

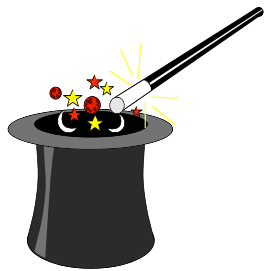
"Ice Breaking" Meeting Start-Ups

ToolTip #2
Mar 2003



Have you ever attended a meeting where it just didn't seem to start on a "good note" or it took a long time for people attending the meeting to focus their attention? In these instances, using an "Ice Breaker" can help get the meeting off on the "right foot". The following provides information on what an "Ice Breaker" is and how best to use it.

WHAT IS AN "ICE BREAKER": An "Ice Breaker" is an activity or opening remarks in a meeting with the purpose of bringing members together in a relaxed, interesting or fun way. An "Ice Breaker" may also serve as a tool to introduce members to the group. Qualities of a typical "Ice Breaker" are:



1. **Positive or Upbeat.** Starting a meeting with laughter or sharing "good feelings" is a great way to get everyone in sync.
2. **All Inclusive:** An "Ice Breaker" should include everyone in the room. "Insider" jokes are out!
3. **Appropriate for the Group:** Consider the character of the group when planning an "Ice Breaker". A group of businesspersons may not feel comfortable with an exercise where they have to get up and greet strangers, but that may be perfect for a group that is based on social relationships.
4. **Make it Brief:** An "Ice Breaker" should bring the start of a meeting into focus, not be the focus of a meeting.

TYPES OF ICE BREAKERS & WHEN TO USE THEM:



- **Start off with a Joke or a Funny Story:** This is good for any type of meeting. Members can share humor (as well as get a glimpse of your "human side"), helping to create a "friendly feeling" in the room. (Just make sure not to offend anyone. No jokes about individuals or special groups.)
- **Bring Up a Current Event:** Make a comment about something in the news that is interesting for everyone **AND** is "upbeat" or inspirational.
- **Inspirational Quote:** There are many books that have quotes from famous or not so famous people. Pick one that is relevant to the meeting topic. A quote can often set the tone for a meeting. This works especially well for more serious, "soul searching" meetings where members may have to make decisions.
- **"Ice Breaker" Introductions:** We've all been in meetings where we go around the table and introduce ourselves. This actually serves as an "Ice Breaker". If humor is added it can be much more effective. See examples of how to do this on the other side of this ToolTip.

"Ice Breaking" Examples

There are many good joke books as well as humor in your own lives to share. Here is one that came off of the "Internet". This joke could relate to the upcoming meeting presentation by saying that this is not what will happen.

After listening restlessly to a long and tedious sermon a 6-year-old boy asked his father what the preacher did the rest of the week. "Oh, he's a very busy man," the father replied. "He takes care of church business, visits the sick, ministers to the poor and then he has to have time to rest up. Talking in public isn't an easy job, you know

The boy thought about that, then said, "Well, listening ain't easy, either."

When chosen well, an inspiration quote can actually help facilitate a better discussion. Here are a few examples

"Whether you think that you can, or that you can't, you are usually right. " - Henry Ford (1863-1947)

"All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." - Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty. " - Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965)

Judy Hutchinson opened many of the Santa Ana Empowerment Zone Community Meetings with a "getting to know you" Ice Breaker. The following is a description of some she used.

At the start of the meeting, Judy asked everyone in the room to find a partner that they didn't know. They were given 5 minutes to interview each other. Then the partner did the introductions, sharing what they had learned about the individual.

In larger groups, this is more difficult because of time requirements. In one meeting, Judy shortened the process by having partners give only the person's name and their organization. The twist, which added the element of humor, was that they had to add a descriptive adjective to the person's name. So we had "Careful Charlie from the ___ Club, or Wicked Wendy from the ___ Agency, or Thorough Thomas from the ___ School". This not only added humor, but helped us know a little about the person so that we might better remember their name.