

# 5 minute team building activities that really work

Team building activities are a great way to bring your work teams together to get to know one another better and improve collaboration. Employees tend to be happier, more productive, and more engaged when they have healthy and meaningful relationships with their colleagues.

MIT's Human Dynamics laboratory noted in their [study on building great teams](#) that successful teams communicate with one another directly rather than solely through management, carry on side conversations with team members, contribute to discussions relatively equally, and partake in energetic conversations with one another. To encourage social conversation, equal sharing, and effective collaboration, team building is essential — now more than ever as teams are increasingly interacting through technology rather than in-person.

If you don't have the time or funding to host a full-day team-building event, don't worry. Incorporating 5-minute team-building activities into some of your regular team meetings can be a simple and effective way to strengthen teamwork and employee engagement.

## Why focus on team building?

Team building provides a number of benefits to your business including:

- Helping your employees build trust as a team to improve collaboration and teamwork.
- Improving your company culture and creating a more positive work environment.
- Allowing employees time to practice their communication skills, problem-solving, and decision-making.
- Reducing feelings of isolation at work, both for office and remote employees. Feelings of isolation among employees have been found to reduce productivity [up to 21%](#).

Intentional team building is especially important for remote or hybrid teams. In an office setting, casual conversation is likely to spring up throughout the day — in the breakdown, while waiting for meetings to start, or as everyone makes their way in each morning. Coworkers can also get to know one another by observing each other through things like personal style and what pictures or items they put out on their desks. However, with remote work, teams miss out on these casual interactions. Thus, it's even more important to be intentional with team building and to dedicate time to fun team activities.

## How to get employees excited about team building?

Team building activities are only effective if your employees actively engage in them. Team building activities often get a bad reputation for being tedious, boring, or awkward.

One of the biggest mistakes that managers make is gravitating towards generic team-building exercises that aren't well-suited for their teams. While the classic icebreakers and team-building games that you played on the first day of school can be effective, it's important to tailor the team-building activities to each group.

### To gain buy-in from your employees for team-building activities try to:

- **Choose activities that fit the personalities of your team members.** If you have a more introverted crowd, try small group activities rather than activities that require them to speak in front of the whole team. For creative teams, plan creative challenges that allow them to showcase their skills and talents in a fun manner.
- **Incorporate team-building into standing meetings.** Incorporating quick team-building activities into standing weekly team meetings can help you incorporate team bonding in a consistent manner that won't feel like a waste of time to your team. Employees that are busy and results-oriented may not take well to full-day team building events, but incorporating team building in small spurts during time that is already allocated for a group meeting can help generate buy-in. It's also best to avoid holding team-building activities primarily through after-hours happy hours or other activities outside of business hours. People are hesitant to commit to work activities in their downtime and likely have other obligations to tend to.
- **Take suggestions from the team.** Let team members suggest or even lead some team-building activities. People are more likely to engage to support their peers than they are with activities that feel forced and are always manager-led. This will also help ensure that the activities are a good fit for your team's interests and personalities.
- **Plan inclusive activities.** Remember that team bonding should be a fun activity. You never want anyone to leave the meeting feeling bad about themselves or excluded. Avoid planning any activities that you know certain members will be unable to participate in. If you have employees with disabilities, strenuous physical team-building challenges may not be appropriate. Memory-focused games can also be discouraging for team members with various disabilities. For example, going around the room and sharing something about yourself such as your name and favorite food or movie is great, but asking members to be able to recite everyone's name and what they shared later on the spot can be excessively stressful and challenging for those with cognitive or memory-related problems, focus challenges, or even social anxiety. The best way to generate buy-in is to ensure that everyone has a good time.

## Icebreaker team building activities

Icebreaker games are designed to help team members get to know one another. Even longstanding teams can learn something new about their coworkers by engaging in these quick icebreaker activities.

### Show and tell

This classic team-building activity isn't just for school children. Adults can also partake in show and tell. Have each person (or just one person per meeting and rotate each week if you have a large group) bring something

from home to share with the group. Encourage them to bring something related to their hobby or interest. It can be a signed baseball from their favorite player, a piece of art that they created, or anything else that will give the rest of the group some insight into what they enjoy outside of work.

This activity also works well over Zoom — and you may even get to see some adorable pets make an appearance. Everyone loves showing off their furry friends!

This fun game is also a great way to help employees build confidence and practice their presenting skills. People tend to be more comfortable and confident when speaking about something that they're passionate about.

### **Two truths and a lie**

Have each team member share three facts about themselves with the group; two true facts and one lie. Then, the rest of the group can guess which of the three is untrue.

### **Bucket list**

Have each team member share one item that is on their bucket list. From skydiving to visiting Antarctica, this gives insight into your employees' adventurous side and what they value in life. The answers can range from sweet and heartfelt to silly, but this game will be sure to spark discussion and bring your team a bit closer together.

### **Would you rather**

This classic game asks participants to choose between two often undesirable options and answer which one they would prefer. Let your team get creative and come up with some of their own questions to pose to the group for an even more engaging experience.

### **Human bingo**

Encourage employees to get to know their coworkers by asking them questions to fill out a bingo card.

Hand out a human bingo card with different attributes. Include questions that encourage colleagues to find out what they have in common such as "find someone with the same make of car as you" or "find someone with the same birth month as you." You can also include more general traits like "find someone who hasn't seen Star Wars" or "find someone that is an only child".

Players go around and try to fill out their cards by asking each other whether an attribute listed on one of the bingo squares applies to them. When they find someone that meets the criteria, that person signs their name on the bingo square. Then, they move on to the next person and try to find a square that they can sign. Along the way, they learn some fun facts about each coworker.

They may only use each coworker to check off one square, so once they find one to mark off they must move on to a new person. This helps encourage employees to speak to more people, including those that they may not know well.

## **Team building activities for creative teams**

Let your team show off their creativity through writing or design-focused activities.

### **Caption contest**

Pick a funny photo (or ask for work-appropriate submissions from the group beforehand) and share it with the

team. Challenge each person to come up with a witty caption and then allow the group to vote on their favorite one.

This activity can also be adapted if you have a creative, yet introverted team by having each person submit their answer electronically or on a piece of paper. Then, the leader of the activity can read each one out without putting anyone on the spot.

### **My slogan**

Your company may already have a stellar slogan, but what would each of your team member's personal slogans be? Let your employees show off their creativity and personalities by creating a catchy slogan for themselves. Then go around the room (or the call) and have each person share their slogan and explain why they chose it.

This works well for new teams as an icebreaker as the explanation behind the slogan will provide insight into each person's interests or personality. It's also a fun game for teams that already know each other well. With well-acquainted teams, there is fun in guessing the reason behind each slogan and sharing whether or not it fits the person.

This is particularly well-suited for marketing or advertising teams, but can work for any team.

### **Paper tower**

Challenge your team to flex their architecture and design skills by building a freestanding paper tower made of paper. The paper provided is typically either sheets of paper or newspaper. Some versions of this game allow teams to utilize tape, while others require participants to fold, tear, or bend the paper to build the tower without any tape, glue, or adhesives.

Divide your team into smaller groups and set a time limit. Then, let them work together to build the tallest paper tower possible. When time runs out, measure the towers to find out who the winner is.

## **Team building activities for problem-solving**

Problem-solving team-building games are a great way to help your team members exercise their problem-solving and collaboration skills. Short 5-minute games or challenges also encourage your team to work efficiently and think under pressure. Here are some problem-solving focused activities to try out with your team:

### **Jigsaw puzzle**

Break out into small teams and put together a jigsaw puzzle. This leisurely activity gets a lot more intense when you set a 5-minute time limit. See how fast your teams can put the pieces together. The first team to finish wins, but if you've picked an appropriately difficult puzzle it's unlikely that anyone will finish. Instead, the winner can be selected based on who got the furthest along in putting the pieces together.

### **Helium stick**

Helium stick is an activity that allows teams to explore how they can work together, communicate, and problem-solve when something doesn't go as planned. Have teams of 6-12 people line up in two rows facing each other and hold up a thin, light rod with only their index fingers and attempt to lower it to the ground. Explain that each member must continuously touch the rod with both index fingers, and that they must keep their index fingers straight. Participants may not curl their fingers to grasp the rod, and must keep the rod on top of their fingers.

The challenge initially seems deceptively easy, and everyone expects that their team will be able to lower it

fairly quickly. However, as the team tries to lower the rod, it typically rises up due to the upward pressure from each person's fingers trying not to lose contact with the stick. The team may experience some level of initial frustration, but this exercise should help them overcome that frustration and learn how to problem-solve together as a team to get the stick lowered towards the ground.

## **Virtual team building activities for remote teams**

The majority of the above activities can be adapted for virtual teams. Icebreakers in particular translate well to a virtual format. You may not be able to build a tower together or put together a physical puzzle with a remote team, but there are plenty of creative problem-solving games available in online formats. There are also a number of virtual team-building activities that can help your team bridge the distance and give everyone a sneak peek into the workspaces and habits of their coworkers.

### **Snapshot**

Ask everyone to quickly take a picture of something in their workspace. Give them a minute or two to select their subject and snap a photo. The photos can showcase their workspace, pets, outfit, home, favorite workday snack, the view from their window, or another person or thing in their immediate vicinity.

Then, have everyone share their photo in the meeting chat on Zoom, in a Slack channel, or upload it into a Google Doc to make a team collage.

### **At home scavenger hunt**

Host a scavenger hunt for your remote team and learn a little bit about their at-home workspace. Call out a description of an item and give them a minute to find something in their home office or workspace that matches the description. It could be something blue, something shiny, something that makes a noise, something soft, etc. Play a couple of rounds and see who can find the funniest or most interesting items.

### **Make time for team building**

Each of these exercises requires a relatively minor time commitment. Stay consistent with team building on a regular basis in order to keep your team connected. Get your team involved in suggesting activities and rotate through a variety of exercises to keep it fun for everyone.