11 FUN TEAM BUILDING GAMES FOR MEETINGS THAT WORK

This is a collection of fun team building games that that any **HR manager** or **Team Leader** can apply before a team meeting. I have personally tested them and refined them to function in a professional context, and I will give you **step-by-step instructions** for each one.

Most of all, these team building games:

1. are quick and fun to do
2. are simple and fast to explain
3. work

So take these games and see which one is right for you!

Questions? Feel free to shoot an email – always happy to chat.

Enjoy!

Contents

My personal favourite team building games

I regularly use these two games in my **Teamwork and Leadership Workshops** in Berlin **and across Europe** – I don't just love the effects they have: I love the fact that they both have a solid connection in research.

I have never experienced any other game that is so much fun and that carries so much value to a team. If there are two games you'd like to take to your teams, let them be **Three Things** and **Bears and Tigers**!

THREE THINGS

Three things is a powerful and fun team building game, with strong and long-lasting effects. It's based on building a playful connection between two people that builds **trust** and **mutual support**.

What you need:

A big enough room.

Instructions:

1. Everyone in pairs
2. The two people in each pair have **3 minutes to talk and find three things they have in common**

That's it. Easy, right?

Things to look out for:

- If a pair comes up with stuff like "we're two human beings, we live on planet Earth and we breathe air" call them out on that and tell them to find personal things they have in common;
- If a pair finds three things before the 3 minutes are over, tell them to look for more.

Background

This game builds on a concept called **High-Quality Connections** (HQCs). HQCs are nothing but short-term interactions that are playful, positive and personal.

We have them regularly in our life and with our friends, but rarely at work – where everyone needs to be "professional".

HQCs, however, have been shown to have incredible effects on teams, like:

- **Better ability to think and create** (Carmeli et al., 2015)
- **Higher levels of trust and cooperation** (Ferrin et al., 2008)
- **Larger capacity to learn** (Carmeli et al., 2009)
- **Stronger stress resilience** (e.g. Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007)
- **Stronger commitment to the organisation and to the people in it** (Blatt & Camden, 2007)
- **Better coordination and precision at team level** (Gittell, 2003 and Vogus, 2004)

Just by having people connect for three minutes at a personal level, **you trigger all the switches you need to activate an HQC**, and the more regularly you do it, and the more you mix the pairs, the stronger the effects will be!

In the short-term, people will feel more connected to who they just talked to, and they will be willing to listen, support their point of view and reciprocate positivity.

In the long-term, the whole team will get more committed and supportive – and quite honestly it will do so at a pace you won't believe.

Personal tip: change it around, so for example have pairs find three things they have in common:

- about their childhood
- about their teenage years
- about what they did in high school

And so on – you'll be surprised by what comes out of this game!

BEARS AND TIGERS

This is a wonderful and fun team building game, I first heard it explained by **Dr. Barry Kudrowitz** in his TED talk. You can use it as a warm up before brainstorming, but there is so much more than that!

This game is particularly effective when it comes to have **people understand how they should behave to give their best during a meeting** – especially when done with CEOs or with Team Managers!

What you need:

Enough room for everyone to stand up in pairs and be far enough from other pairs

Instructions:

1. Everyone in pairs – every pair decides who is the "bear" and who is the "tiger";
2. When you say "go", tigers have 1 minute to list as many reasons as possible for which **tigers are awesome**
3. After a minute yell "switch" and bears will list as many reasons as they can for which **bears are awesome**

Things to look out for:

- When the "tiger" is talking, the "bear" **will count the reasons the "tiger" can come up with right in front of her eyes**, and vice versa when you switch.
- **Every sentence must have the same structure**: "*Tigers are awesome because (blank)*" so:
  o Tigers are awesome because they live in the jungle
  o Tigers are awesome because they have sharp teeth
  o Tigers are awesome because they are big cats
- **Most importantly: it doesn't need to make sense**! If you want to say that *tigers are awesome because they sleep on clouds* you can do it!

Background:

This game develops team creativity, and it shows a very important link that Kudrowtiz found: **the more ideas you list, the more creative ideas you will have**!

The point is that nobody cares about who is better between bears and tigers, so we are

not afraid of coming up with stupid ideas, like tigers are awesome because they sleep on clouds. Usually the **first ideas we come up with are the obvious ones** (sharp teeth, live in the jungle…), which are also the ideas that **everyone else comes up with**, and as such **your first few ideas will not be creative, nor innovative**.

After you list 10-15, though, your brain runs out of banal ideas and needs to start working to come up with more. And **that's when the really creative stuff comes up**. So if you want to have creative ideas, including solutions to a problem, have many and don't be afraid of voicing all of them out – the sillier, the better!

On this last point, silliness, remember that **humor and creativity work the same way in our brain**, meaning that great ideas don't appear out of the blue, but are generated by associating seemingly unrelated – and even silly – concepts. If you don't believe me, **this is John Cleese's take on this concept**.

This game is also relevant if you have a **strong hierarchy in the team meeting**… research (Mullen et al. 1991) shows that if you have a sort of hierarchy, people will tend to self-censor stranger ideas **to look professional** with their boss – the result is that everyone only voices conservative ideas, that really take the meeting nowhere.

Point is, if you want to get even more out of this game, involve the team leader or CEO in playing it! It may not change everyone's attitude right away, but it will make everyone aware of how to behave to get the best out of a meeting – which is already a lot!

Team building games to wake up and get active before meetings

TAKE SHAPE!

This is a very physical and fun team building game, perfect for morning meetings – just make sure people have had enough coffee and are at least three steps apart!

What you need:

An empty room, or enough space for people to move around without hitting each other.

Instructions:

1. Have everyone form a circle;
2. Tell each person to remember who is standing at their left;
3. Scatter the circle, i.e. have everyone go to a **random position around the room** – make sure they can see clearly who was at their left in the circle.
4. Have everybody take a **bold, extreme shape with their body**, examples
   a. Flying superhero
   b. Kneeling down and hands in the air
   c. Balancing on one foot
5. When everyone has taken a shape, tell them to **look at the person who was at their left in the circle**
6. When you say "go" **everyone needs to imitate the posture of that person**

Because everyone will have different positions, everyone will be changing theirs quickly, so what you'll get is a group of **people desperately struggling to keep up with someone else's changing posture**, and making things worse in the meantime!

After 1-2 minutes, things should start to calm down and everyone should be syncing in the same position.

If that doesn't happen, call it, **everyone will be laughing and awake – which is precisely what you want**!

SOMEONE LIKE ME

This is a fun team building game you can use to get people to open up, share, get to know each other better, and get active and wake up in the meantime!

What you need:

Enough room to make a circle. Chairs if you want.

Instructions:

1. Everyone forms a circle, and a volunteer takes a spot in the middle (you can do that if everyone else is shy)
2. The person in the middle will start by saying: "**I'm looking for someone like me who...**" and then add anything they want about themselves, e.g.:
   a. Is wearing blue socks
   b. Has recently finished a project
   c. Just met his in-laws
3. After that, everyone who resonates with that sentence (everyone who is wearing blue socks for example), including the person in the middle, **needs to take someone else's spot**
4. The person who is left in the middle gets to start again with "I'm looking for someone like me who..." and add something about themselves.

Things to look out for:

- Tell people to be careful when they change places! The last thing you want is people bumping into each other and get hurt!
- If someone is left alone in the middle because nobody else is resonating with that sentence, **tell everyone to give that person a big round of applause because it's very difficult to be unique** – then that person gets to choose someone else to take his place in the middle of the circle, and the team building game starts again.
- **You want people to share personal stories**. If they don't, share one of yours, and another, and so on – people will follow along!

This deep and fun team building game comes from **Marijn Vissers** of **improphondo**– credit goes to him and to the **Bring a brick podcast**, where I first heard about it.

Team building games to focus and listen during meetings

Have you ever been in a meeting in **which people are physically there but all they do is look at their phones**? What a waste of time and energy!

These team meetings could be so much lighter, shorter and effective if everyone actively listened and focused – so here are **four team building games** to play just before a meeting to help people focus and listen!

COUNT TO 20

This is a short and fun team building game to get your team's listening muscles flowing!

What you need:

Enough room to form a circle

Instructions:

1. Everyone in a circle
2. The goal of the exercise is to count to 20 as a group (i.e. a person says "one", someone else says "two" and so on)
3. If two people talk over each other, the whole group needs to start again from one.

The goal of this team building game is **to have people focus on what they hear and on finding the right moment to talk**. They need to "feel" the right time to add a number to the count and to do that, they need to listen very well to what is going on in the group. If it takes more than 5-10 minutes to get to 20, call it and move along.

Things to look out for:

- If people start pointing at each other or signaling blatantly when they want to talk, intervene and tell them to stop, that's not the point of the game.
- **If people adopt a pattern (e.g. clockwise), disrupt it** – your job is not to make it easy on them!

MIRROR GAME / FOLLOW THE FOLLOWER

This is a fun team building game you can use to **get people out of their head and focused on their team**.

What you need:

A big enough room.

Instructions:

1. Everyone in pairs - each pair decides who leads first
2. When you say "go" **each pair will play the mirror game** – i.e. one person moves and the other needs to follow movements as close as possible
3. After 1-2 minutes switch roles: same pairs but the person who was leading now follows and vice versa;
4. After 1-2 minutes **both people are leading and following at the same time**, meaning that they need to closely observe the other person and replicate even the smallest movement – all while moving in parallel.

Things to look out for:

- People going crazy and trying to mess with the other person. Remind them that the goal is not to make it difficult for the other, but to make it easy!
- If you've done it a few times already, you can skip directly to step 4. **What's more, you can have everyone form a circle and have everyone follow everyone's movements** – in this case it's called "follow the follower" – a slightly more advanced version.

Research (Noy et al. 2011) shows that **when people are leading and following at the same time** (Step 4)**, they are more in sync with each other**, with respect to when someone is leading and someone is following!

We also know that just **moving in sync** with someone else makes you **more cooperative** with that person, makes you **trust** that person more and makes you more **supportive** towards them (Valdesolo et al., 2011 and Wiltermuth et al., 2009).

Sounds like something you'd like your team members to be?

WORD ASSOCIATION

This is a quick and fun team building game to help your team focus and listen.

What you need:

Nothing really. Have people stand up from their chairs and they can stay around the table if you want – have them stand up though!

Instructions:

1. Start by saying a word, any word
2. The person to your left will say a word connected to what you said
3. The person to her left will say a word connected to what she said, and so on.
4. **Go for speed**, any association is good, but make sure there is no silence between people.

Call the game or move to **Word disassociation** after 2-3 rounds.

Things to look out for:

- This is a fun team building game – keep it so! Don't be pedantic if words are not really connected, **people will mess up and have fun, but will focus while doing so**!
- Go for speed on this, **come in with a good energy and keep the rhythm going**, this game played at a slow pace is dreadful!

This game is pretty straightforward – it's a basic warm-up for your listening "muscles"… point is: **you do want those muscles warm by the time you get into a meeting**.

WALK JUMP DASH FREEZE

This is an active and fun team building game that works similarly to "take shape" but is more focused on the listening part.

What you will get is **awake and focused participants** – so go for it!

What you need:

A room big enough to move around.

Instructions:

1. Everyone is walking around the room, you yell out four commands from the side:
   a. "Stop"
   b. "Walk"
   c. "Jump"
   d. "Dash" or "Run"
2. Everyone will do what you say (make sure they are careful when they run). Give commands at random for 2-3 minutes.
3. After 3 minutes, tell them that **they will be giving commands now**, meaning anyone can yell out "stop", or "dash" at any time, and everyone needs to do it
4. After another 3 minutes, **no commands are given**, so they need to look at what everyone else is doing! **If anyone stops walking, everyone else needs to stop walking. If anyone jumps, everyone jumps**.

This game gradually forces people to notice what's happening around them and sync up with the rest of their team – and as we've seen, **a focused team working in sync will perform better at a number of levels!**

Things to look out for:

- In the last round, make sure people are paying attention. If you notice they are sloppy or don't see what is happening, call them out on it.

Team building games to get the brain to work during meetings

WORD DISASSOCIATION

This is a quick and fun team building game that will get people to focus AND will wake up their sleepy heads!

You can use this game right after **word association** to for an even better result

Instructions:

1. Start by **saying 4 words in a row**: all these words will need to have **as little connection to each other as possible** (e.g. "banana, spaceship, scorpion, biceps")
2. The person to your left now says another 4 words, also completely disconnected, and the circle goes on;
3. **Between your last word and the first word of the other person there must also be no connection**, just to make it more difficult. If you last word is "shoe" her first word cannot be "foot", just to be clear…
4. Again, go for speed!

This team building game is a nice curveball to throw after playing word association because **it forces your brain to shift gears quickly and wake up**. After this, jumping into any meeting will be a piece of cake!

Things to look out for:

- Just like for **word association**, don't be too strict and **go for speed and pace** – it's up to you to keep the energy up and make this team building game fun!

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

This fun team building game is guaranteed to start a meeting off in a good mood and to have your team's brains at their best!

Usually, people ask questions and receive answers – in this team building game, instead, **we will give answers and people need to figure out the questions afterwards**!

What you need:

Nothing, just have people get up from their chairs and stand in a circle.

Instructions:

- Start by **giving an answer**, anything at all
- Point to someone else in the circle
- The person you point to needs to immediately come up with **a question to your answer**,
- Now that person gets to come up with an answer and point at someone else, and so on.

For example:
- Joe:
    o (Answer): "*24 hours eating popcorn*" (points to Mary)
- Mary:
    o (Question): "*How do you intend to spend your holidays?*"
    o (Answer): "*Red, Yellow and Transparent*" (points to Julian)
- Julian:
    o (Question): "*What is the colour of things you like to drink?*"
    o etc…

Things to look out for:

- For this game, **you don't really need to make sense, go for the fun of it**! If people are playing it safe, encourage them to come up with very difficult answers, and see what happens.
- **Go for pace**, don't let people sit on their thoughts for too long.

CLAP 3 AND 7

This fun team building game takes a similar idea to **count to 20** but **requires more brainwork** – and is somewhat more active!

What you need:

Nothing apart from enough room to form a circle

Instructions:

1. Form a circle;
2. You need to **count to 100** in a group, one person at a time, going clockwise
3. When someone makes a mistake, **that person will start counting again from one**.
4. Instead of saying some numbers, you will **clap your hands**, these numbers are:
   a. Numbers **3 and 7**
   b. Numbers that are a **multiple of 3 or 7**, for example 6 or 35
   c. Numbers that **contain the digit 3 or 7**. For example 31 or 47

For example:

1. Joe: "one"
2. Mary: "two"
3. Todd: (clap)
4. Julia: "four"
5. Joe: "five"
6. Mary: (clap)
7. Todd: (clap)
8. Julia: "eight"
9. Joe: (clap)
10. Mary: "ten"

And so on until you reach 100… **If your team's heads aren't working after this, I don't know what will get them running**!

Things to watch out for:

- Keep the energy up, it's tedious otherwise
- **At certain points there is just non-stop clapping**, for example between 30 and 40: all numbers contain the digit 3! **Make sure everyone is following**!

About me

I train leaders, teams and individuals to communicate better.

I use **skills from improvisation theatre**, my own personal **management experience**, and **research** compiled by respected external sources to provide my **trainings in Berlin and across Europe**.

I have been working in and heading 7-figure business and policy projects at European level for a large part of my career. I have also been improvising at a professional level for 5 years and have studied with several top-level schools (UCB, David Razowsky, ComedySportz).

I exploit contact points between these realities and transfer skills across them.

I am the author of two books:

- *"Effective Decision-Making: how to make better decisions under uncertainty and pressure"*
- *"Writing Proposals: A Handbook of What Makes Your Project Right For Funding"*

References

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