

10 minute Board Exercise

Ice Breakers

Getting people moving and talking before formal meetings start gets the blood flowing and makes for more companionable discussions and creative problem solving. People who trust each other problem solve more efficiently. Try these simple but effective warm up exercises to get people talking and laughing:

- 1) **(WHO'S WHO)** Have each person turn to a person they are seated next to, and have them interview them with these three questions:
 - a. Where are your grandparents from?
 - b. When and what happened the first time you took a family vacation that was memorable as a child?
 - c. What state did you do military service/university/first major job?

Go around the room and have people introduce their interviewee and what the interviewee said. Comment that although we all may seem alike, our broad experiences come with us as a board and help make the organization a robust and thoughtful charity.

- 2) **(RIVER OF LIFE)** Take three big flip chart sheets before the meeting and place them end to end horizontally and connecting on one wall. Take a blue fat felt pen, and draw a very wide river across all three sheets. To warm up the room:
 - a. Ask everyone to grab a felt pen
 - b. Explain that the river is the life of the organization from beginning to this point at this meeting
 - c. Ask people to get up as a group and decide and then draw where the:
 - i. Headwaters are
 - ii. The rough passages of the organization were in the form of rapids
 - iii. Where calm river waters are when the organization was flowing peacefully
 - iv. If any new streams are feeding the river, and what those streams are (funding, people, etc.)
 - v. Where the boulders are that diverted or changed the river

Give the group ten minutes to make decisions and draw. Then ask:

- Who did the drawing in the group?
- Who remembered what happened when?
- Why do we think we are in a place now that is reflected in the river?

This exercise shows that having organizational memory is important, as is new infusions of money and people and energy

Ice Breaker: Commonalities and Uniquenesses

Purpose

This ice breaker can be used effectively with stranger groups, with intact working groups, to begin a board retreat or a board meeting. It's effective because it allows strangers to get to know each other, and helps people who already work together see a slightly different side of each other.

Instructions

This exercise works best when the total group is divided into sub-groups of no less than four and no more than five people each. For each sub-group, you'll need one flip chart (see below,) posted on the wall. Position each flip chart as far away from the others as possible – so the charts are spread out around the room.

1. Ask people to gather around a flip chart, with four to five people at each flip chart.
2. Give one person in each group a wide-tip felt tip marker.
3. Ask each group to find out everything that they have in common, and write it inside the circle. An item can only be listed if it applies to **EVERYONE** in the sub-group. To add a little energy – give a prize for the group that finds the most things in common.
4. After 3-4 minutes, ask each person to write their name underneath one of the lines, and then write one thing about themselves that is interesting, unique, or different.
5. Each group reports out three things that they had in common. Then each person introduces themselves by name and shares what they wrote about themselves.

Follow-Up

None needed

Variations:

- If you have more time, you can tell the group that the purpose of the activity is to get to know each other – not to see who has the longest list. So if they discover that they all like to travel, write down travel – and before going on to discover something else, have a brief conversation about where they've traveled and where they hope to travel. Or if they all love to read, explore what types of books they enjoy.

In this case, allow ten minutes for the groups to generate items for the middle of the circle, and additional time to write down their individual uniqueness.