



Dr. Clue's Favorite Ice Breakers

The following icebreakers and energizers were originally printed in the Dr. Clue Teambuilding Newsletter. To see back issues or to receive a complimentary subscription, go to <http://www.drclue.com/newsletter.htm>.

We hope you find these icebreaker activities fun and useful. Try one at your next meeting.

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About Dr. Clue Treasure Hunts

Founded in 1995, Dr. Clue began with three treasure hunt sites in the San Francisco Bay Area. Over the years, we've expanded to over 20 hunt locations around the country, from the Mardi-Gras atmosphere of New Orleans' Bourbon Street to the neon-bright glitz of the Las Vegas Strip. At Dr. Clue, we do treasure hunts and treasure hunts *only* – full time – in an effort to absolutely perfect this unique and powerful experiential learning model. Dr. Clue has performed close to 300 treasure hunts across America, in such diverse locations as Dallas, Baltimore, Los Angeles, New York, and Orlando.

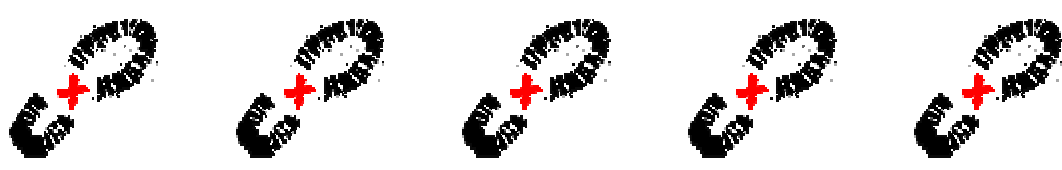
Unlike a scavenger hunt, a treasure hunt involves clue solving rather than object gathering. We believe that clue-solving is a much more dynamic and challenging learning model. In our treasure hunts, you decrypt code, crack puzzles and decipher ciphers as you strive to uncover & visit each mystery location. While out in the field, you really feel the hand of the treasure hunt master at work, laying a "trail of breadcrumbs," as it were, to each clue location. Beyond anything you might do in a classroom, a Dr Clue treasure hunt brings teamwork lessons *alive* as you find yourselves making group decisions on the fly, in real time -- choosing your course, brainstorming as a team, allocating your resources, and shaving time off the clock.





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The Story of Your Name

We all have stories -often fascinating ones--around our names. And surprisingly, no one ever seems to ask you: "Where does your name come from?"

--Divide people into groups of 3-5 and have each person take turns telling the story of their names. Why did their parents give them their first name or middle name? What's the story of their last name? Did their ancestors change it at Ellis Island? And for the brave, how about that old high school nickname of yours? People can share as much or as little information as they like.

--At the end, ask each group what was the most interesting story they heard (making sure, of course, that the person whose story is being shared is willing to have their story repeated in front of the whole class). I'm always amazed at how much looser and relaxed everyone always feels after this very simple activity!





This one is borrowed from the world of Improv acting (many thanks to Sue Walden of ImprovWorks: www.improv.org It's called:

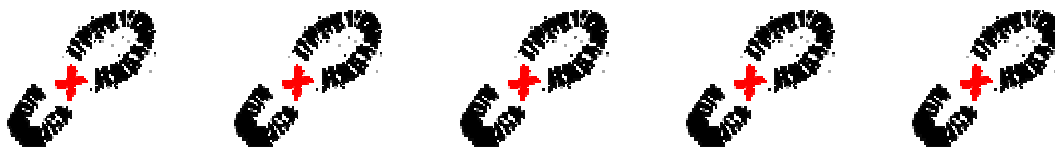
" Yes And/Yes But"

Your group is charged with designing an innovative new product - let's call it the "Electric Ice Cream Cone." (It could be anything, of course, the more fanciful the better.) Your task is to imagine all the fabulous features of this invention, with only one restriction: During your brainstorm, you are *not allowed to use the word "But"*. As one person comes up with an idea, everyone should immediately and enthusiastically applaud his/her brilliant suggestion (no matter what it is!) Other people may then take turns jumping in with the next fabulous idea, building on the previous suggestion, and always starting with the phrase "Yes", and wild applause follows every person's idea (and remember, no "yes-buts" allowed!).

Continue for 5 minutes and observe the amazing, outstanding, outlandish ideas you all come up with.

The point: Brainstorm sessions are very different from "analysis" sessions. Their purpose is to generate a quantity of ideas, regardless of the quality. In a brainstorm session, "anything goes," without limitations, and there are no wrong ideas. So often in school and business, we jump into the brainstorm stage with our "Yes-buts," the language of the "analysis" stage, where ideas do need to be sifted and discarded. In the brainstorming activity above, "critical thinking" is not the point. Your goal is simply to "yes-and" each other, celebrating the unfettered joy of idea generation.

Variant: Try the activity again for 5 minutes, this time using only "Yes-but" statements, and observe the difference!





Before your next project meeting, start with the following quick-and-easy

"Needs Assessment"

Ask attendees to imagine that today is the day they've finished their team project. The task successfully completed, you are all now lifting a glass of champagne to celebrate a job well done. Each person is now to describe, one by one, what they most enjoyed about the project, as well as what they got out of the experience personally.

The point: By "looking back" at a successful outcome and the steps that led us there, we are in essence describing our "ideal scenario" - what we really want to create. Just as teams possess task, group and individual **Roles**, so do they possess task, group and individual **Needs**. This "reverse visioning" exercise sheds light, in a very positive manner, on what each of your team members might need to experience in order to feel personally satisfied with the project.

Note: this exercise works just as well as a needs-assessment for a training session. Ask participants at the beginning of the training to imagine that it's the end of the day and they've had an amazing, meaningful and "impactful" time together. Now it's time to look back, reflect and celebrate all that they've learned and achieved from the day.

Participants will tell you exactly what they'd like to learn and experience. Try it!





The Continuum Exercise:

Diagnosing a group's skills and knowledge is never easy. At best, we administer a lengthy survey or diagnostic tool, with uneven and often incomplete results. At worst, we simply rely on what people have written on their resumes. The exercise below is a fun and easy way of discovering what your team is all about while simultaneously breaking the ice and raising the group's energy level.

Start by having people line up in a column, with the first person in line fairly close to you and the last person in line at least 20 feet back. The distances are not that important, nor is the position in line where people are initially standing. All that matters is that people are facing you and that they have enough room to spread out. Some kind of spatial limit is helpful, however, for the back boundary—such as a wall or a marker.

Tell people that they are standing in a very flexible continuum, with one extreme near you and the other extreme at the back boundary. You are now going to ask some questions about their skills, abilities and knowledge; their job is to move to the place in the continuum that best expresses their answers to the questions.

The First Question:

Are you an introvert or an extrovert? If you are an introvert, defined as someone who recharges his energy during his quiet time "alone," move to the front of the line. If you are an extrovert, defined as someone who recharges her energy by being around people, move to the end of the line. If you feel you are somewhere in between these two extremes, move to the place in line that best expresses your place along the continuum of this question.

People will then move in line according to their beliefs about themselves, usually with great enthusiasm and much laughter.

Continue the exercise with a variety of questions, both work and non-work related.

Examples:

Are you a planner or a "play it by ear" type?

Do you make your decisions based on logic or on the happiness of people?

Do you know a lot about sports or nothing about sports?

Are you good at word games and puzzles, or terrible at word games and

puzzles?
And so on...

You can ask almost any kind of question and people will tend to answer them quite honestly.

Debrief Questions for the Participants:

- 1) What might make you hesitant about moving away from a middle position?
- 2) What are the implications of declaring an extreme position?
- 3) Were you surprised at some people's self-assessments? What does this say about the way people perceive themselves?
- 4) Were people surprised at your self-assessments? What might this suggest about the way you present yourself in the office?

Questions for the Team Leader(s):

- 1) Were your people's self-assessments what you expected to see?
- 2) Did you learn something new about your team members?
- 3) Do the results suggest that you might reconfigure your team(s) in some way?





Paper Airplanes:

This is a classic "jolt" - a short, high-impact energizer with a strong "aha!" moment.

Set Up: Explain to the group that their task is to determine the best model for a paper airplane. Each person gets several sheets of paper and 5 minutes to create their plane.

Process: After the initial five-minute design process, invite people to step up to a line on the floor and try out their planes. Their goal is to hit a hand-drawn bulls-eye poster on the opposite wall. Participants take turns launching their planes for 3 minutes, followed by discussion.

Debrief Questions: What happened out there? Did you work individually or in teams? Did you each make one airplane or several airplanes? When someone succeeded in hitting the bulls-eye, did that person proceed to help others with their design? Did anyone ask the successful person to share their design?

The point: We exist in a culture, both business and societal, that automatically imposes a competitive element on our simplest endeavors. In this activity, people tend to assume that they are involved in a personal competition, with all that this implies: winners and losers, me against them, etc. In fact, nothing prevented the participants from working together in teams, sharing ideas and expertise. Nothing prevented the skillful "designers" from assisting others. Nor was there any limit on how many planes a person could try out - although most people simply assumed that one shot was all they got - an attitude of scarcity. How much more effective we could all be if we began each work task with an attitude of cooperation rather than competition, asking for help - offering help in return, and treating each other as "partners" rather than as "rivals"!





The Status Game:

Set Up: Distribute playing cards to everyone in the group -- one per person. Each participant places their card on their forehead, visible to others but not to themselves.

Process: Instruct people that they are now at a party. They are to mingle for five minutes, treating everyone according to the status of their card. People holding the highest cards are the highest-status individuals; people holding the lowest cards are the lowest-status individuals. After five minutes, stop the game. Without yet looking at their cards, people should now line up according to their perceived status, from highest on the left to lowest on the right.

Debrief Questions: What happened during the game? During your party conversations, how did you go about imparting status to others? What were the cues, both verbal and physical, that clued you in about your own status? How successful were you in guessing your status? How did it feel to be treated like a high-status person? How did it feel to be regarded as a low-status person?

The point: Status is communicated in so many ways, including:

- 1) Verbally - The words we use.
- 2) Para verbally - The way we use them.
- 3) Body Language - The way we stand, the way we shake hands, the way we maintain eye contact, body movements, gestures, touch.
- 4) Personal Space - The space between us and others.

This exercise brings attention to our communications styles and the feelings generated around status. Question: Is status learned or instinctual? Is it possible for humans to relate to each other without imposing status relationships?





"Around the World"

Set Up: Inform participants that you are going to help them visualize the global diversity represented in their group. From now on, the center of the room is to be considered a map of the world, flattened Mercator-style on the floor.

Process: Each person should now move to the spot on the world map where they consider themselves to have grown up. As there are likely to be people in attendance who were born in far-flung locations across the globe, the map must be scaled to allow everyone a place to stand. The defining of the map's dimensions should be left to the participants.

--Options: "Go to where you grew up," might be preceded by, "Stand on the place where you were born." Further rounds might include: "Move to where you've spent the majority of your adult life" and "Position yourself over the place where you live now." In each case, the map may need to be "re-scaled," with the final-round configuration transforming to an over-sized map of your local area.

--Further Options: Include a round of "Go to where your ancestors lived" or "Move to the part of the world to which you'd most like to travel." For even more of a challenge, have participants do the entire activity silently!

Discussion Questions: Were you surprised at the diversity represented in your group? How did you go about re-configuring the map? Who were the leaders overseeing the map re-scaling? What were the challenges in this activity? What made it easy?

The Point: The world is getting smaller all the time. The people we work with are likely to hail from locations all across the globe. This activity brings home the worldwide diversity of one's organization - as well as providing participants a chance to think about where they consider to be "home". It's also a great exercise for teaching world geography!

