Icebreakers

I cebreakers are great openers for most team-building events. They introduce people, help them find out each other's names, and kick off the team-bonding process. These are especially important when new teams are forming. You can also use them anytime you add a teammate or want to discover something new about your team, even if the team members have worked together before. You can put these kinds of initiatives together very quickly and easily, and they help put the group at ease. You can also use icebreakers when you're introducing a new piece of technology. Make sure to start with the most basic of functions when using a new piece of technology for an icebreaker.

7

Me in 140 Characters or Less—Twitter Hypernetworking

Time: 10 minutes

Participants: 2–1,000

Technology: Twitter, text, chat, teleconference, web conferencing

Category: Icebreaker

Goals

Get to know about each team member and assess needs.

Game Summary

This icebreaker solves simple challenges such as knowing everybody's name, associating at least one word with that person, finding things in common, and beginning to understand the other person's personality and style. It's also a great opening initiative for people who are new to Twitter. Once you've logged on to the Twitter website, this initiative trains your teammates in how to use it, keep their posts short, use features to find out information about other team members, and most important, learn the names and something about each teammate.

Setup

Arrange a time and unique hashtag to meet at (such as #50dteambuilding) if you are using Twitter. Using chat, send instructions on how to set up a Twitter account and how to search messages or view only messages using your unique hashtag. Note that you can go faster if you also have a teleconference line set up.

Instructions to the Audience

Since we're a new team, let's find out who is on this team and a little bit about each other. Go to twitter.com and log in with your username and password. Now let's search for only the messages we want to see by typing "#50dteambuilding" into the Search box at the top and hit Return.
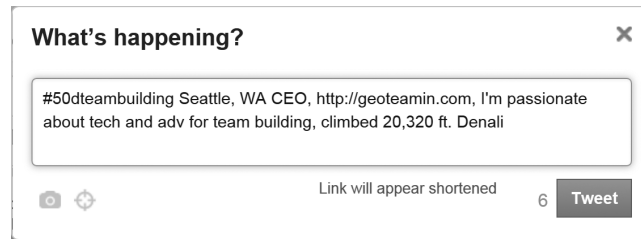

9
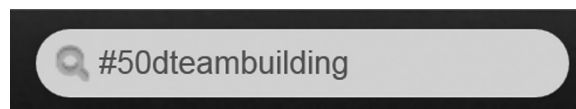
Since Twitter has a 140-character limit, you'll have to keep it short and sweet. Click the "New Tweet" box with the pencil in it near the top right [✎].

Tweet the hashtag (i.e., #50dteambuilding), where you are from, what you do, and something unique about yourself in 140 characters or less.

For example, my tweet would look like this:

What's happening?   ✕

#50dteambuilding Seattle, WA CEO, http://geoteamin.com, I'm passionate
about tech and adv for team building, climbed 20,320 ft. Denali

📷 ✛   Link will appear shortened   6   **Tweet**

Any questions?

Okay, you have 5 minutes to complete your tweet and read other people's tweets. Remember to refresh Twitter (by hitting F5 on most Windows Internet browsers, Command+R for Mac users, or clicking the "Reload current page" button ↻) to read other people's introductions. Also, you can click their Twitter ID to find their full name and information about them.

Power Tips

Learn how to attach photos, videos, or links to other sites as a way to say much more than 140 characters of narrative.

Click on each person's Twitter profile to see a picture of that person and his or her short bio. Read the bio and click the link to that person's website. This will provide you with a lot of information about this person.

You can send a link to your participants in the meeting request that will take them to your hashtag search, https://twitter.com/#!/search?q=%2350dteambuilding (replace "50dteam-building" with your hashtag).

Debrief

What did you learn about one another? What do you notice that you had in common with others? What challenges did you have in describing yourself in 140 characters or less? Whom do you feel closer to after completing this? Why? Do you know each other's names now?

Variations

Feel free to customize the last question to gain information that you want to know about each teammate. For example, you could ask, "What do you want out of this team-building course?" as a way of doing needs analysis.

Case Study

At a monthly gathering of our Washington State Chapter of MPI (mpiwsc.org), we met technology expert James Spellos. For this event, everybody's name tags included printed instructions to tweet their name, company, position, and favorite app or technology during the 30-minute networking period before lunch was served. About 40 people, out of 100, tweeted their information. During the 5-minute time reserved for structured networking, the MC then read the different tweets as each person stood or waved as they were read. This allowed the participants to get to know 40 of the people there. In addition, we received feedback on what apps people are using and which ones they like. The following is the Twitter log from this event:

> bigkid #mpiwsc Welcome to August MPIWSC Meeting of Hot Technology with James Spellos http://t.co/lUxkK3z #mpi #eventprofs
>
> bigkid #mpiwsc We will be running a high tech networking today. Tweet your name, company, position and your favorite app or technology #eventprofs
>
> bigkid #mpiwsc John Chen, Geoteaming http://t.co/w2qLPGN, CEO, http://tweetdeck.com is one of my fav apps.
>
> briannajmark Brianna Mark, Seattle's CVB, Special Projects Manager, fav app is seesmic (for now). #Mpiwsc
>
> bigkid #mpiwsc Chris Dunham, Meydenbauer Center, convention sales, fav app is Shazam in car, last song was from radio!
>
> jspellos #mpiwsc - My fave app today is Spotify. What a game changer for music lovers!
>
> bigkid #mpiwsc Terry Onustack, IASP, Meetings Manager, www.IASP-pain.org, I heart Facebook.com
>
> bigkid #mpiwsc Jane Schmidt, LaConner Channel Lodge, director of sales, posting town specials, daily deals, spa deals at Facebook.com
>
> bigkid #mpiwsc Sarah Nelson, LaConner Channel Lodge, dir of sales, groupon.com, sold 500 nights in 8 hours!!!
>
> bigkid #mpiwsc Adrienne Miller, Suncadia, Natl sales manager, blackberry for e-mail!
>
> briannajmark Chad Biesman, man of leisure, undercover tourist Disney world app #mpiwsc
>
> bigkid #mpiwsc Carrie Zimmerman, renaissance Seattle, SR sales manager, Facebook.com and conference apps for Cascadia

briannajmark Roxy Inouye, biz admin, Msft, Netflix for windows phone #mpiwsc

nashfung Nash Fung - professional magician And basketball frenetic! Fav. App=photo-synth at #mpiwsc

SeaJet01 #MPIWSC Jeannette Davidson, Gretchens Shoebox Express, sales mgr, facebook

bigkid #mpiwsc Angela shen @savorseattle savor Seattle food tours founder, TiVo dvr fav show top chef

bigkid #mpiwsc jeff Kyle, mra services, it director, spiceworks, network monitoring and it community

TerrenceYoung My fav app is HootSuite whats yours? #mpiwsc

bigkid #mpiwsc Jason Henderson, mra services, registration manager, my android tmobile g2, always on it

bigkid #mpiwsc Karen Davies, meeting planner, founder, google translate used in Finland on my last trip

thebekah #mpiwsc Bekah Laughman, Sheraton Bellevue Hotel, Business Travel Sales Manager, Fav App: Instagram ;o)

SBDonaghy #MPIWSC Everett Blindheim, SH Worldwide, web/reg team, iPhone

Azureeyes30 #MPIWSC, Amy Adams, Suquamish Clearwater Casino Resort, Sales Manager, Words Free

Witt_emily #mpiwsc Emily Witt, Hyatt Regency Bellevue, Catering Sales Manager, C25K app

lyevan #mpiwsc, Lesley Young Cutler, president, Envision Meetings & Incentives. My smartphone!

kathygerke #MPIWSC Kathy Gerke, CRG Events, Account Manager, Bejeweled

AlkiGirl09 #MPIWSC, Carolyn Henning, Director of Catering. Fav App - Facebook

emilgoo #MPIWSC, Emily Gooding, Starwood Hotels and Resorts, Account Director Starwood Convention Collection, fav app?....app envy

SingingComedian #mpiwsc Larry g jones entertaining you at up to 75 voices per hour. From Sinatra to Cher, to rodney dangerfield I get no respect at all

beck_seattle #MPIWSC, Becky Williams, Director of Catering, McCormick & Schmick's, great app is Flashcards, helped in studying for CMP

michaeljnoesen #mpiwsc my fav app is Starbucks mobile card.

SBDonaghy #MPIWSC SarahBeth Donaghy, SH Worldwide, Registration & Events Mgr, LinkedIn to connect w/ my clients & kicking butt at Wordsfree for fun!

audreyrfan #mpiwsc Audrey Fan. eVenues.com (new startup). Angry birds

HRHalsey #mpiwsc Heather Halsey, microsoftmeeting solutions customer advocate. I love Facebook.

MPIWSC RT @thebekah: @MPIWSC Bekah Laughman, Sheraton Bellevue Business Travel Sales Manager, Fav App: Instagram #mpiwsc

MPIWSC RT @jspellos: @MPIWSC looking forward to today's Technologies session #mpi #eventprofs. cool video to show. #mpiwsc

bigkid #mpiwsc James Spellos uses tweetchat.com

briannajmark Revised fav app is angry birds. #Mpiwsc

SBDonaghy Everything @jspellos is saying abt social media & technology for today's meetings is so spot on! #MPIWSC

TerrenceYoung Are u using paper.li or delicious or scoop.it or other daily RT if u do! #MPIWSC #mpi #eventprofs

jones_kristen Kristen stevenson, visit bellevue washington, convention sales manager, my favorite app is Pandora! #mpiwsc

SBDonaghy @jspellos…I love the #winepad! #MPIWSC

SeaJet01 Check in with foursquare! #Mpiwsc

bigkid #mpiwsc mad props to James Spellos for all his tips, note less than 5% use some of these features, should it be you? #eventprofs @jspellos

bigkid #mpiwsc chapter breaks 300 for facebook friends! http://t.co/262bTUz Like them today to get to 400! #eventprofs #gmic #pcma #somet

Alpha Names—Learn Names While Learning Team Process

Time: 10–20 minutes

Participants: 4–20

Technology: Text, chat, needs to be real time (not Twitter as it has a significant delay), teleconference (optional)

Category: Icebreaker

Goals

Text or chat all of your names in alphabetical order.

Game Summary

This text or chat initiative looks deceptively simple; however, it can become challenging without a leader. It's also an easy way to learn everybody's name and something about their team style in a short amount of time. Using this initiative, a facilitator can learn the team's default style and process.

Setup

You can use the chat feature on any instant messenger, BuddyMeeting.com, or other meeting room. The key is to use a real-time chat application. Do *not* use Twitter; each reader has a different refresh rate, which makes it difficult to use for these types of timing games. It's also useful to have a stopwatch ready to time how long the team takes.

Instructions to the Audience

We're going to get a chance to meet one another and see how fast we can work as a team. Chat all of your first names in alphabetical order. If you get one out of order, you need to start again from the beginning, and you can use only chat to communicate. Any questions?

Power Tip

The fastest technique I've seen is to have your name pretyped in and know the order in which the team needs to go in, hitting Enter as soon as you see the name before you.

Debrief

Who was the leader in the group? How did you decide on a process? What did you do when you failed? How can you do it even faster?

Variations

Allow the teams to complete the game two or three times in an attempt to increase their speed with each try. It can make the game too easy if their names are displayed on the app they're using, so you can have them chat A-Z in alphabetical order instead.

Case Study

We did this activity with one especially dysfunctional team of 10 people. They asked no questions before they started, spent no time on process, and just started working using trial and error. Joe would type his name, then Beth would type hers, and they'd have to start over. They would get three or four names done, and then someone would go out of order. They'd get to five or six, and someone would chime in with a suggestion; although often helpful, it meant starting over yet again.

This team realized during the debriefing that a clear team leader would have helped them, even though nobody wanted to fulfill that role. They also realized that using their planning time would have allowed them to ask more questions, agree on the plan they were going to use, and then execute it. This provided a significant comparison to how they were working as

an online team. They were doing redundant work at multiple sites and not taking the time to plan who was doing what before starting a project.

Implementing these changes in future team meetings yielded significant gains in productivity and opened more time and energy for team training to create further gains!

Where in the World Whiteboarding—Draw Who You Are and Where You're From

Time: 5–20 minutes
Participants: 2–20
Technology: Whiteboard
Category: Icebreaker

Goals

Write your name and draw something to represent where you are from.

Game Summary

It usually takes attendees a good amount of time to arrive for online meetings. As such, this initiative is a great way for a facilitator to engage people one by one as they log in to the meeting. Each person who arrives is able to see information about the other people who are present and then join in themselves.

Setup

Log in to any whiteboard or online conferencing software such as BuddyMeeting.com, GoToMeeting, or another Web conferencing tool with a whiteboard. As the facilitator, be sure to log in 15 minutes before the start time and draw your own example. Use the service's teleconference line or have a call-in line.

Instructions to the Audience

Welcome! Who just joined us? (Wait for responses from attendees.) Thank you for coming; we're all taking a moment to introduce ourselves. I'm passing control to you, so please write your name and a quick sketch of where you're calling from on the whiteboard.

Variations

You can ask participants what their favorite hobbies or type of weather is, what company they work for, and other questions that might spur graphic art.

Case Study[1]
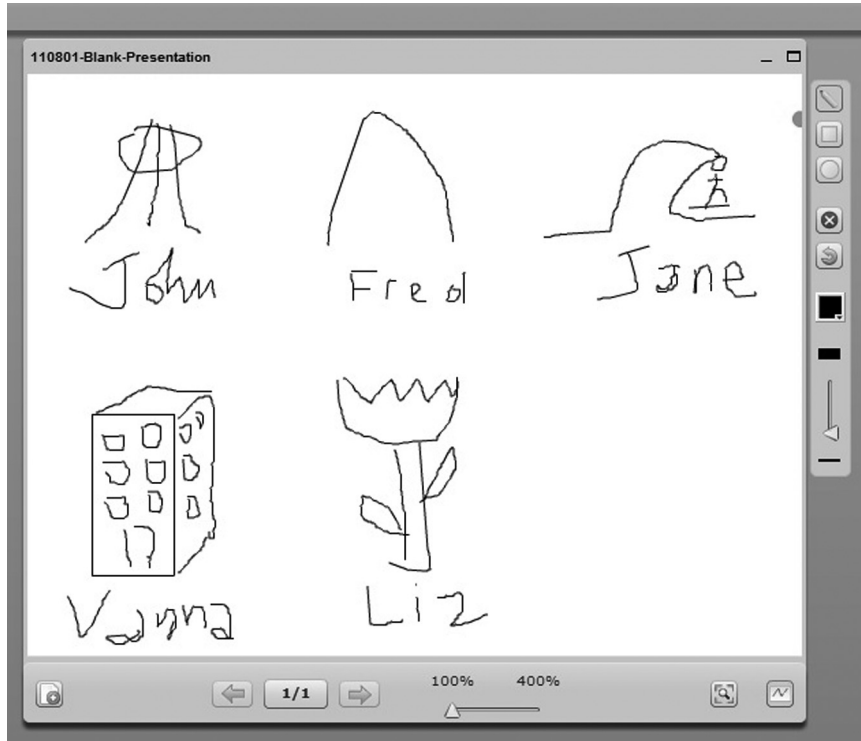
During the online meeting that produced the preceding graphic, we had John from Seattle (that's the Space Needle), Fred from St. Louis (the Arch), Jane from Hawaii (a surfer on a wave), Vanna from New York, and Liz from Skagit Valley, Washington, where a tulip festival is held. As each person finished their drawing, other participants chimed in with comments; they chatted about the last time they were in Hawaii and asked where Vanna lived in New York, thereby spurring some helpful informal conversations that allowed everyone present to get to know the other participants.

Photo Booth—iPad 2 or Photo-Based Networking

Time: 10–20 minutes
Participants: 4–30

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[1]*Sources:* Priest, S. #4 of *100 of the Best Virtual Team-Building Events*. (Seattle, WA: Tarrak Technologies, 2001). virtualteamworks.com; http://www.tarrak.com/BOOKS/100.htm

Priest, S., Sikes, S. & Evans, F. #37 of 99 *of the best Experiential Corporate Games We Know*. (Lakebay, WA: eXperientia, 2000). http://www.tarrak.com/BOOKS/99.htm

Technology: iPad2 (live), Twitter, e-mail, text, or any other tool that can send a photo

Category: Icebreaker

Goals

Take a photo of yourself and share with the group.

Game Summary

The iPad 2 features an app called Photo Booth that allows you to take a photo of yourself using one of nine different filters, including Squeeze, Kaleidoscope, and Thermal Camera. This is a good introduction to the forward-facing camera on the iPad 2, and it can easily break the ice, as you can make some very funny photos with it. Other options are to have people use their own camera phones to take their photos and have them text or e-mail the photos with a caption. You can exhibit all of them by displaying pictures on a projector from a computer or using a program that can share your desktop, such as BuddyMeeting.

Setup

Have at least one iPad 2 that you can use or check to see if enough participants have cell phones with cameras and the capability to text or e-mail a photo. Another option is to make digital cameras available that you can collect and from which you can quickly download photos.

Instructions to the Audience

Pass the iPad 2 around and take a photo of yourself using one of the nine different filters available. Then be ready to introduce yourself as we display your photo.

Variations

Consider using the Magic Mirror app on the iPad 2; this uses augmented reality to allow the user to try different virtual hairstyles, glasses, and other accessories. The app follows the user's face, keeping the virtual accessories in the correct place. You can touch the "camera" icon to save the photo to your Gallery and then e-mail or tweet it from there.

Case Study

We brought an iPad 2 into a meeting with Expedia as a way to display new technology-based team building. Each person in the room took his or her photo, added it to iMovie (see YouTeams), and wrote a caption before passing it to the next person. Here are a few of the photos they took, along with the captions they came up with:

Too much caffeine

Ah ha . . . fun at team building equals fun at work.

We have X-ray eyes

TEAM . . . together everyone accomplishes more!

Pinterest—Pin Pictures and Websites for a Common Topic

Time: 10–20 minutes

Participants: 2–1,000+

Technology: Web browser

Category: Icebreaker

Goals

Find out what your team has in common in regard to a specific chosen topic by pinning websites and photos to Pinterest.

Game Summary

Pinterest is a cool website that allows you and others to pin a website or a photo to a visual board. It's a great networking activity, because you can discuss the different links people share and use them to discover what you have in common with one another. In addition, you can keep the board up for future networking.

Setup

You (and possibly all of your teammates) need to sign up for a free account at Pinterest.com. You can then create a board with the topic and invite your teammates to contribute.

Instructions to the Audience

Let's find out something about each other by logging into the website Pinterest.com and posting at least one or more links or photos that fit our topic. I'll give you 5 minutes to post as many as possible; then we'll see what we have for our team.

Sample Questions

Where do you want to travel? What are your favorite websites? Can you share some photos of your family/friends?

Debrief

Take the time to review the board and ask each person to introduce himself or herself and describe at least one pin. At the end, ask what you learned about this team through the various links people shared.

Case Study

Julie Norton from one of our Fortune 500 clients started a board after her husband surprised her with a trip to France. She asked people to share their "Places to go," and others soon began pinning up their favorite destinations. This site has the most beautiful collection of photos from around the world and great ideas for places to visit. Julie currently has 46,000 people following this board, with more joining every day. Now that's power icebreaking!
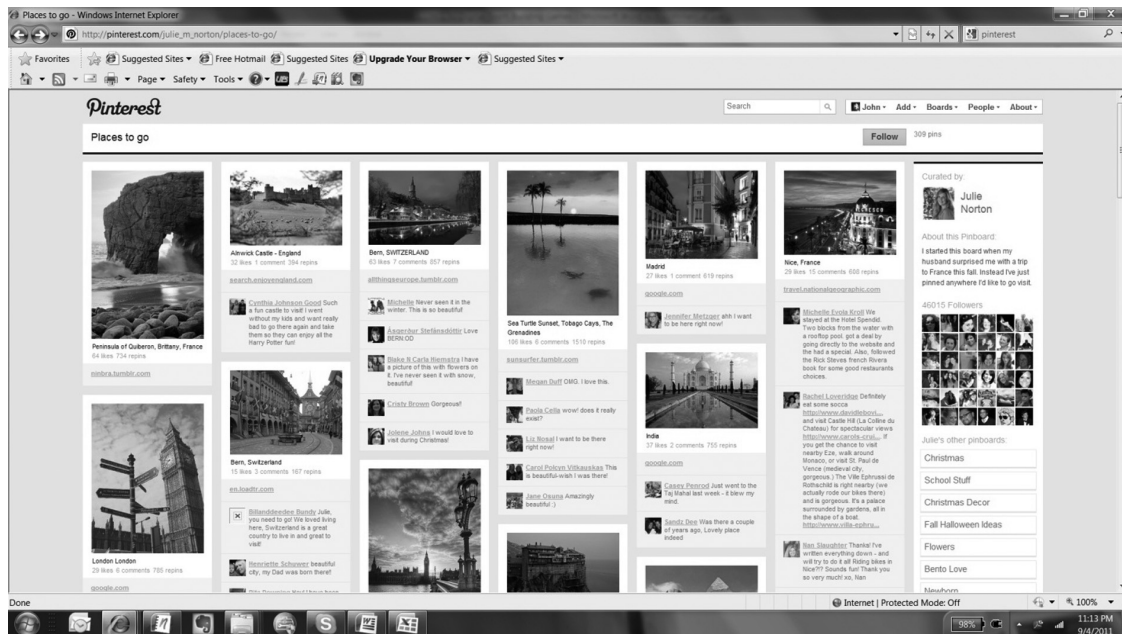
Source: http://pinterest.com/julie_m_norton/places-to-go/