



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR COLLEAGUES

Belonging Teambuilding Exercises

What is belonging? It is the feeling of being accepted and included by those around you. Having a sense of belonging leads to higher overall physical and emotional wellbeing. Use the exercises below as a way to get to know your colleagues and build a greater sense of belonging amongst your team.

1. Fitting In vs. Belonging

Create a space for employees to better understand the difference between just fitting in versus actually belonging to a group.

- Hang two posters around the room (remote teams could try this on a virtual whiteboard), one titled “Fitting In” and the other titled “Belonging”.
- Invite the members of the team to write on each poster their definition for each term
- Beyond just defining the term, encourage employees to write anything else they believe is relevant
 - What it feels like to belong or fit in?
 - Who is doing it?
 - How do you know when you belong or are fitting in?
- Debrief the activity by defining fitting in versus belonging and asking the team to share their takeaways from the exercise.
 - *“Belonging is being accepted for you. Fitting in is being accepted for being like everyone else” – Brené Brown*

2. Belonging Brainstorm

Create a space for team members to think about what belonging means to them and how being part of the “in crowd” or “out crowd” has impacted them at different times in their lives. This exercise also allows them to learn a bit about their colleagues and what being part of the in/out crowd looks and feels like to them.

- Hang three posters around the room with the following questions (remote teams could try this on a virtual whiteboard):
 - Think about a time when you felt like you belonged in a group. How did you know you belonged?
 - Think about a time when you struggled to feel like you belonged in a group. What happened?
 - Think about a time you witnessed someone else struggle to feel that they belonged in a group? How did you respond?

- Invite the members of your team to walk around the room and write down their answer to each question on the poster.
- Once everybody has had a chance to write on the poster, ask team members to go back to each poster and read the other answers, and highlight or circle comments that stand out to them.
- Debrief the activity with the whole team by discussing the following key questions
 - How did this exercise make you feel?
 - How do you think belonging affects how we work as a team?
 - What are some ways you can help those being excluded to bring them into the group?

3. Defining Moments

Learn about team members' backgrounds and what has been vital in shaping their lives. Doing this as a group allows employees to learn new things about each other that otherwise might not come up, and the act of being open, honest and vulnerable is a great way to form bonds, increase empathy and improve relationships.

- Ask everyone to think about the three most defining moments in their lives and write them down on separate post-its (remote teams can try this on a virtual whiteboard).
- Have each employee present these moments to the team, and share their story to whatever degree they feel comfortable.
- Debrief the activity by asking the team to share their takeaways from the exercise.

4. If You Knew Me

People's lives and experiences outside of the office inform the way they show up to work. Simply recognizing that and encouraging people to feel comfortable sharing builds inclusion because it makes it okay for everyone to be themselves. Use the following question to start a team meeting to set the tone for openness and get a sense of how your employees are doing mentally.

- "If you really knew me, you'd know that..."
 - This can be something as simple as "My alarm didn't go off this morning so I feel a bit stressed," or something a bit more revealing such as "I have a family member who is not well and I'm having trouble focusing."

5. Rose-Thorn

Like activity 3, this question helps teams to understand people's lived experiences outside of work and what struggles they may be facing as a result of those struggles. Use the following question to start a team meeting to set the tone for openness and get a sense of how your employees are doing mentally.

- "The rose (best part) and thorn (worst part) of the last week were..."

- This gives everyone the opportunity to bring up both accomplishments and challenges, big or small, professional or personal.

6. I Am, But I Am Not

This activity is a great way to break down misconceptions and stereotypes by giving people a chance to self-identify, while also addressing the stereotypes that can accompany these identifying factors. Here are the steps for “I Am, But I am Not”

- Each participant folds a piece of paper in half to create two separate columns.
 - In the first column, they write “I Am”.
 - In the second column, they write “I Am Not”.
 - In between these two columns, write the word “But”.
- The final phrase will read “I am _____, but I am not _____.”
- Participants fill in the first blank with some kind of common identifier, such as their ethnicity, gender, race, religion, or age, and the second with a common stereotype about that group which is not true of them (whether the stereotype is positive or negative).
- Make sure there are no questions and have everyone write at least 5 statements.
- Allow participants to share their statements with the team and have an open and respectful discourse on stereotypes.

7. Walk in Someone Else’s Shoes

“Perspective taking” is a great way to mentally walk in someone else’s shoes. Lead your team through this activity with the following steps.

- Have your team share what types of diverse backgrounds are represented on their team (education, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, etc).
- Pair each team member with a background that is different from their own.
- Have everyone write a few sentences on the distinct challenges that they believe people with the background group they’ve been paired with could face.
- Share and discuss with the team or in small groups.

This reflection will produce more empathic teams, and according to the Harvard study, will help build positive attitudes and behaviors toward people who are different from them. The study also reveals increased support among teammates.

8. Step Inside the Circle

One way to build trust in teams is to have colleagues learn about each other. This activity is design to encourage people to share who they are and build connections with their colleagues. This can be done as a small or large group activity.

- As everyone to form a large circle.
- Read a series of statements and anyone who can answer “yes” to the statement takes a step into the circle

- A list of questions can be found [here](#).
- After each question, each person steps back into place.
- Ask 15-25 questions and then debrief with the group afterward to share:
 - One thing they learned about a colleague that they didn't previously know
 - How did this exercise make them feel?