

25 Great Icebreaker Activities

At the start of a typical brainstorm, a group's attention is often scattered. Participants may be in the room physically, but their minds tend to be elsewhere. They are thinking about outside concerns totally unrelated to the brainstorming session about to take place.

This is especially true if participants are juggling multiple projects; work in a busy, fast-paced business; or in an organization that is lean on staff.

The key to a successful SmartStorming session is to first transform a room full of individuals into a collaborative team aligned toward a common goal. And to do so as quickly as possible to make the most of your allotted time.

The fastest, most effective way to do this is to engage the group in an enjoyable activity that releases attention from outside distractions, breaks down interpersonal boundaries, and gets the creative juices flowing. This is often referred to as "breaking the ice."

Icebreakers are most effective when they are kept simple and are not too personal or embarrassing. You may consider offering

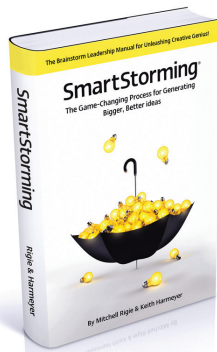


participants the option to pass on the activity if they are not comfortable playing along.

When choosing an icebreaker activity, it is important to consider the makeup of your group (age, gender, cultural diversity, levels of seniority, etc.). Certain icebreakers simply work better for different groups.

The ideal length for an icebreaker activity is a speedy ten to fifteen minutes, max. That's it. Anything longer can become a diversion from the real purpose of your session.

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Excerpt from the book, *SmartStorming: The Game-Changing Process for Generating Bigger, Better Ideas*.

Available at SmartStormingBook.com

25 Great Icebreaker Activities

Here are twenty-five proven icebreaker activities that will really help get a group's creative juices flowing and your session off to a fast start.

1. Pre-Storming

A few days prior to your session, instruct participants to pre-storm two to three initial ideas for solving the challenge at hand. At the start of your session, begin your icebreaker activity by asking everyone to take turns sharing their initial ideas. Once participants have shared ideas, challenge the group to see if they can find creative ways to improve or evolve the most promising ones, or combine two (or more) ideas to create something altogether new.

2. Roses Are Red

Ask participants to compose a simple four-line rhyming poem that incorporates some aspect of the challenge and a solution. For example:

*Roses are red,
Lilies are white,
Higher prices haven't helped us,
But a new website might!*

Next, ask each participant to stand and recite his or her poem to the group.

3. Think Like a Famous Problem-Solver

Divide your group into small innovation teams. Ask each team to select a famous visionary, innovator, or creative problem-solver (living or legend), such as Steve Jobs, Donald Trump, Oprah Winfrey, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Mother Teresa, or Picasso. Next, instruct the teams to generate ideas for how to solve the challenge in the same style and manner its iconic leader might have. For example, "In what ways would Steve Jobs have solved our customer service issue?"

4. What If...?

Ask everyone to silently write down three of the wildest, most ambitious, or audacious "What if...?" ideas they can imagine to solve the challenge. In this fun, "anything goes" icebreaker activity, the more imaginative the concepts, the better! Afterward, have participants take turns sharing their "What if...?" ideas with the group.

Option: Invite everyone to search for ways some of the wild ideas can be adapted or modified to become practical, real-world solutions.

5. Future Perfect

Ask your group to imagine what the ideal solution to the challenge would look and feel like in its most perfect form. Then have the group work backward, through deductive reasoning and leaps of imagination, to identify the steps necessary to achieve their vision.

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25 Great Icebreaker Activities (Continued)

6. Idea Sprinting

Idea Sprinting is a fun, fast-paced, “beat-the-clock” activity for generating ideas. To begin, give your group a challenge or problem to solve. Next, challenge your group to generate a target number of ideas within a tight time frame. For example, “Let’s shoot for twenty (or more) new ideas in five minutes.” This process is very effective for getting the creative juices flowing and generating an abundance of new ideas very quickly.

7. Guess My Secret Talent

Ask everybody to write down a special talent or ability they possess that nobody in the room knows about. Participants then pass their papers to the Pilot, who reads them aloud. Everybody tries to guess which talent belongs to whom.

8. Cartoon Caption Contest

Find an interesting cartoon and eliminate the caption. Present it to your group and have them each write a new caption. The cleverest new caption wins. (You can find excellent New Yorker-style cartoons at www.cartoonbank.com.)

9. Animal Personality

Ask your group to answer the question, “What animal best represents your personality and why?”

10. Superpowers

Ask your group, “If you could have just one superpower, what would it be and why?” Examples: the ability to fly, the ability to travel through time, the power of invisibility, the ability to read minds, etc.

11. Dream Vacation

Ask your group, “If you could go on a two-week, all-expenses-paid dream vacation anywhere in the world, where would you go, and why? What would you do there?”

12. Quick Million

Ask your group, “What is the fastest way to make a million dollars without playing the lottery or resorting to a life of crime.”

13. Things in Common

Partner people up and give them two minutes to discover three things they have in common. Then have each pair share their discovery with the entire group.

14. Dinner with the Famous

Ask your group, “If you could have dinner with any three famous celebrities or historical figures (past or present), who would you invite, and why?”

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25 Great Icebreaker Activities (Continued)

15. One Truth and a Lie

Ask participants to take turns stating one truth and one lie about themselves. The group must decide which statement is true and which is false.

16. Worst Job

Ask each group member to describe his or her worst or first job.

17. My Own Reality Show

Ask your group, "If you were to star in your own reality TV series, what would it be called? Why?"

18. SmartStorm the Absurd

Have the group quickly and energetically SmartStorm ideas for an absurd challenge. Examples:

How can the beef industry convince vegetarians to buy its products?

How can the ice-cream industry sell more of its products in Alaska?

How can the hot tub industry increase sales in the Caribbean?

19. Celebrity Spouse

Ask your group, "If you could marry any celebrity, who would it be, and why?"

20. Collaborative Storytelling

Begin by having your group form a circle. Select one person to begin telling a story. It can be about any subject in any genre—fiction, nonfiction, or fairy tale. They simply begin a story. After a few sentences, they look at the person to their right and "hand off" the storyline. The next person must take the story in any direction he or she wishes. The storytelling continues around the circle until the person who started the story is reached. He or she gets to create the ending.

21. Desert Island Wish List

Ask your group, "If you were stranded on a desert island, what three things would you want to have in your possession? How do you plan to use those items on the island?"

22. The Story of Your Name

Each participant tells either what their name means or where it comes from, and if they think that it accurately represents them as a person. If not, and they could rename themselves, what name would they choose, and why?

23. Lucky Lottery Tickets

Give each group member a real, scratch-off lottery ticket. Have each person take turns describing what he or she would do if they won the jackpot prize. When everyone has shared, have the group simultaneously scratch off their tickets to see if anyone won! The winner may be excused from the meeting to celebrate.

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25 Great Icebreaker Activities (Continued)

24. Time Traveler

Ask your group, "If you could go back (or forward) in time, what year or period would you go to, and why?"

25. Yes, and...

This well-known and popular improvisation technique is an excellent icebreaker, and sets the stage for positive collaboration during the session. Begin a simple story for the group. For example, "Once upon a time there was a man who lived in a blue house. And right next door lived a woman in a green house." Then pass the story on to the person to your left, who must start off by saying, "Yes, and..." and then continue the story. The idea is that they must accept your storyline ("yes") and add to it ("and"). Saying "no" or "but" is not allowed. When everyone has contributed to the story, either begin a new one or just continue with the same story.

Note: You can also ask your group to brainstorm their own list of fun icebreaker activities.