

When In Doubt, Retreat: Fun and Effective Team Building Activities for Your Board, Committees, and Congregation

Supporting Materials

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Thought Provoking Questions

- Where is your bloodline originally from?
- What is your greatest pet peeve?
- Who is your best friend and why?
- What is your favorite bumper sticker?
- What would you absolutely refuse to do, regardless of the circumstances?
- If you had to live in any other country, which one would it be?
- What was the thing you most wanted to be when you were a little kid?
- What is your proudest accomplishment?
- If you had one hour alone with a famous person, living or dead, who would that person be?
- What is your go-to activity when you need to relax or otherwise take a break from the world?
- Who would play you in a movie made about your life?
- What was your most memorable moment of high school or college?
- What is one story that you used to feel embarrassed about but can laugh about now?
- What did you do growing up that got you into trouble?

Sculpture Exercise

Please bring with you three items that have personal meaning for you and that represent what you bring to the group that will help to enhance your effectiveness and value as a team.

If you can't bring the actual object, please bring a representation.

After everyone has shared:

Ask them to put the objects on a table in no particular order and to do it in silence. They should also give each other permission to touch or move each other's objects.

Allow as much time as the group needs to complete the sculpture. Watch to see where people put objects in relation to other's objects; how and where they move objects that aren't theirs. Ask the group to talk about the process and why they put or moved the objects the way they did.

Finally, ask the group to walk around the table and look at the sculpture from different angles. Ask them to report on what they see. Make the connection to the hidden talents that members of the team have and that sometimes we look at each other from different perspectives in order to see and appreciate those skills, gifts and talents. Hold this up as a monument to the skills gifts and talents of the team. Get someone to take a picture of it.

Alphabetical Order Exercise

If you want to get the group up and moving in the beginning, here's a great and fun way to do that. Ask people to form a circle and tell them that in a moment they are going to get into alphabetical order. Tell them that the "A's" if there are any will start over here (point to a spot in the circle) and the "Z's", if there are any will end over here. Tell them also that they can talk to each other during the exercise and that they will have 30 seconds or one minute (depending on the size of the group) to complete the task.

Then tell them that their task is to get in alphabetical order corresponding to the first letter of their mother's maiden name. Say "go".

Allow time for the group to complete the task, adding some urgency by counting down the time. When done, go around the room and ask for the names.

Debrief by asking what it took to succeed in this task:

- Participate
- Speak up...and listen
- Tell the truth
- Know where you stand in relation to each other
- Feel comfortable in taking the lead, but know when to hang back and let others do so
- Have fun

End the exercise by talking about how these qualities relate to the success of the team during the retreat.

The Marshmallow Challenge

Divide the group into teams of at least four. Provide each team with the following materials: 20 sticks of spaghetti, one yard of tape, one yard of string or yarn, one marshmallow.

Read the following rules to the group:

- ✓ The winning team is the one that has the tallest structure measured from the table top surface to the top of the marshmallow. That means the structure cannot be suspended from a higher structure, like a chair, ceiling or chandelier.
- ✓ The entire marshmallow needs to be on the top of the structure. Cutting or eating part of the marshmallow disqualifies the team.
- ✓ The team can use as many or as few of the 20 spaghetti sticks, as much or as little of the string or tape.
- ✓ Teams are free to break the spaghetti, cut up the tape and string to create new structures.
- ✓ The Challenge lasts 18 minutes: Teams cannot hold on to the structure when the time runs out. Those touching or supporting the structure at the end of the exercise will be disqualified.

When time is up, measure the structures and award a prize to the structure that is the tallest. Use the slides on the Marshmallow Challenge PDF to describe the processes that various groups go through in order to accomplish this task.

Make the point that the marshmallow is usually the congregation or the mission or Unitarian Universalism and that we need to constantly keep our goals in mind as we go about our tasks. Teams that work in

isolation or who are not continually mindful of why they exist are doomed to fail.

Prisoner's Dilemma

Divide the group into two teams and each ask to come up with a name for their group. In the meantime, prepare a flip chart page with numbers 1 to 10 running down the left side of the sheet. Add the names of the teams to the top of the sheet.

Hand each team two cards or pieces of paper, 8 1/2 by 11, one with the word "red" on it and the other with the word "blue" on it.

Say the following:

"The purpose of this exercise is to get the maximum number of points. You will be working within your team during this exercise and can only communicate with the other team when I say it's ok. Otherwise, you need to keep your deliberations a secret from the other team. Each team has two cards, a red card and a blue card. You will be playing these cards to represent a blue strategy or a red strategy and scoring will occur based on which strategy you use."

"You have ten rounds. Before each round, I will give you 30 seconds to plan your strategy. When you're ready, I will say "ready, show your cards" and you must hold up your card at the same time. Scoring will take place as follows."

Write the following on flip chart paper and read it to the group. Keep it visible so that people can refer to it during the exercise.

If both teams play the blue card, both teams get one point.
If both teams play the red card, both teams get two points.
If one team plays the blue card and the other team plays the red card, the team that plays the blue card gets three points and the team that plays the red card gets zero points.

Remind them again that the goal of the exercise (or game) is to get the maximum number of points. (Say this clearly and precisely, but don't make a big deal of it.)

Ask if there are any questions about the rules. Do not respond to questions concerning their strategy. Instead, say that you can only answer questions about the rules.

Before the game begins:

Tell the groups that they can speak to each other (across teams) before we start. Allow some time for them to do so. Cut off the discussion at an appropriate or dramatic time. Don't allow too much time for them to talk and figure out the solution. (Let's talk more about this.)

Begin the game and keep score.

After the fifth round, allow the teams the opportunity to talk to each other one more time. Again, keep it short.

Finish the game and with dramatic flair, total up all the points, combined for both teams. If the total is less than 40 (and it probably will be), announce that unfortunately no one has won this game and begin the debriefing.

Lessons learned:

- ✦ Look for win-win outcomes in all scenarios
- ✦ We are stronger and will make greater progress when we are all rowing in the same direction.
- ✦ Sometimes we need to take risks in order to realize more abundant rewards.
- ✦ Communication and trust are not merely words. They are the means by which all visions become reality

Paper Airplane Exercise

Divide into small groups. Give paper to participants and tell them that they can make as many paper airplanes as they want in five minutes. They can even test fly them. At the end of the five minutes, tell them that they have to pick one airplane and one pilot to fly it. Have a fly off.

Get people back into the same groups. This time, tell them that they will get only one piece of paper to work with and that every person on the team must make at least one fold in the paper and no team member can make more than two folds in a row.

Before the second fly off, ask members to notice what was different the second time compared to the first.

Share the following lessons learned.

- Engage everyone in the process
- Draw on the strengths and experiences of your team members
- Allow your team members to take risks
- Allow your team members to make mistakes
- Teach, demonstrate and model at all times
- Ask for input
- Keep the lines of communication open
- Provide support and encouragement to complete the task

Energizers

Stand on One Foot

Participants pair up and take turns participating in a conversation. The one who is speaking, however, must keep one foot off the floor.

What's Different?

In pairs, trainees are asked to study their partners for 30 seconds and are then asked to turn their backs. Participants then change three things about their appearance. When they face each other again, they must identify the three changes.

The "i"s Have It

Participants engage in conversation with their partner for one minute and are not allowed to use the word "i". If they do, they have to stand up briefly and then resume their conversation.

Whispering Down the Lane

Participants are given a phrase (relating to the subject matter) and asked to whisper the message to the next in line.

Closing and Wrapping Up Exercises

Yarn Toss: While holding on to the end of the yarn, ask each participant to toss the ball of yarn to someone in the circle. As they do, they should state (for example) how that person inspires them, or what they learned from them, or what gift they bring to the team, or what they enjoy most about working with them. Once everyone has shared, ask them to notice that they have created a web. Tug on your end of the yarn and ask them if they can feel it. They will be able to, of course. Make the point that all of us are connected to each other and that what one member of the team does affects every other member of the team.

Ball Throw: Gently tossing a ball around the room, participants share a thought in closing, such as one thing they learned during the day or one thing they will use back at the congregation.

Take Aways: Share one thing that you will take from or commit to from the time spent together.

Inspirational Quote or Story: End on a positive note with a quotation or anecdote that pulls the day together.