.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Two Truths and a Lie

Group Size: Any

Time: 20 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Ask participants to list three interesting things about themselves, two true facts and one lie (in any order). These could include hobbies, things they own, past experiences, places they have gone, or people they have met, and so on. After a team member reads all three statements, the group has to guess which fact is actually a fib. The person reveals which item is untrue (this is your lie). This goes on until each person gets a turn. It is up to your group if you wish to keep score and see who correctly guesses the lies, or just play for fun to get to know each other.

Discussion:

- What are some interesting facts that you learn about your team?
- Were there any similarities?
- Were you surprised to find that some people's truths are more unbelievable than their lie?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- When trying to be creative, do you practice guided imagery so you can see a concept come to life or do you let your ideas "incubate" by taking a break from them?
- Did the requirement to come up with a lie cause you to think differently about the subject?
- How do you build team cohesion?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Who said that?

Group Size: Any

Time: 5 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Create a poll on the shared drive that has several famous quotes about how future innovations would be impossible. Give several possible answer choices and ask participants to vote for their choice.

Some examples are below.

Discussion: Discuss the assumptions of the speakers about further innovation and how those were incorrect. Discuss how quickly the impossible became possible in terms of years or even months.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

- How do we overcome the critics that assume we cannot achieve our goals?
- How do we inspire others to share our confidence in our new innovations and success?
- What strategies can we use to allow for open and free innovation within our team to make sure no ideas are left off the table?

Some possible questions/answers:

1. Question: Who said “There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in his home?”
 - a. Steve Jobs
 - b. [Ken Olson](#), president, chairman and founder of [Digital Equipment Corporation](#) (DEC), 1977 - Correct
 - c. National Computer Week
2. Question: Who said “No one will need more than 640 kilobytes of memory for a personal computer.”
 - a. Stanley Kubrick
 - b. Bill Gates (1981) – correct but unverified
 - c. Jim Harris, one of the founders of Compaq Computer
3. Question: Who said "This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us."
 - a. *Western Union internal memo, 1876.- correct*
 - b. US Government memo
 - c. US Post Office memo

Virtual Team Toolkit

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Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Aliens Have Landed

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: Tell the group to imagine aliens have landed on Earth and want to learn about your agency and/or product. But since they don't speak English or understand your product, it needs to be explained with 3 symbols or pictures. Ask each participant to email or post to a share drive 3 simple images to the team that best describe and communicate your agency's product and culture.

Discussion: Take a few minutes and look at all the images. Are there common themes?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

This icebreaker can be useful for teams with remote participants with language and cultural differences. The purpose of this exercise is to challenge team member's ability to creatively describe your agency and/or product to external partners, which in turn will reinforce their understanding of the agency vision.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Making Connections

Group Size: Medium

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: Ask participants to state their names and something interesting about themselves. They will have to connect their interesting fact to the person that preceded them. For example, Mary says “I like to cook”. John goes next and says “I like to raise vegetables”.

The host or facilitator begins the meeting by explaining the Ice Breaker theme and then either introduces themselves first, or calls on someone to go first. The facilitator should then call on participants randomly in turn to state their names and an interesting and related fact.

Discussion: Talk about how each member is connected to the vision of the team through the work they are doing.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

The purpose of this exercise is to get participants thinking about making connections between the team members and to the team vision and mission.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Mission Word Game

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: The leader of the meeting picks a letter of the alphabet. Then, the leader gives team members 2 or 3 minutes to think of a word beginning with that letter that relates to the team's mission and/or objectives. The leader could also choose to have the team members choose words related to the mission of the agency or the team's division.

Example (specifics relate to a team working on agency internal procedures):

Leader: Today we are going to start with an exercise to get us thinking creatively about our team's mission and objectives. Everyone take 2 or 3 minutes to think of a word that begins with the letter T that relates to our mission. For example, I would choose the word "transform" because we are transforming the procedures on internal reports to be more streamlined and intuitive.

Leader (after 2-3 minutes): Okay, let's go around and share our words and why we chose them.

Team Member 1: I chose the word "teach" because, once we develop new procedures, we are responsible for training the staff on the new processes.

Team Member 2: I chose the word "translate" because we are translating abstract concepts from our agency's strategic objectives and performance goals into procedures that the agency staff can use.

Team Member 3: I chose the word "trust" because the rest of the agency trusts us to make procedures that are intuitive and don't place undue burden on them.

Discussion: *Note for Leader: Keep the exchange light-hearted and recognize creative thinking whenever possible.

- Which word was the most surprising or creative?
- Did any of the words describe aspects of our mission or objectives that we could improve on?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

- This exercise gives team members a chance to think about how the team objectives relate to the mission. By choosing a specific letter, team members will likely have to think about many of the team objectives before being able to think of a word that begins with that letter.
- This exercise also encourages creative thinking, so it could be fitting introduction to a brainstorming meeting.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: One Word Vision

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: The one word icebreaker can be used without a lot of preparation, and moves quickly. Break the team into small groups and ask them to brainstorm ideas in the form of one word that describes how their team fits into the overall organizational vision. An online tool for mind mapping would work well. Or, they can use an online whiteboard solution or even a shared Google document. For teams without a lot of time, this icebreaker does double duty. It acts as a fun and interactive icebreaker but it also kicks off the brainstorming session. Choose a word aligned with the meeting goals, such as the product itself, or the solution it is trying to provide. Ask the team to reconvene and share their answers. The variety of one word answers will be enlightening.

Discussion: After the groups reconvene, ask one or two of the following questions.

- 1) Did your team come up with any unexpected answers?
- 2) Did your team build on each other's words?
- 3) Was this activity harder or easier than you expected?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*).

Discussion of the mission or solution that the team is working towards helps clarify the vision.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Shared Vision

Group Size: Any

Time: 5 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: Let everyone know you are going to be asking them 6 questions and they need to write down the correct answer from two options.

1. Red or orange
2. Green or blue
3. Horizontal or Vertical
4. Stars or planets
5. 50 or 500
6. Fly or drive

Request participants to share their answers, then provide the correct responses.

Discussion:

- Does anyone know what all of the correct responses relate to? (The American Flag)
- How did you feel answering the questions?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- When trying to achieve a goal, do you, as a leader share the vision/goal you are trying to achieve, or do you simply assign tasks?
- Do you work with your team to develop a shared vision/goal?
- How do each of your team members and yourself contribute to the ultimate vision/goal?
- Can each team member articulate the vision/goal?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Shared Vision (Option 2)

Group Size: Any

Time: 5 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: Let everyone know you are going to be asking them 6 questions and they need to write down the correct answer from two options.

7. Tall or Short
8. Third or Sixteenth
9. Illinois or Maryland
10. North or South
11. Mount Rushmore or the Grand Canyon
12. Top Hat or Ball Cap

Request participants to share their answers, then provide the correct responses.

Note: This exercise is similar in format to the American Flag shared vision exercise. However, if the group has already seen the American Flag exercise they can still participate in this version as a reminder of the importance of a shared vision.

Discussion:

- Does anyone know what all of the correct responses relate to? (Abraham Lincoln)
- How did you feel answering the questions?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- When trying to achieve a goal, do you, as a leader share the vision/goal you are trying to achieve, or do you simply assign tasks?
- Do you work with your team to develop a shared vision/goal?
- How do each of your team members and yourself contribute to the ultimate vision/goal?
- Can each team member articulate the vision/goal?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Train of Thought

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: Provide a subject matter to the group (a problem you are trying to solve, a leadership trait, goals, etc.) Let everyone know that the time limit is 1 minute to come up with the answers. Ask for a volunteer or select an employee to start. The first participant can choose any random letter of the alphabet, and provide a word beginning with that letter associated with the subject matter you identified. The next person can choose any word that begin with the last letter of the previous word. Continue this until everyone has had a chance to participate.

Discussion:

- How did you feel about coming up with words spontaneously?
- While waiting for your turn, did any of the answer surprise you?
- Did you build from the prior words given or come up with a new word?
- Were the words chosen active, passive, etc.?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

- When trying to develop ideas or brainstorm, do you come up with organic solutions or do you stay with trusted ones?
- Did the requirement to come up with a word given a specific letter cause you to think differently about the subject?
- How do you encourage creativity and innovation?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Ice Breaker: Word Clues

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: At the meeting, display the pictures below on the screen. Ask the participants to come up with the answers, either by recording the answers on instant message or verbally saying them.

Discussion:

- How many did you answered correctly?
- Did any of the answers surprise you?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

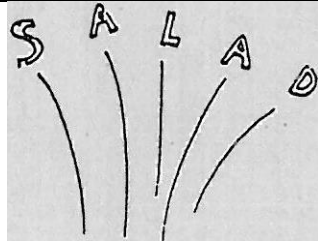

This is a game. The correct answers are below:

Line 1: Mixed Bag; Face in the Crowd; Life after Death

Line 2: Bermuda Triangle; Split Pea Soup, Hole in One

Line 3: Knee High; Tossed Salad, Deep Sea Fishing

Line 4: Backward Glance; a Step Above; Scattered Shower

agb	CR ☺ WD	DEATH LIFE
B A E D U M R	SOUP	OHOLENE
<u>KNEE</u> LIGHT		FISHING C
ECNALG	STEP — STEP STEP — STEP STEP	 S O E S H W R

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activities – How to Use Them

Team building activities are more of an investment in time and can take from 30 minutes to a couple of hours, depending on the objective you are trying to achieve. The goal of team building activities is to improve the interactions of the team, increase trust and motivate team members. Similar to icebreakers, team building activities should be selected to meet the desired goal.

To maximize the benefit of using team building activities:

Identify the objective or category of the activity and select the right team building activity

- Determine if your team needs to prepare for the activity in advance of the meeting, if so, provide preliminary information – email materials well in advance
- Explain the activity and make sure everyone understands how it works
- Make notes of things that happened during the activity so you can discuss them either as part of the application/learning check or later in the meeting
- While checking on the learning, ask questions
- Build upon the activity throughout the meeting or at other points in the job to receive the full benefits of the team building activity

There are some things to remember when conducting virtual team building activities. Remember, not everyone is in the room, so make sure they have all the materials you have. Make sure you are adjusting the activity to accommodate the size of group you have and the number of locations. Do you need more time to gather everyone's input?

Teambuilding categories include:

- Communication
- Driving Results
- Innovation
- Decision Making
- Guiding Change
- Vision

Virtual Team Toolkit

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Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: A Picture is Worth 1,000 Words

Group Size: Medium

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: While one picture can do a lot, could it describe your entire day? How about part of your day? We're about to find out.

You and two partners are each going to take one picture that encapsulates part of your morning, afternoon and evening. Take one picture for each portion that will completely sum up that part of your day. When you reconvene, put all the pictures in a PowerPoint and invite someone not in the group to try to put the three pictures in order for each person.

Discussion: Is a picture truly worth 1,000 words? Was it hard to pick a picture to describe the whole day/part of your day? Did you learn anything about your peers that you did not know prior?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*
Although one picture *(if carefully selected)* can tell a person's story or part of a story, additional communication is always helpful to provide clarity.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Active Listening

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: Before the meeting, divide your team members into groups of 4. Assign a separate call-in number to each small group so they can have a private conversation once the activity begins.

At the beginning of the meeting, introduce the concepts of listening to people in three different ways: What they say (technical listening), what emotion they convey (emotional listening), and their implied intention (directional listening).

Tell the participants they will each think of a current issue or problem they are dealing with and their task is to tell the other small group members about this problem in 5 minutes or less. This should be timed.

The other three people will listen to the speakers from one of the three ways mentioned above. Listening for technical details means only listening for the facts of the information being conveyed. Emotional listening means trying to determine the emotional state of the speaker. Intentional listening means trying to determine the intention of the speaker regarding what solutions they want or how they are hoping the problem resolves itself. The listeners should not take notes of any kind; just remember as much as they can.

After the speaker is finished each listener should report to the speaker what they heard from their different listening perspectives.

The participants then switch roles until all participants have been the speaker and the different types of listener.

Discussion: After the small group discussions are completed, the entire group should re-dial the main teleconference number to have a group discussion. Topics of discussion should include:

How did listening from different perspectives affect the message received?

Did the speakers gain any insight to their problem based on the different listeners' perspectives? For example, did they realize a problem was causing more emotional pain than they realized?

What difficulties did the listeners encounter trying to focus on one aspect of the speaker's words? Was it hard to concentrate? How much more difficult is it to "read" emotion over the phone?

Did the participants find it difficult to listen actively without taking notes? How might this skill translate to a meeting?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

This activity strengthens your team members' listening skills. Listening is an incredibly important part of good communication, and it's a skill that people often ignore in team activities. This activity also shows them how to pay attention to different aspects of people's communication and to help the listener find non-verbal motivation and meaning even in a virtual conversation. This exercise helps the team explore the benefits of active listening. It also highlights the challenges to active listening in a virtual environment.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Elephant in the Room

Group Size: Any

Time: 30 Minutes (or longer depending on group size)

Notes: The exercise requires webinar technology or other screen sharing methods

Category: Communication

Activity: This exercise addresses the difficult issues an established team is facing and teaches team members how to discuss them openly and productively. This exercise requires a facilitator. The facilitator should be from outside the team and will need to reassure participants that they can participate fully in a safe, trusting environment.

Prior to the meeting/call, create a mechanism for collecting virtual messages from the team, either using an email inbox, SharePoint site, or other virtual collection mechanism like instant messages. At the beginning of the call, explain these objectives of the exercise to the team: to create an environment of open communication, to identify any obstacles or problems that the team faces, and to help the team move forward on projects or initiatives while openly discussing potential "elephants in the room."

1. Explain that you will address each elephant using the principles of Control-Influence-Accept (CIA). This means deciding whether they are issues that the participants have Control over, that they can Influence, or that they need to Accept.
2. Tell participants to begin uploading their first "elephant" to the collection site and give your team members five minutes to submit it. They should also indicate whether they perceive their elephant is C (Control), I (Influence) or A (Accept).
3. Have the facilitator collect the elephants, read them aloud one by one, then record them on a webinar software whiteboard or discussion site as either C, I or A.

Discussion: Decide as a group whether the elephants really are issues that just have to be accepted, and agree on whether any of the C or I elephants are actually an elephants. Then, let the A-list elephants go. Agree as a team to accept them.

Tackle C and I elephants in open conversations, and try to come up with solutions or action items. Look at each elephant through the "4 Ws." Why are we doing this, or why is this happening? What are we doing about it? Who can resolve this issue? When can we resolve this?

Have the facilitator collect all the responses, A, C and I, and any solutions or action items. Provide this feedback to the team so they can refer to it during future discussions.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

This exercise fosters open communication on a team. It teaches team members to be open to each other's ideas, helps communicate different perspectives on an issue, and helps teams learn to work through problems, even those that seem unsolvable on first glance.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Fortunately/Unfortunately

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: The leader starts with a simple sentence that sets a scenario. Then each group member takes a turn to add to the story. The kicker is that players alternate starting their sentence with either “Fortunately...” or “Unfortunately.” This works best with an odd number of players so members can play both good and bad. It might sound like this:

Leader: Johnny raced across the parking lot to his prized cherry-red Camaro. He had only minutes to make it to his job interview.

Player 1: Unfortunately, when he reached the car, he realized that he had left the keys inside, and the doors were locked.

Player 2: Fortunately, his car was a convertible, and the top was down. Johnny jumped in, turned the key, and the engine roared to life....

Discussion:

- Was there a common “unfortunately” thread running through the scenario?
- Were there common “positives” that trumped the “unfortunately?”
- Did the “unfortunately” sentences inspire forward thinking “fortunately” responses?
- Did this exercise reinforce the positive, in the end?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

This is a quick thinking exercise, most times in critical meetings we do not have all the time in the world to react to surprise thoughts or problems freshly laid out. The important lesson here is to listen attentively but also have quick and concise answers ready.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Learning Styles

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: First, email the questionnaire and instructions from slide 6 to the participants. Then capture the information and populate into slide 9 for the teambuilding session.

Discussion: Lead the presentation of the information regarding learning styles and have a team discussion focusing on slides 19 and 20 regarding the challenges of each learning style and things each team member can do to overcome these challenges.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Consider the ways each team member can interact with each other. Knowing the learning styles and communication preferences of each team member consider the following questions.

Should discussions have more visual aids?

Do some team members benefit from more formal communication such as emails?



Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Lightning Round

Group Size: Small

Time: 5 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: Near the end of a meeting the Manager can ask each member to state, “it is my opinion we” and state an action, concern or opinion about the project, the meeting, of the process of the meeting to share what your thoughts are at that moment. Keep it simple, concise and descriptive.

Manager has each participant in alphabetical order or just call out the name of each to state for the group “it is my opinion we”:

EXAMPLE:

It is my opinion we make these meetings shorter.

It is my opinion these meetings should circulate pre-agenda input.

It is my opinion we need to have longer Q&A time at the end.

Discussion:

- Team members can speak freely, give comments, opinion or suggest direction.
- Choose salient points from team members and discuss further, build on comments with further explanations or solutions that can perhaps resolve underlying issues.

Application/Learning Check: (*What can we derive from this exercise?*) A great tool to get team members involved who may not often speak up; this activity allows each team member to take the public square to make a statement, offer an opinion and to be heard.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Most Proud Moment

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: The accomplishments we attain as children and young adults are often quite significant. These life experiences shaped our sense of responsibilities, problem solving, and even leadership skills. We may think of knocking on doors and asking for five bucks to cut the grass, shovel the drive, feeding horses, painting fences, or maybe being the ultimate entrepreneur by just setting up a lemonade stand on a hot summer day and turning a profit. We are unsung working heroes of our youth!

Describe a working experience you had before you could work for a wage (about 16 years old):

- Think of a chore, job you did to make extra money,
- What was the job in detail?
- Who hired you to perform the work?
- Was there ever someone famous or a VIP you did this for?
- Did your business grow, did word get around?
- Share anything about the experience, especially if you impressed yourself with the accomplishment.

Examples:

- **GOLF CADDY:** About age 12 I caddied (carried golf bags) at Hawthorne Country Club for Teamster President Jackie Press and Art Gallo (heir to Gallo Wines) - paid \$10 per bag for 18 holes, going rate was \$6 per bag in 1979.
-
- **AUTOGRAPH SALES:** Had season tix to Cleveland Indians baseball games, got autographs from players after the game and sold them at school. Johnny Bench and Ray Fosse were two I remember selling for \$5 each.

Discussion: After each team member shares, ask the any of the following question.

- Why did you do this?
- Were you scared?
- Did you succeed?
- What did your parents or guardians say? Did they encourage you?
- Was your mission against the odds?
- Can you push yourself today to perform with the same unknown results (e.g., knocking on doors)?
- Did you celebrate your success?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Application/Learning Check: (*What can we derive from this exercise?*) In virtual teams we work towards goals of the bigger organization and often perform our best to meet the expectations of our project's deliverable. This exercise should remind the team how we were able to think innovatively before we even knew we were doing so. It shows we can be proactive and not be afraid of failure.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: On the Way to Work

Group Size: Any

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Communication

Activity: We typically do not talk about what we do on the weekend's other than a quick "had a great weekend, thanks, how was yours?" during Monday morning exchanges. Not only on weekends but virtually every day we witness wonderful acts of random kindness towards one another that usually go unsaid.

Take the first five minutes before starting the agenda to talk about notable random acts of kindness we have just witnessed over the weekend or on our way to work. Talk about what you did to help someone or if you saw another individual helping someone else.

For example:

- "On the metro this morning I saw a young boy help a woman onto the train and even making sure there was a seat available for her."
- "While getting my coffee this morning at a "Mom and Pop Shop" I frequent I was told no charge for my coffee and muffin, the clerk said "the guy in the back is buying for the first 50 people this morning."

Discussion: This exercise helps the team to understand a little more about each other's life experiences outside of their job; and, what they value. It shows that each of us has compassion and are able to see the good in the world. The activity leads others to share positive personal experiences and how we impact situations to make them better and/or friendlier.

Application/Learning Check: (*What can we derive from this exercise?*) Are these personal experiences independent of work situations? As we work together as a team can we provide random acts of kindness to each other, offering help or guidance to each other to move the project forward?

Virtual Team Toolkit

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Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: CFC Highlight

Group Size: Any

Time: 15 Minutes

Category: Decision Making

Activity: The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is the world's largest and most successful, annual workplace charity campaign, with almost 200 CFC campaigns throughout the country and overseas raising millions of dollars each year. Pledges made by Federal civilian, postal and military donors during the campaign season (September 1st to December 15th) support eligible non-profit organizations that provide health and human service benefits throughout the world.

Prior to the meeting, ask team members to think of a charitable cause that is important to them. Examples could include the environment, medical research, mental health, etc. Ask team members to look on the CFC website (<https://cfcgiving.opm.gov/offerings>) to find one charity that focuses on that cause. Reiterate that they don't actually have to support the charity through the CFC; this is just an exercise to learn about each other, the general benefits of the CFC.

Ask each team member to share their cause, why it is important to them, and the CFC charity that they found. Alternatively, you could have one person share at the beginning of each of a series of meetings. Note that the CFC season runs from September through December, so this exercise would be particularly helpful during that time.

Feel free to contact a CFC Keyworker at your agency to provide more detail about the CFC.

Discussion:

- Discuss the decision-making process that team members used to choose their cause and charity.
 - Why did you choose a cause? If you considered several, how did you narrow down to one option?
 - What factors did you consider when choosing a charity to highlight?
- Encourage discussion after each person shares by asking specific questions about the causes/charities. For example:
 - Has this cause always been important to you?
 - Had you heard about this charity before?
 - What areas does this charity work in?
 - Were there any similarities between the causes or charities that the team members picked?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- Discussing team members' decision-making process allows a deeper understanding of choosing specific criteria for narrowing down many options.
- Even though this exercise is designed to give visibility to the CFC (not necessarily to get team members to contribute to any particular charity), these types of conversations can deepen employee relationships and increase engagement.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Listening to Make Good Decisions

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Decision Making

Activity: How often do we miss an important fact because we tune out of a conversation for whatever reason (good or bad), or miss the point because the speaker may clutter the salient points with jargon or frivolous words that distract us from the real points we need to hear and know?

Have one person in advance of the meeting write a 50-word paragraph about something unrelated to the work you are doing. Active listening could be listening for numbers, colors, places or other words of interest. Instruct one person to focus on a subject of his or her interest.

HOW: One person reads their paragraph. The reader will hint first that the team should listen for words *that could describe the American flag*:

Last year I went to the beach for a day. The sky was a brilliant blue over the ocean with the sandy beach glowing white. The afternoon sky turned to a red sunset that was like a picture postcard. It was the end to a perfect day!

Active listening would pull the colors from the reading, “blue,” “red,” and “white,” or, red, white and blue, which, is the color of the American flag.

Discussion:

- How easy or hard was it to focus on the salient point?
- Are you confident you can maintain focus on what the speaker is saying?
- What did you do differently to be an active listener?
- How does your ability to listen and understand the content affect your ability to make a good decision?

Application/Learning Check: (*What can we derive from this exercise?*) Remember, to make a good decision you need to ensure you have all relevant facts. In order to do this, you need to focus, take time to hear salient points and “be present” or “show up”. Listen, process and move forward with a good decision.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Lost at Sea

Group Size: Any (a large group could be broken up into several smaller groups)

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Decision Making

Activity: One person not participating will need to facilitate and provide the instructions and make observations to share with the group later. Email each individual in the group the list of items once you initiate the activity.



15 Items Available

Instructions: You were on a chartered yacht in the Atlantic Ocean and the captain and crew have been taken by pirates. You and three friends were left behind. In the aftermath of the fighting, you realize the yacht is slowly sinking. Your location is unclear because the navigation and radio equipment was damaged. You are, however, hundreds of miles away from landfall. You have managed to save 15 items the pirates didn't loot. In addition, you have access to a four person rubber life raft and a box of matches.

You must decide which items are most important to you and rank them. First rank them individually; then discuss as a group and rank them. The 15 items are: a sextant, a shaving mirror, a quantity of mosquito netting, a 5 gallon container of water, a case of army rations, maps of the Atlantic Ocean, a floating seat cushion, a 10 liter can of oil/gas mixture, a small transistor radio, 20 square feet of opaque plastic sheeting, a can of shark repellent, one bottle of 160% proof rum, 15 feet of nylon rope, 2 boxes of chocolates, an ocean fishing kit with pole.

The facilitator should provide a 5 minute warning. If you have broken out into smaller teams, have each team summarize their answers for the others. Or the facilitator can lead a discussion using the prompts below.

Discussion: Provide the team the following information: According to the US Merchant Marine, the basic supplies needed when a person is stranded mid-ocean are articles to attract attention and aid survival until rescue arrives. So the list of items in order of importance are:

- (1) Shaving mirror – critical for signaling air-sea rescue
- (2) 10 gallon can of oil/gas mixture – critical for signaling; the mixture will float on water and can be ignited using the matches
- (3) 5 gallon can of water – will supply water for several days
- (4) case of army rations – this is your basic food intake

Virtual Team Toolkit

- (5) 20 square feet of opaque plastic sheeting – could use to collect rain water and shelter from wind and waves
- (6) 2 boxes of chocolates – reserve food supply
- (7) fishing kit with pole – ranked lower than chocolates as there is no guarantee you will catch any fish
- (8) 15 feet of nylon rope – could be used to lash people or equipment together to prevent being washed overboard
- (9) floating seat cushion – useful as life preserver
- (10) can of shark repellent – to repel sharks
- (11) one bottle of 160% proof rum – Can be used as antiseptic; will cause dehydration if ingested
- (12) small transistor radio – you would be out of range of radio stations
- (13) maps of the Atlantic Ocean – worthless without navigation equipment
- (14) quantity of mosquito netting – there are no mosquitoes in the middle of the ocean, netting not useful for anything else
- (15) Sextant – useless without the relevant tables and chronometer

Now summarize the group score versus individual scores. If part of a larger group, compare various group scores. Did the group come to a better answer than most individuals? How did the group interact to reach a decision? Was the method effective? Was there a clear leader? What level of negotiation/team building took place in the discussions?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

When making decisions, oftentimes having a collective body of knowledge will help the overall group reach a better decision. But in the process, does the decision making take more time? Is the additional time available? Is there better group buy-in when others are part of the process? Overall, there is a balance to including more individuals in the decision making process and the leadership needs to assess which stakeholders should be a part of the decision making.

The discussion could also focus on whether the right goals were considered when making decisions. Did the teams determine their goal was to get rescued or to survive? An analogy could be made comparing this exercise to allocation of resources during planning processes or other similar topics.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Six Thinking Hat Model

Group Size: Large; Teams of six

Time: 1 Hour

Category: Decision Making

Activity: You can use Six Thinking Hats in meetings or on your own. In meetings, it has the benefit of preventing any confrontation that may happen when people with different thinking styles discuss a problem, because every perspective is valid. Each "Thinking Hat" is a different style of thinking. These are explained below:

- **White Hat:** with this thinking hat, you focus on the available data. Look at the information that you have, analyze past trends, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and try to either fill them or take account of them.
- **Red Hat:** "wearing" the Red Hat, you look at problems using your intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Also, think how others could react emotionally. Try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.
- **Black Hat:** using Black Hat thinking, look at a decision's potentially negative outcomes. Look at it cautiously and defensively. Try to see why it might not work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan. It allows you to eliminate them, alter them, or prepare contingency plans to counter them.

Black Hat thinking also helps to make your plans "tougher" and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. It's one of the real benefits of this model, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that they often cannot see problems in advance. This leaves them under-prepared for difficulties.

- **Yellow Hat:** this hat helps you to think positively. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it. Yellow Hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.
- **Green Hat:** the Green Hat represents creativity. This is where you develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas.
- **Blue Hat:** this hat represents process control. It's the hat worn by people chairing meetings, for example. When facing difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into Green Hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for Black Hat thinking.

Discussion: A variant of this technique is to look at problems from the point of view of different professionals (for example, doctors, architects or sales directors) or different customers.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Participants are expected to learn that when we examine all options from numerous viewpoints, the team has a much more detailed picture of possible outcomes, and can make their decision accordingly.

An Example of Six Hat Thinking The directors of a property company are considering whether they should build a new office block. The economy is doing well, and the vacant office spaces in their city are being snapped up. As part of their decision-making process, they adopt the Six Thinking Hats technique.

Wearing the White Hat, they analyze the data that they have. They can see that the amount of available office space in their city is dwindling, and they calculate that, by the time a new office block would be completed, existing space will be in extremely short supply. They also note that the economic outlook is good, and steady growth is predicted to continue.

Thinking with a Red Hat, some of the directors say that the proposed building looks ugly and gloomy. They worry that people would find it an oppressive or uninspiring place to work.

When they think with the Black Hat, they wonder whether the economic forecast could be wrong. The economy may be about to experience a downturn, in which case the building could sit empty or only partially occupied for a long time. If the building is unattractive, then companies will choose to work in other, more attractive premises.

Wearing the positive Yellow Hat, however, the directors know that, if the economy holds up and their projections are correct, the company stands to make a healthy profit. If they are lucky, maybe they could sell the building before the next downturn, or rent to tenants on long-term leases that will last through any recession.

With Green Hat thinking, they consider whether they should redesign the building to make it more appealing. Perhaps they could build prestige offices that people would want to rent in any economic climate. Alternatively, maybe they should invest the money in the short term, then buy up property at a lower cost when the next downturn happens.

The chairman of the meeting wears the Blue Hat to keep the discussion moving and ideas flowing, encouraging the other directors to switch their thinking between the different perspectives.

Virtual Team Toolkit

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Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: 5 Languages of Appreciation

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Driving Results

Activity: Prior to the meeting, send out a brief article on the 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Work Place. These articles are based on a book, *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace*, by Dr. Gary Chapman. Ask team members to think about which of the 5 Languages of Appreciation that they most identify with.

Example Articles:

- 1) <http://www.thecarpediemcoach.com/5-love-languages-in-the-workplace/>
- 2) <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/4hfiles/StaffDocs4H/2013YouthFest/2013NovM3BRetainVol.pdf>
- 3) <https://capiche.us/2014/5-languages-appreciation-motivating-employees-developing-culture-appreciation-part-2>

Summary of the 5 Languages of Appreciation

- 1) Words of Affirmation
- 2) Quality Time
- 3) Acts of Service
- 4) Tangible Gifts
- 5) Physical Touch (not common in the work place)

Discussion:

- Which of the 5 Languages of Appreciation did each team member most identify with?
- Can you think of a time when you felt sincerely appreciated by your supervisor or coworkers? Would anyone like to share?
- Does feeling appreciated increase your productivity?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

This exercise demonstrates that there are different ways to communicate appreciation and encouragement to others. The most effective communication of appreciation and encouragement occurs when the message is sent in the language of appreciation most valued by the receiver. Conversely, messages of appreciation in languages not valued by the recipient will tend to miss the mark.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Knowing and using the primary language of appreciation of your coworkers, direct reports, and supervisors can allow team members to:

- Express genuine appreciation to co-workers and staff — even on a tight budget.
- Increase loyalty with the employees and volunteers in your organization.
- Reduce cynicism and create a more positive work environment.
- Improve your ability to show appreciation for difficult colleagues.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Community Service

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes (Takes 2 meetings, planning and showing results)

Category: Driving Results

Activity: Virtual teams work together on a common cause (project)

What causes do we wish we had time to work on or to work with someone to make it a team effort in the spirit of giving! There are undoubtedly people in your community who are less fortunate than us. Pick a deserving cause, rally your virtual team buddy, and give back to the community, church, place of worship of your choosing, or any organization that makes a difference!

Get two or three member together and form a “little” team. Each “little” team will discuss off-line to choose a charity (for example church, place of worship, NGO-Red Cross, or Leukemia/Cancer Society) and to work together to develop a giving plan. Each little team may contribute its time, money or a donated product to that cause.

Afterwards the little teams should talk off-line to each other to share results and be ready to give a read out at the next meeting about their community service, donations and achievement:

The little teams could share:

- Who they gave to
- What they gave (time, donation)
- How they felt about doing this

Discussion: Did you realize that the little teams have just performed a community service without ever meeting each other, and, that each was going to make a positive difference in someone else’s life just by being on virtual team.

This team building exercise shows that each person can implement change for the better, outside and inside the work place! Its team building and innovative communication.

- How did you form teams?
- How did you choose your charity or organization to contribute to?
- Did you ever think you could partner up with a team member to effect a difference, without ever meeting face to face?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Reveals team building capability built on earned trust, mutual ambition, communication and going the extra mile to help others. If you can help others outside the team without ever meeting each other than the team will be able to tackle its project’s most difficult tasks.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Feedback Roundtable

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Driving Results

Activity: The goal of the meeting is to get an update from all team members about what is going well and what is not. Using video conferencing for this meeting is strongly encouraged because each team member will have a turn speaking, so others can assign faces to names. However, it can also be done via teleconference.

Prior to the meeting, tell team members that they will each have the opportunity to answer the following questions.

1. What is one thing that has been going great lately?
2. What is one thing that can be improved upon?
3. What is one thing that's been going on with you personally?

Limit responses to 5 minutes for each person, or less for larger teams.

If using video, let people know beforehand so that they can ensure their webcam is working.

This activity works best if there is an assigned periodicity to the meeting (e.g., every month or two), but it can still be useful as a standalone activity.

Below are some example responses:

1. "We're doing great with the latest requirements document – we finished it ahead of schedule. Big shout-out to Mike for helping us last week and walking through it in detail with our lead engineer."
2. "One thing we could do better is be a bit more responsive in email. I realize we're all very busy, but we had to wait 48 hours for a response from the Ops team, and this is going to affect us negatively in the long run."
3. "A personal update is that I'm heading over with my wife and 3 kids to the Bahamas during my vacation next Friday. We're all super-excited about it, and Charlie, my youngest, is looking forward to swimming with the dolphins."

Discussion:

- Are there any themes or similarities between what has been going well for everyone lately?
- Are there any themes or similarities between what can be improved upon?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- This exercise gives team members practice giving feedback on team performance in a non-threatening way.
- Encourage team members to recognize each other for accomplishments or contributions to the team. This provides a good opportunity to increase job satisfaction and engagement for team members that appreciate words of affirmation.

Are there any problems that need to be explored more? If so, set up a separate meeting to brainstorm solutions. This meeting is focused on brief feedback from all team members.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Learn from Peers

Group Size: Medium

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Driving Results

Activity: The theme of this activity is learning something from a peer. The task will be for team members to teach another person something new in a short amount of time.

In advance of the meeting, put the team members into pairs. Ask each pair to meet ½ hour before the meeting begins (or give them time to leave the main teleconference and talk in private). Their goal is to teach each other something that will take only a few minutes to learn. The lesson could be a skill, like how to use a blade of grass as a whistle, or it could be intellectual knowledge, like a motto in Latin. After they teach each other, they should return to the main teleconference at a pre-determined time. Each person then shares what they learned to the group and asks if that knowledge is new to anyone else in the group as well.

Discussion: How many new skills or knowledge did each person learn during the meeting? Was the goal of learning many new skills and facts achieved faster when everyone shared what they knew with the group?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Team results are achieved faster and more efficiently when all members share their knowledge with the group. Pooling knowledge and skills will help the team move forward with better results than each person working independently.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Meaningful Quotes

Group Size: Any (break whatever size group into smaller groups of 4-5)

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Any – Using Driving Results as an Example

Activity: In advance of the activity, email a quote of your choice to each participant asking that they think about it and make some notes to themselves related to the following questions:

- What does the quote mean to them?
- How does the quote relate to the problem you are trying to solve or the motivation you are trying to bring?

Driving Results Example: “People love chopping wood. In this activity one immediately sees results.” **Albert Einstein**

Also align everyone into smaller groups trying to mix individuals from different teams. Provide the information about the groups in the email and instruct each group to meet jointly and discuss the answers to these questions. Each group should also appoint a spokesperson.

Discussion: Convene the entire group together. Ask the participants to share their answers with the members of the group. The facilitator should ask questions such as:

- How similar or different were your answers?
- Did anything meaningful occur for you during the discussion?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Driving Results Example: Applications can vary but using this quote a discussion could take place regarding whether immediate results are as important as lasting results. Do individuals work on tasks which are achievable and they can immediately see results as opposed to strategically working towards a goal, investing time and waiting for the results? What results are we striving to achieve? Is the team working towards the same goals strategically?

Application for any subject: Based on the subject desired, select a quote and determine the application/learning objectives associated with your desired subject. The same technique could be used for just about any subject, be creative.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Three Shining Moments

Group Size: Any (break into smaller groups of 4-5)

Time: 45 Minutes

Category: Driving Results

Activity: Ask each group to look back over their careers and identify three events, activities, accomplishments, collaborations, or moments of recognition by others that stood out as shining moments in their work lives or careers. Allow about 20 minutes for the participants to think about the question, jot down ideas and share their shining moments within their small group. For participants who are relatively new to the workforce, ask them to share moments from college classes, part-time jobs, internships, or volunteer work. When all participants are ready, ask each person to share just one of their shining moments with the entire group. Alternatively, a spokesperson can present the top shining moments for the group.

Discussion:

- How do you feel about telling their own stories and hearing the stories of coworkers?
- Were your shining moments experienced similar to your coworkers?
- Did many of the shining work moments involve praise and thank you from a respected manager?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

The goal of the exercise is to help participants build a cohesive team by learning about and appreciating each other professional accomplishments. These are the shining moments people remember when they produced their best work, their finest moments, and their career successes.

- Describe the work culture in which you could most successfully contribute your best work.
- What are some ways to achieve business results?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Video Roundtable

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes (every 2 to 4 weeks)

Category: Driving Results

Activity: The goal of the meeting is to have everyone join a video conference and get an update from all the team members about what's going well and what's not. This is **not** a detailed status update to discuss issues or risks (which should have their own separate meeting), but rather general feedback about how things are going with the team. In addition, everyone must share a single personal update about them to spice things up.

The key to making the activity work is two things: First, explain to your team members ahead of time that it's mandatory that **everyone** use video, and second, that every team member will get the chance to talk. This way, you'll ensure that everyone has their web cams ready ahead of time, AND is prepared to give an update. To add some structure to this, you can limit everyone's responses to 3-6 minutes each, and have them answer three questions

1. What's one thing that's been going great lately?
2. What's one thing that can be improved upon?
3. What's one thing that's been going on with you personally?

A sample response could be:

1. *"We're doing great with the latest requirements document – we finished it ahead of schedule and the customer is happy. Big shout-out to Mike for helping us last week and walking through it in detail with our lead engineer."*
2. *"One thing we could do better is be a bit more responsive in email. I realize we're all very busy, but we had to wait 48 hours for a response from the Ops team, and this is going to affect us negatively in the long run."*
3. *"A personal update is that I'm heading over with my wife and 3 kids to the Bahamas during my vacation next Friday. We're all super-excited about it, and Charlie, my youngest, is looking forward to swimming with the dolphins."*

Discussion: The idea is to avoid "presenting" anything. The focus should be on the person talking because it's a Video Roundtable, and team members are free to ask or comment on any of the responses so that it feels like an open forum. Having the video turned on is awesome because you can read everyone's facial and body expressions as they speak, and it's like you're all sitting in a large conference room. An optional idea is to ask everyone on video to bring along their favorite beverage – coffee, tea or soda – to the meeting so that it feels like a virtual coffee break.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*) The objective of this game is to increase the level of intimacy among your virtual team members. Video conferencing is one of the least utilized features of remote teams, yet it is one of the most important to build trust. I think people shy away from using video because they are just generally uncomfortable with it, or they're just too busy to "fix themselves up" to be camera ready. However, video conferencing is a great way to increase the level of cohesion among your team to drive results.

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Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Change, Change, Change

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Guiding Change

Activity:

1. Number participants off in groups of two. Ask the participants to determine which one will observe and which one will make the changes.
2. Ask the change agent to take a picture of their workspace and send it to the observer. Tell the observer to study the picture closely.
3. Next, the change agent should make five changes to their physical environment. Give participants 30 seconds to complete the changes.
4. The change agent should take another picture and email it to their partner. Without looking at the first picture, the observer should try and identify as many changes as possible. Allow about 30 seconds for this.

Do a couple more rounds of steps 3 through 5 taking turns as change agent and observer.

Finally, ask participants to make 10 changes in 20 seconds. You will likely get some resistance at this point. When you start to get verbal resistance, stop and move to the discussion questions.

Discussion:

1. How did it feel to be asked to make so many changes?
2. Could there be problems making so many changes at once?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

- It is important to understand the feelings generated by change.
- Consideration should be given to how quickly changes are made and how many changes are made at one time.
- What can you do to make it easier for people in your organization to accept the change?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Kotter Model for Change

Group Size: Any

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Guiding Change

Activity: This activity is designed to be used when the team is undergoing change. The change can be directed from higher levels within the agency or internally-driven change. For example, this exercise could be used immediately prior or in the early stages of a reorganization, implementing a new process, or the addition of new team members.

Prior to the meeting send out the following information from the Kotter Model of Change.¹ Ask team members to think about the following eight errors to determine which ones are most applicable to the current change that the team is undergoing.

John P. Kotter identifies eight common avoidable errors that lead to failures of organization change efforts.

Error 1: Allowing too much complacency.

Error 2: Failing to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition.

Error 3: Underestimating the power of vision.

Error 4: Under communicating the vision by a factor of 10 or more.

Error 5: Permitting obstacles to block the new vision.

Error 6: Failing to create short-term wins.

Error 7: Declaring victory too soon.

Error 8: Neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the corporate culture.

When discussing this model, try avoid overly negative discussions. The purpose is not to criticize; instead the goal is to identify problems in the change management process and identify potential solutions.

This exercise can also be used when the team is proposing changes that affect other groups. In that case, consider going through each of the eight errors and brainstorming ways to prevent the error from occurring.

¹ Additional information can be found here: <https://www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change>

Virtual Team Toolkit

Discussion:

During the meeting, ask the group the following questions:

- 1) Do you think we (or whoever is initiating the change) are committing any of these errors? Ask each team member for their opinion.
- 2) Which of these errors are we (or whoever is initiating the change) likely to commit?
- 3) What can our team do to prevent these errors from happening or lessen the effects of these errors?

Document any action items to follow up on.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

The purpose of this exercise is to develop a vocabulary and avenue for discussing the mechanics of change.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Picture This

Group Size: Small

Time: 20 Minutes

Category: Guiding Change

Activity: Prior to the exercise, email each individual one of the following pictures. Each person has only one picture and therefore doesn't know how it relates to the other pictures. Each person will name and describe the image they received and together the group must determine how they relate. Set a time limit of 10 minutes.



Item 1



Item 2



Item 3



Item 4



Item 5



Item 6

After 10 minutes, ask the group to explain how they believe the pictures relate. Then show everyone the picture of hiking below.



Hiking

Discussion: During any change, communication is one the most critical elements of achieving success. But communication can't be just one direction. Employees experiencing the change need to communicate what they are seeing and experiencing so alterations can be made if needed. Everyone sees the organization with a different lens, so sharing different viewpoints is critical to understanding the complete picture.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Was everyone able to describe their image? Did the participants who were not talking do a good job listening? Did the group ultimately see the big picture or did they get bogged down with unimportant details?

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Start-Stop-Continue

Group Size: Any (break whatever size group into smaller groups of 4-6)

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Guiding Change

Activity: Ask participants brainstorm with their group actions either their department or the larger organization should start performing, stop performing or continue performing. Encourage the group to come up with ideas in any area of interest to them.

Discussion: Have a discussion, either with the one group or convene the various smaller groups together. Discuss why each action fits into the applicable category (start/stop/continue) and their desired results from changing these actions.

Find a shared drive to place this list. The management team should then discuss the results and determine if there are actions that can be started and some that should be stopped. Make a point to acknowledge practices the teams appreciate and would like continued. Revisit the list periodically with the staff so they can see the resulting changes.

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

In this exercise, leadership provides an opportunity to obtain individual input as to the organizational practices that may be working well and those that may not be working. In addition, employees can provide input into determining the direction of the organization by also suggesting activities to start performing.

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Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Brainstorming and Multi-voting

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Provide the embedded presentation to introduce the techniques of brainstorming and multi-voting. Email it to the team in advance and then discuss during the meeting. Identify a current problem the team or organization is facing and have the group brainstorm solutions then use multi-voting techniques to identify/prioritize the best solutions. If possible, share a screen to record the ideas. If not, keep a list and email to participants after the session.



Brainstorming and
Multi-voting

Discussion: Discuss the benefits of using these tools to quickly gather ideas. Brainstorming can be used in any setting and anyone can be a facilitator.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Were more ideas generated using these techniques? Did more people participate? What about this activity might result in increased participation? Because the pace of brainstorming moves more quickly and brief ideas are shared initially as opposed to well thought out full solutions, brainstorming can include create ideas and more participants usually join in a brainstorming session. As a result, the hope is we can reach a better solution.

Virtual Team Toolkit

Team Building Activity: Create Your Own

Group Size: Large

Time: 1 Hour

Category: Innovation

Activity: In this exercise, teams must create their own, brand new, problem-solving activity.

What You'll Need

- Ideally four or five people in each team.
- A large, private skype meeting.

Instructions

1. As the participants arrive, you announce that, rather than spending an hour on a problem-solving team building activity, they must design an original one of their own.
2. Divide participants into teams and tell them that they have to create a new problem-solving team building activity that will work well in their organization. The activity must not be one that they have already participated in or heard of.

After 45 minutes, each team must present their new activity to everyone else, and outline its key benefits.

Advice for the Facilitator: There are four basic steps in problem solving: defining the problem, generating solutions, evaluating and selecting solutions, and implementing solutions. Help your team to think creatively at each stage by getting them to consider a wide range of options. If ideas run dry, introduce an alternative brainstorming technique, such as brain-writing. This allows your people to develop on others' ideas, while everyone has an equal chance to contribute.

Discussion: After the presentations, encourage teams to discuss the different decision-making processes they followed. You might ask them how they communicated and managed their time. Another question could be about how they kept their discussion focused. And to round up, you might ask them whether they would have changed their approach after hearing the other teams' presentations.

Key Points: Successful decision making and problem solving are at the heart of all effective teams. While teams are ultimately led by their managers, the most effective ones foster these skills at all levels. The exercises in this activity shows how you can encourage teams to develop their creative thinking, leadership and communication skills, while building group cooperation and consensus.

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Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Consider how others around you communicate, solve problems and make decisions.

This game encourages participants to think about the problem-solving process. It builds skills such as creativity, negotiation and decision making, as well as communication and time management. After the activity, teams should be better equipped to work together, and to think on their feet.

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Team Building Activity: Dumbest Idea First

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: With the group present, ask a question like “we were given authority and responsibility to build a new office building for ourselves that will cost \$10 million. We have \$1 million to work with.” What do we do now?

Have one person keeping bullet point notes, have the group shout out solutions and strategies to do this. Now look through the notes and see which ones might not be as *dumb* as you think.

Discussion: Review “shout out points” and tease apart ones that may work and build on them.

Possible Answers:

1. Hire a construction company and build a \$1m building.
2. Rent space somewhere until we can have congress fund the new building.
3. Hire lobbyist to lobby congress to budget the construction next year.

Perhaps number 1 and 3 may be feasible if in fact the authority lies squarely on the office, then 1 and 3 can create a critical path to achieving the goal. Flesh these out a bit more and see if there is a plan here.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

Is it the “dumbest idea” or is it more about thinking on your feet? Offering quick suggestions to problems to build quick solutions is not a bad thing. This exercise can be useful for team building cohesion, innovative thinking, problem solving, and communication.

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Team Building Activity: Finding Solutions

Group Size: Any

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Ask each participant to write an email with a difficult problem that needs solving. The problems can be real or made up, serious or silly. Assign each person the email address of another team member and have them send their problem to that email.

Next, have the team members read the problem and send the moderator a reply email with a short solution to the problem. Solutions can be sincere OR humorous!

Give each participant another email address and have them send their original problem to this new email address. The new recipient should also send their solution to the moderator. Repeat this process for a third and fourth round if desired.

Have the moderator send each participant an email with their original problem and all the collected solutions. Each participant reads their problem and the solutions aloud to the group. The participants should get a few laughs and maybe some great advice!

Discussion: What is the benefit of having multiple perspectives when finding solutions to difficult problems? Did any of the proposed solutions surprise you? If the problem was a real one you are currently experiencing, did any of the solutions help?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Discuss how innovation is best achieved through inviting multiple perspectives and ideas. Discuss how no idea should be seen as “dumb” or not practical or logical, since innovation often moves in unexpected directions.

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Team Building Activity: Making a Marvelous Menu

Group Size: Any

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Prior to the meeting, split attendees into smaller groups and designate separate call-in numbers or Skype meetings for each group. Also choose a “mystery ingredient” that will be featured in each small group’s imaginary menu. Examples include avocados, zucchini, balsamic vinegar, mint, or anything that can be used in both savory and sweet dishes.

At the beginning of the meeting, introduce the activity to the entire large group. Example: “For the first half of our meeting today, we are going to practice creative thinking with a fun brainstorming game. Each small group will have 15 minutes to plan a meal of at least 3 courses featuring the mystery ingredient. Today, the mystery ingredient will be _____. At the end of this, we will vote to see which team can come up with the most creative menu.”

Prompt each small group to call/log-in to their separate virtual meeting spaces to brainstorm. Select and reiterate a time to reconvene on the main call line. After everyone reconvenes, ask a representative from each group to share the team’s menu.

Once everyone has shared, go around and ask each team member to choose the most creative menu and tally the results. Other options include voting on the most appetizing menu or the classiest menu.

Discussion:

- This exercise increases innovation by placing a restriction on the teams, i.e., selecting a secret ingredient. How would this exercise have been different if there has been no secret ingredient? Would the results have been more creative or less creative?
- Did individuals in your team naturally gravitate towards different roles (e.g., leader, note-taker)?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

- This exercise is designed to show that sometimes, placing restrictions on brainstorming can actually increase creativity. For example, Theodore Geisel wrote one of his most famous works on a bet that he could write a book with 50 words or less. The result of his efforts was titled *Green Eggs and Ham*, and Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, used exactly 50 unique words.
- If this activity is used to introduce a brainstorming session for a team problem or process improvement, ask the group: What restrictions can we place on

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ourselves so that we get the most creative solutions to this problem? Examples: only come up with solutions that do not incur additional cost or solutions that most improve work-life balance.

- Keep the exchange light-hearted and recognize creative thinking whenever possible.

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Team Building Activity: Marooned

Group Size: Any (break into smaller groups of 4-5)

Time: 20 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Tell participants they are to pretend they are marooned on an island. Give teams 5 minutes to discuss and choose five items they would have brought if they had known they would be stranded. Have each team list their items, and then explain and defend their choices to the whole group.

Discussion:

- Is there any overlap of items among the different groups?
- Are there any unique items that only one group brought to the table?

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

This is a good way to encourage problem solving among the group. It is a good example of how all ideas (even wild ones) should be shared and considered.

- Have all the teams vote on which list they think would be the most effective and discuss why that list is maybe better or more effective than the others.

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Team Building Activity: My Work Updates

Group Size: Small

Time: 10 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: Being transparent provides clarity into what is currently going on in the organization. Whether your agency or organization is providing a new service or the development of a new project, it's a great idea to let your teammates know what you're working on. This may also help generate new ideas "piggybacking" off what you are working.

This team-building exercise gathers the team to take a few minutes before starting the agenda to allow three people to talk about a significant project their agency is rolling out or big plans for the future.

For example:

- "Our agency will have a travel app go live next year which will get consumers advance time delays and TSP changes to help eliminates wait time at airports and train stations around the United State, this project took a few months to design and develop and will be a model for other agencies."

This exercise helps the team understand what each members' agency does and contributes to public service and allows insight about each person other than what their job is.

Discussion: The updates are the activity: knowing what each of your team members are working on in their departments or agencies can be refreshing and inspiring to work towards goals to make a difference.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*) The team member's activities and resulting successes within their departments or agencies can contribute to the team's cohesiveness, a drive to "make a difference." This can also foster new ideas for your group.

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Team Building Activity: Story Telling

Group Size: Small

Time: 30 Minutes

Category: Innovation

Activity: This fun game fosters creativity and helps team members think on their feet. During a meeting, make up the first line of a story. Then ask team members to take turns and add each subsequent line until a whole plot develops! Let the story go along on its own path and deviations.

Discussion: Here are some ways you can start your tale:

- I woke up at 9am — that was when we were supposed to Skype in for the meeting...
- Jared looked over the ledge of his balcony, wondering why the crowd had gathered...
- The email had no subject line...I hate it when he does that...
- 15 years, 15 days, 15 hours and finally the letter had come...
- As Sophia hid behind the red SUV in the parking lot, she tried to remember how exactly she had gotten there...and why there was that giant scar on her arm...

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*) The fun part of the game is that you never know what perils or fortunes can occur next! Even though your team may develop favorite start tags, the story will never end up the same. In other words, your team will learn how to think innovatively.

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Team Building Activity: Create a Personal Mission Statement

Group Size: Small

Time: 45 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: Prior to the meeting, ask each team member to write a personal mission statement for their role in the team. The mission statement can be as general or specific as they want, but request that they limit the mission statement to one sentence. Encourage participants to think about their core values while writing their mission statement. The mission statement should include not only *what* they do, but also *how* they do it.

Examples:

I solve complex programs with creativity and enthusiasm.

I manage cost and schedule of the project with integrity and open communication.

I analyze data and synthesize information accurately and impartially.

During the meeting, have each team member share their personal mission statement.

Discussion: Discuss how each person's role connects to the overall team/agency mission.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

After discussing each person's mission statement, is it clearer how each person is important in accomplishing the team mission? Understanding others' role (i.e., mission) on the team is important to fulfilling the team vision.

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Team Building Activity: Create a Team Mission Statement

Group Size: Small

Time: 45 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: Discuss your Agency's Vision and Mission. Next, discuss the importance of how having a mission helps the organization clarify its values and direction. Ask the team to consider the Agency mission statement and next develop a team mission statement which can help the team understand how they relate to and support the overall Agency mission. Have one individual scribe and continuously summarize for the group. If possible share a screen.

Discussion: It's important to understand the mission of the Agency to know what everyone is working towards. It helps shape the daily work behavior and purpose. Going one step further and creating a mission statement for the team helps emphasize how the team contributes to the Agency mission.

Application/Learning Check: (*What meaning can we derive from this exercise?*)

After discussing the Agency and team mission, is it clearer the importance this team has on contributing to the Agency mission? How do both of these mission statements relate to your individual personal missions in life? Are they consistent?

Consider posting the team mission statement on a shared site and refer to it repeatedly in future meetings.

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Team Building Activity: Team Core Values

Group Size: Any

Time: 20 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: Prior to the meeting, ask each team member to choose 5 values from the following list that they believe are most important to fulfilling the team (or agency's) goals/mission. Request that each team member send their top 5 values to the leader and tabulate the results. If two values are similar, you can combine them in your table.

Values

Accountability	Focus	Restraint
Accuracy	Foresight	Results-oriented
Adaptability	Generosity	Rigorous
Capable	Imagination	Satisfaction
Certainty	Independence	Security
Commitment	Innovation	Self-reliance
Common sense	Insightful	Simplicity
Communication	Integrity	Sincerity
Compassion	Kindness	Spontaneous
Competence	Logic	Stability
Consistency	Openness	Stewardship
Cooperation	Optimism	Structure
Courage	Order	Support
Creativity	Organization	Sustainability
Credibility	Originality	Teamwork
Decisiveness	Passion	Thorough
Dedication	Patience	Timeliness
Dependability	Persistence	Tolerance
Determination	Productivity	Transparency
Efficiency	Professionalism	Trustworthy
Enthusiasm	Quality	Understanding
Excellence	Reason	Vigor
Fairness	Respect	Vision
Fidelity	Responsibility	

During the meeting, share the 3 values that were chosen the most. Discuss how these values can be exemplified to fulfill the team or agency mission.

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Discussion: Are these 3 values sufficient to be our team's core values? Should we add or change any? Do we exemplify some of these values better than others?

Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

Core values contribute to the vision of the team by creating a shared standard for conduct and work products.

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Team Building Activity: Vision Setting

Group Size: Small

Time: 45 Minutes

Category: Vision

Activity: This exercise is useful to help each participant visualize what they wish to see in their organization and in their personal life and share it with the rest of the team. Each individual often has different ideas about how they wish an organization to grow; this activity will help every participant share their personal vision and align everyone's vision for the organization. Also, by sharing the vision for their own lives, participants will grow to know each other better and hopefully encourage each other's vision.

Instructions:

1. Explain to the participants about vision setting and its role in personal and organizational success. You can read about vision in leadership and articulating your vision.
2. Invite the participants to fill out the Vision Setting Sheet (example below). Give them about 20 – 30 minutes.



visionsettingsheet.
pdf

3. One by one, each participant will present his/her vision for the organization as a whole, for his/her department as well as their personal vision.
4. As a facilitator, seek to find the common points in their vision and encourage the whole group of participants to come up with a common vision for the organization. Try to take every idea into consideration. Be careful not to dismiss any ideas or suggestions, but attempt to incorporate it into a common vision.
5. Also talk about how individuals can collaborate to achieve similar goals or common visions.
6. *Optional*, use this final common vision and make it into a corporate vision as a plaque. Encourage the participants to display this plaque somewhere visible.

Discussion: Take a few minutes to discuss. Does the vision that has been set excite you? Do you think the organization is currently heading towards this vision? Or away? If away, what changes can or should be made to move the organization toward this vision?

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Application/Learning Check: *(What meaning can we derive from this exercise?)*

This teambuilding exercise can be useful for understanding the importance of vision. The purpose of this exercise is to align every participant's vision to a common organizational vision and to help each participant understand each other better.

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Staff Conference Considerations

The fact that all teams are not in one place should not be an impediment to a leader orchestrating a staff conference for the entire office. Individual teams are likely holding team meetings, but having the opportunity to meet as a larger office group is just as important. Some of the benefits of staff conferences include the following.

- 1) Communication - employees hear the same message at the same time and any questions and answers are heard by the entire group
- 2) Employee development – have an employee research and present to the group as a whole is a great staff development opportunity
- 3) Leadership – staff conferences provide a great opportunity to “rally the troops” and motivate employees
- 4) Training – this is an opportunity to provide training on areas where there is growth opportunity
- 5) Innovation – as opposed to just delving into problems or challenges, members can share suggestions and ideas and create processes or programs
- 6) Bonding and celebration – getting together reminds everyone they are part of one team; this is a perfect time to acknowledge team and individual successes

The following considerations will help ensure the staff conference conducted in a virtual environment is productive and achieves the desired results.

Timing: Since team members are likely operating from different time zones, consider when appropriate start and stop times would be. It won't be received well if one group of employees doesn't end their day until 7:00 pm or another has to start theirs at 5:00 am. Ideally, no team member should have to start before 8:00 am or end after 5:00 pm. Therefore, the staff conference will ideally only last for four to six hours. Consider whether a full eight hours is needed for a staff conference. If it is, then it would be better to break it into two days.

Breaks: Although the meeting is virtual, there still needs to be time for formal breaks. Consider having a longer break in the middle which would allow team members to grab a lunch from the fridge.

Technology: Determine the technology which you will use to hold your conference. If you have access to a formal meeting software such as Skype, you can still share visual materials. Everyone will either need to be logged onto their own computer or if groups of employees are sitting together, someone can share their screen to a larger screen so the entire group can see. And just in case there are technical difficulties, share any PowerPoint presentations in advance so all team members have an opportunity to print or view in the absence of a shared screen. This would include any materials guest speakers might present. And lastly, have a phone line available in case the quality of the Skype call is unacceptable. At least everyone could join via conference call.

Smaller Breakout Sessions: Just because the meeting is being held virtually doesn't limit your ability to have smaller breakout sessions. That is part of the goal of having a

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joint staff conference...getting team members who don't normally work together to collaborate and build relationships. Breakout sessions just take extra planning. Determine who will be in the breakout sessions and email each group this information. Ask them to determine as a group how they will communicate during the breakout. Do they want to share phone numbers so they can call/text or do they want a separate Skype chat? Because there are some logistics to this, the breakout sessions may need to be longer than when not operating in a virtual environment. If you have deliverables from the breakouts, ask them to email everyone their results. Consider designating a lead for the separate locations. Then make sure leaders coordinate in advance to make sure all exercises run smoothly.

Speakers: If you have an outside speaker make sure to explain the dynamics of your virtual meeting and the location of team members. Obtain any presentation material in advance and distribute to the team members prior to the meeting.

Touch Points: To make sure everyone is engaged, build in specific touch points during the conference. Ask to hear from each team at some point, request feedback and comments. Sometimes to prevent people talking over each other, calling on individuals or groups can be effective. If using Skype, use the comment field and ask people to raise their emoji hand, then call on them.

Virtual team meetings can be just as rewarding as meetings conducted face-to-face and can even bring out some creativity in your teams. They take some consideration and more advanced planning, but are definitely one of the key pieces in building a solid team capable of achieving great results.

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Management Tips

As a supervisor or manager of a team, your goal is likely to have a group of employees who have mutual respect and trust for each other, and who can work independently, but also support their coworkers in a teaming environment. Working in a virtual environment creates a unique set of challenges to achieve these goals. Physical distance can create a disconnect in communication when it comes to defining goals and expectations and remote team members can feel as if their actions are not noticed or appreciated. There are several actions you can take to overcome these challenges and draw on the advantages a virtual environment creates.

One of the first things needed is to have clear expectations about specific work assignments, performance and communication.

- Have short term goals about what is going to be accomplished each week.
- What are the priorities for a given week/month?
- How and when do you expect your team members to communicate with you?
- When will you communicate with them?

Take time to discuss not only your expectations but your employee's expectations and concerns. Schedule regular one-on-one meetings and discuss not only specific assignment status, but overall performance. This doesn't have to wait for required progress discussions. And don't forget to reward employees publicly, it might just take the form of a virtual all-hands meeting.

Use different communication methods strategically to make sure every remote team's communication is delivered using the right platform. Consider using this guide:

- *Email*: short, neutral exchange of information
- *Weekly or bi-weekly team meetings*: group discussion, general announcements, sharing best practices, discussing new guidance
- *Skype Video or Call*: long, detailed, or potentially difficult conversations. When using Skype, consider screen sharing to explain or demonstrate tasks.

Additional communication strategies and considerations:

- Check in regularly and spontaneously, formally and informally
- When scheduling meetings, be considerate of employees across different time zones
- Use ice breakers and team building activities to encourage sharing and help build team spirit

Effectively managing the challenges of virtual teams will enable you to benefit from the advantages. Your team will be a diversified team with a broader set of ideas. Team members may be happier and more engaged as a result of the increases in work/life balance. With the increased flexibility and team spirit, the office will likely also have increased productivity and employee morale.

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Employee Tips

Working effectively in a virtual team requires thoughtful actions from everyone on the team. There are many considerations and tips to make sure every employee achieves the best possible results while teleworking.

- Make sure remote work is really for you. Working remotely is a dream for many, but it is not for everyone.
- Dedicate your full attention to your job duties during working hours.
- Remember to be available for all office meetings, conference calls, management, and/or customer contacts. Log on to your IM consistently to show your employer and coworkers that you are actively working.
- Adhere to break and attendance schedules agreed upon with your supervisor.
- Understand your expectations, and maintain your productivity.
- Check-in regularly with your supervisor to show your progress. Seek assistance regarding any area of work that may be difficult.
- Frequent phone calls and video conferences should be part of your routine to ensure that nothing gets lost in translation via text-based communication.
- Make sure that you take the time to read and answer all of your business emails. Use your email to share everything with your team, from face-to-face conversations to online conversations, and more.
- Establish consistent methodology for communicating. Your supervisors (and teammates!) will not know when you are working on something unless you tell them.
- Including away messages when you are not working to keep the lines of communication open and everyone on the same page.