

CHAPTER 4

5 Carefully Selected Ice Breaking Games for Remote Teams

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The use of distributed teams adds an additional layer of complexity for a meeting organizer. Keeping the team engaged and involved can be challenging. Your goal is to direct the team and get the most out of every member at each step of the project. To be successful, many of us are constantly looking for a new way to engage the team. One of best solutions? Use an icebreaker game.

An icebreaker is a fun, interactive game that acts as an informal introduction and creates a personal connection among the team. The use of an icebreaker game can diminish some of the inherent challenges of remote teamwork. Take a look at how and when to best employ icebreakers for distributed teams.

When to Use an Icebreaker

Icebreaker games need to be speedy. After all, you need enough time to focus on the assigned challenge. Experienced teams may be able to jump right in. However, there are two situations in which an icebreaker is strongly encouraged.

New Teams

Going in “cold” to a session with a group of people from different teams and functions can be challenging. Participants tend to have preconceived ideas about other members that may be difficult to overcome. The use of an icebreaker will help break down stereotypes and forge previously unknown connections. New and existing members will learn to relate to each other in ways they hadn't expected. Pop culture, sports, and family similarities can all be discovered and bonded over in an icebreaker game.

Remote Teams

Remote teams may or may not be familiar with one another, but the lack of “face time” can limit results. The ability to visually read physical and facial cues may be reduced. Using an icebreaker, you may not be able to see a team members smile, but you can hear them laugh.

Benefits of an Icebreaker

You've recognized the need for an icebreaker, but time is of the essence. When the participants all have pressing work to be done, do the benefits of an icebreaker really outweigh the time it takes away from “real” work?

Take a look at these benefits to learn why icebreaker games for ideation are worth your time.

1. Team Introduction

The study of ideation has yielded reliable “best practices”. One of the most important is to include the right mix of people, which means the participants don't always know or work with one another.

In fact, they may be spread around different time zones and cultures. The use of an icebreaker game is a fun way to quickly engage the team and make introductions more interesting and personal.

2. Encourage The Right Atmosphere

Ice breaking games insert fun and laughter into the meeting; an invaluable component. A little laughter creates an open and relaxed atmosphere that is critical for any form of ideation. It forces the participants to communicate and interact differently than normal, which will be useful as they begin the brainstorming process.

3. Get Everyone Thinking Creatively

Icebreaker games stimulate creativity. Rather than reiterating their resume, title, and number of children, coming up with a unique description or humorous story opens the participants up to a less structured way of communicating.

4. Good “Practice” for What Comes Next

An icebreaker sets the tone for the rest of the meeting and is a springboard into the brainstorming session. Participants generate a personal and unique idea for their segment of the game, just as they will be expected to do when the ideation begins.

It is best to keep the choice of game appropriate for your meeting and for the team involved. Remote teams may include a number of international participants, so asking about professional sports teams or spring break vacation destinations may cause more discomfort than inclusion.

Wondering how to choose the right icebreaker? Here's a rundown of some of our favorites.

The Best Ice breaking Games for Remote Teams



10 Common Things

This game is a good fit for brainstorming teams that do not know one another or work remotely. Group the team into small groups and ask them to come up with a list of 10 things they have in common. Remote teams should use a shared document or an online whiteboard to generate the list quickly. If coaches prefer to keep the topic more business-oriented, limit the list to work or industry related topics.

It can be as simple as, “We all wear shoes”, to something more specific such as, “We were all hired in 2014”. Regardless of the answers, it will create a bond, generate discussion and laughter and get the group thinking creatively. Allow time for each time to share their list with the larger group on the online whiteboard. This will create an electric, dynamic atmosphere, well suited to brainstorming.

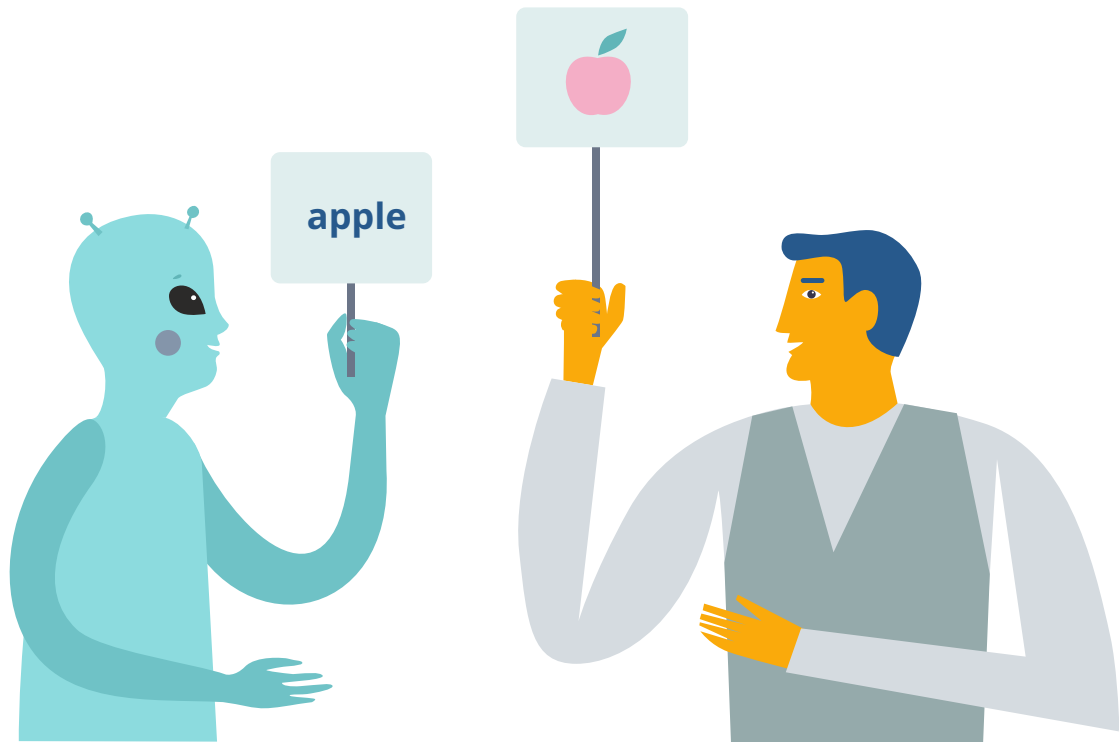


Favorite Things

In this icebreaker game, everyone is encouraged to name their favorite thing. This icebreaker game is useful because it can be adapted to align with the meeting goal, work environment or something more personal. However, since the participants are all asked to name their favorite, there is no risk for “getting the answer wrong”. This works well for remote teams because everyone can participate.

Here's how it works. Assign the “Favorite Thing” topic. Possibilities include, “favorite thing about the company” or “favorite aspect of the product”. Ask the team members to find an image online and upload it to a picture sharing site, shared drive or online whiteboard.

Within the group, each member should present the image and a short description online. It will stir the imagination and creativity of the participants, and makes an ideal springboard to brainstorming.



Aliens Have Landed

This icebreaker can be useful for teams with remote participants with language and cultural differences. Tell the group to imagine aliens have landed on Earth and want to learn about your company. But since they don't speak English or understand your product, it needs to be explained with 5 symbols or pictures. Ask each participant to upload 5 simple images to the team that best describe and communicate your company's products and culture. Take a few minutes and look at all the images. Are there common themes?



A One Word Icebreaker

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 “x”. 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.



Take a Picture

This icebreaking game, “Take a Picture” was developed as a fast icebreaker for distributed teams. To begin, ask each team member to take and post a picture of something on their desk to a common online page. The team member should pick something that best describes them and how they work. It can be a photo, an award, or something silly. Take turns explaining why that item was chosen. A second option is to take a photo of your shoes and upload it. Take turns doing screen shares so everyone can participate, regardless of location. Your choice of shoes says a lot about you! This is an easy and fast method to learn something personal, with a work twist, about everyone on the team.

This game takes some preparation.

Tip from RealtimeBoard:

Make sure the service you're using has a mobile app and have all team members install it before the brainstorming session begins. So all the team members can upload their photos with ease.

Regardless of the brainstorming game you decide upon, remember that it should be fast, relevant and fun. The goal is to quickly bring your team together, get them open and engaged and to engage their creative side. Once your team has been prepared with an ice breaking game, they are ready to begin the brainstorming session. Have other great icebreaker ideas for distributed teams? Make sure you let us know in comments.

In the next chapter we will lead you through the visual thinking practices for remote brainstorming.
