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your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Strong team cohesion people feel to one another is a key element for success in distributed teams. Icebreakers get to know each other and feel more comfortable collaborating. Its important to choose the right icebreaker for your team. Teams that know each other well may be more comfortable sharing personal information. Newer teams may want to start with lower-stakes games that focus on work-specific topics. Icebreakers. The very name elicits a frosty reception in many workplaces. The concept short, simple games to prime our brains for planning and problem-solving is often discounted or completely overlooked by managers. But theres evidence that the benefits of icebreakers make them more than worth the time. Icebreakers, particularly within the remote workspace, are an incredibly good idea, says Eugene Chung, an Atlassian team coach and advisor on Team Playbook. Any time youre collaborating with colleagues, a few short minutes spent on carefully chosen activities beforehand can seriously help you. Not just in terms of feeling more connected by learning new things about each other, but also in terms of getting comfortable with speaking up and actively contributing to the group. That last point is crucial, particularly when the activity precedes a problem-solving or brainstorming meeting. Icebreakers foster what workplace experts call psychological safety In other words, they create an atmosphere in which colleagues feel free to speak up, question, contribute, and criticize without fear of censure. The trick as any hungry polar bear would tell you is to break the ice in the correct fashion. One common mistake is assuming that every icebreaker serves the same purpose. On the contrary, there are many types and styles of icebreaker, each geared towards particular groups and outcomes. Its smarter to think of them like a set of golf clubs, with each designed for certain scenarios. To tee off, there are introductory icebreakers, where the participants are strangers at the start of the session, and the ice is simply the fact that they dont know each other yet. In a remote working environment, these have become increasingly valuable tools. There are plenty of other picks to choose from too, ranging from team-building icebreakers for more established groups to topic exploration icebreakers, which help lay the groundwork for more targeted meetings. The common denominator is that all types of icebreakers can help build stronger team connections. Best for: Topic exploration How: Best for groups of three or more, this is one of the most popular icebreakers from Team Playbook. First you introduce the idea youll be brainstorming around in the main meeting. Then, using a shared space in Confluence or Trello, you all note down the worst ideas you can possibly think of. After a few minutes, step back asking each person to share their favorite worst idea. Why: This juices up everyones neuropathways before brainstorming and helps people to resist any temptation to self-censor when the real problem solving begins. This one also boosts psychological safety because, hey, every idea is automatically going to be better than whatever already on the page. Best for: Team-building How: Each person is asked to make three statements about themselves, one of which has to be false. The rest of the group then votes on which fact is actually falsehood. Why: Not only does this help the group get to know each other better and swiftly reduce stress levels, but it also sparks immediate interaction as the group comes together to root out the red herrings. Best for: Introductions How: A quick-fire, fast-paced activity. Person A kicks things off by naming a category (for example, types of dessert). Person B rattles off three things that fit that theme, as quickly as they can. No judgment and no self-censoring. When theyve finished, the entire group applauds, and then Person B names the next category. Continue until everyone has had a chance to name the category and the three things. Why: This is all about triggering fast, unfiltered thinking before a brainstorming session. Its not about right or wrong answers, its about celebrating the weirdest, funniest contributions and letting your brains relax into a comfortable, accepting, and creative gear. Best for: Team building How: Each team member takes four slips of paper, jotting down an important moment from their life on each. When theyre done, people take turns showing the camera what they have written, and each is added to a shared timeline on a Confluence page or whiteboard. Why: This exercise helps show, in a visual way, the different experiences, priorities, and generations within your team. It leads well into talking about shared experiences, breaks down barriers and creates a mindset of authentic communication. Best for: Team building How: Split participants into small teams (using breakout rooms if youre on Zoom) and ask them to come up with one word to describe, say, your company culture, or a project youre working on. Give them a few minutes to discuss amongst themselves, then let each team present their word, and the reasoning behind it. Why: This can reveal some surprising answers, with enlightening discussion to follow, which can easily segue into the meeting proper. Plus, starting out with small groups allows everyone the chance to participate in a meaningful way, which can boost their confidence about speaking up in the full session. Best for: Team building How: Beforehand, everyone emails the facilitator three light-hearted answers from a list of questions. These could be anything from what was your first job to whats your craziest-ever hair style? During the icebreaker, the facilitator shares an answer, asking the group to guess who the response belongs to. Why: This is a classic team-building exercise for groups of three to 10 employees who have met or interacted before. Its a fun way for teams to get closer and bond more. Best for: Introductions How: Break everyone into small groups in separate rooms over Zoom, being sure to mix departments if possible. Task the groups with finding 10 things that all of them share in common (for example: places they have visited, movies they love, items of clothing they own). Why: This is an extremely effective way of encouraging cohesion and building solid inter-departmental relationships, leading to a happier, more committed and engaged workforce. While the many benefits of icebreakers are well documented, there are also a number of pitfalls to avoid, too. Its always a good idea, for example, to start with more simple icebreakers in newly established teams and work your way up. You also want to avoid anything that is too personal or hot-button topics that will foster division instead of cohesion. And always be sure to state the objectives of the task at the start of the exercise, so participants understand what theyre doing and why. One of the key elements of an effective team is cohesion, says Dr. Mahreen Khan, an organizational psychologist and emotional intelligence specialist, whos also a senior qualitative researcher at Atlassian. In other words, how bonded do you feel with each other? To maximize that cohesion, you need to get to know people on a personal level, and icebreakers can really help with that. People are feeling more disconnected now than ever before, so its even more important to use activities like this. Grab a list of 20+ icebreakers questions in the Atlassian Team Playbook a free online resource of simple, science-backed workshops that helps teams build on their strengths, troubleshoot difficulties, and encourage positive team dynamics. 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