

What are Ice Breakers?

(Source: www.mindtools.com)

Ice Breakers can be an effective way of starting a training session or team-building event. It is a structured activity aimed at helping people to get to know each other and buy into the purpose of the event.

If an icebreaker session is well designed and well facilitated, it can really help get things off to a great start. By getting to know each other, getting to know the facilitators and learning about the objectives of the event, people can become more engaged in the proceedings and so contribute more effectively towards a successful outcome.

But have you ever been to an event when the icebreaker session went badly? Just as a great icebreaker session can smooth the way for a great event, so a bad icebreaker session can be a recipe for disaster. A bad icebreaker session is at best simply a waste of time, or worse an embarrassment for everyone involved.

As a facilitator, the secret of a successful icebreaking session is to keep it simple: Design the session with specific objectives in mind and make sure the session is appropriate and comfortable for everyone involved.

When to Use Icebreakers?

As the name suggests, an icebreaker session is designed to "break the ice" at an event or meeting. The technique is often used when people who do not usually work together, or may not know each other at all, meet for a specific, common purpose.

Consider using an ice breaker when:

- Participants come from different backgrounds.
- People need to bond quickly so as to work towards a common goal.
- Your team is newly formed.

- The topics you are discussing are new or unfamiliar to many people involved.
- As facilitator you need to get to know participants and have them know you better.

Designing Your Icebreaker

The key to a successful icebreaker is to make sure the icebreaker is specifically focused on meeting your objectives and appropriate to the group of people involved.

Once you have established what the "ice" is, the next step is to clarify the specific objectives for your icebreaker session.

These questions can be used as a checklist once you have designed the icebreaker session: *"Will this ice breaker session help people feel comfortable? Will it establish a level playing field? etc"*

As a further check, you should also ask yourself how each person is likely to react to the session. Will participants feel comfortable? Will they feel the session is appropriate and worthwhile?