The University of Texas
RioGrandeValley™
Office of Human Resources

Virtual Teambuilding Ideas

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UTRGV™ | Organizational Development

Team Building Defined

What is Virtual Team Building?

Virtual team building is a way to bring virtual teams together and create a work environment that mimics an office environment. It is the process of turning a group of employees into a high functioning team. It allows your entire team to become familiar with one another virtually and create meaningful relationships that leave your employees feeling more valued and engaged.

Virtual team building can consist of several strategies, games, and activities that are designed to bring more human interaction to virtual work. Examples include icebreaker questions as well as video and nonvideo-based games and activities.

Why is Virtual Team Building Important?

When working remotely, it is important to keep the virtual team engaging and connecting with each other, staying focused on the tasks, and sharing critical information with the team. It brings the team together (and builds trust) and increases engagement & communication. The physical distance from the team can quickly turn into emotional distance. It is important to create a comfortable team culture that virtual workers can rely on. Virtual team building not only improves effectiveness but can also induce laughter and stress relief in the workplace (mental wellness). These strategies lead to closer-knit teams and heightened levels of collaboration, which in turn positively effects productivity and results.

Below you will find examples of virtual team building activities. Some easy and quick ones with no advance preparation needed, some other more advanced and time-consuming ones. Pick the right tool for the right occasion. You know your team best. Ask for feedback and see what they enjoyed.

No Prep Needed

Opening Chit Chat

Duration: 5 minutes

Materials/Prep: Nothing

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: At the beginning of your conference calls or virtual meetings, allow for some natural chit-chat to allow team members to get to know each other better and catch up with one another. Try to use video conferencing, if possible, for an even more personal experience. This activity should give the team some time to relax, socialize for a bit, and get used to speaking to one another on a virtual platform.

Though it is not supposed to be structured, you can plant some questions or conversation starters to get the ball rolling within the group. There are many good conversation starters: "What did you all do this weekend?" or "I had the best pasta for lunch, anyone else have anything homemade today?" This is a time for everyone to catch up and get to know each other. This little bit of time can reveal who has kids, what kind of hobbies everyone has on the weekends, who loves to cook, and much more! Simply chit-chatting is a great way to naturally bond!

Word Association

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Materials/Prep: List of prompts, virtual platform (video preferred but not necessary)

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: Pick a prompt that's relevant to your meeting and ask people to either write down or verbally share one word they associate with that prompt. For example, if you are leading a meeting about your company's culture, ask the group to share one word that they feel best describes the organizational culture. The prompt could simply be, "Pick one word that best describes our company's culture." Some possible answers may be, "fun," "supportive," or "wacky."

When you feel you have enough answers for the prompt, discuss the results. This icebreaker is designed to help the group explore their thoughts on a common issue or goal before diving into the meeting agenda.

Additional Resources: https://www.polleverywhere.com/ - Word cloud

Virtual Coffee Break

Duration: 10-30 minutes

Materials: Zoom/Microsoft Teams or similar video chatting platform

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: When at the office, we often interact with each other in a coffee or break room. Use this tool to offer a 30minute video chat to catch up over a cup of coffee (or smoothie, breakfast, lunch). Should be an open, fun, relaxed chat.

Virtual Water Cooler

Duration: 10-30 minutes

Materials: Zoom/Microsoft Teams or similar

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: When at the office, we often interact with each other in a coffee or break room (around the water cooler). This is another virtual break opportunity. Employees tend to miss these moments of casual conversations when working remotely. Use this to talk about anything other than work. You can either designate a specific watercooler time each week or day or have an "always-on" room available where people can meet up at their convenience and just "pop-in". As an alternative, use a chat platform (or create a Yammer group or Microsoft Teams) and allow for a fun chat where people can engage in non-work related conversations.

Best Practices Exchange

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: List of prompts, topics or questions

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: Share a question, prompt or topic either before the meeting or during the meeting on screen and facilitate the exchange of tips, lessons learned, and best practices.

 Additional Resources: Below are a few suggested questions/topics:
- How can we keep our energy levels high and stay productive while working from home?
- De-stressing techniques
- How to juggle working from home and parenting/school?
- Ideas to stay engaged with the team

Post a Goal

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: Nothing

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: Encourage each person to share a non-work-related goal that they want to achieve, why it's important to them, and the date they want to accomplish it by. Post it to the team's shared calendar. As the date approaches, ask for updates and encourage them to accomplish their goals.

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Teams should be there to help each other achieve their goals! This can be a good way to help build in some accountability as they strive to reach their goals.

Geographic Fun Facts

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: Nothing

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: Before the meeting, ask members to be ready to share three unusual fun-facts that aren't commonly known about the city, state, or country that they live in. This can be a good way to learn something new while improving understanding of the location and cultural environment where your teammates work.

If you want to take this to the next level, have the participants create and share a slide that includes a map of their favorite places in town or a little slide of facts and pictures.
In times of Covid-19, change it up and ask for the best restaurants with delivery or take out and any specials they enjoy.

Email Threads – Prep Needed

Reply All

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: A quick email prior to the meeting

Number of Participants: 4+ broken into smaller groups if larger

Instructions: Before the start of your meeting, ask a question, or a series of questions, to the group via email. Make sure to ask them to "reply all" to the email thread so that everyone can see the answers. As the meeting starts, either have your team members explain their choices, OR you can give the answers.

If you go the second route, you can have the team guess who responded with what answer and then have the author explain their answer(s) once they have been revealed. For this option, DO NOT have the team use "reply all" to the email you send so that everyone's answers remain anonymous.

Additional Resources: Below are a few suggested questions
- If you could visit anywhere in the world, regardless of budget or time it took to get there, where would you go?
- Who would you have dinner with, either living or dead?

- What is the best place you have ever travelled?
- If you could pick one superpower, what would it be?

Who is It?

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: Email prior to the meeting to collect the facts

Number of Participants: 4+

Instructions: Prior to the meeting, ask each player to send you a fact about themselves that others do not know about them yet. During the meeting, read them aloud to the group so the responses are kept anonymous. Have the team guess which fact belongs to which team member. They can cast votes and discover if they got them right at the end OR vote as you go along.

Baby Photos

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: Email prior to the meeting to collect baby photos

Number of Participants: 5+

Instructions: Before the meeting, send out a request for baby photos from each individual on your team. Make sure they do not hit "reply all" or else the guessing game will be spoiled! Once you've compiled the photos, place them all up onto your screen sharing program, number each one. A great way to do this is to put each photo in a slideshow or a document.

Once this is set up, participants must guess which photo belongs to which employee by writing a name beside the corresponding number, filling out the answers on a sheet of paper and later holding it to the video camera, sending their answers in an email or chat, or however you feel it is best to submit.

This is voluntary and not everyone has to submit a photo if they don't feel comfortable sharing a picture of them. They can still participate in the guessing game.

Photography Activities – Prep Needed

Take a Picture

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Materials/Prep: Email and a smartphone or camera

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: Ask participants to take a picture of an object, or objects, in their work area. The photos may be fidget toys, family photos, desk organizers, or some cool art. The responses you'll get will be all kinds of interesting items!

Have the team email you the images with a little description so that you can screen share them during the meeting or just have them hit "reply all" to your initial message so that everyone can see. This can spark interesting conversation and provide insight into what each co-worker is like.

Alternative: You could ask team members to take a picture of the view out their window or their workspace as a whole. As a result, you'll gain new insight into the wide variety of locations and settings of the group. The cool part about remote teams is that they are from all over the country, or globe, and work in very different settings!

Photography Competition

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Materials/Prep: Email thread or other media platform thread

Number of Participants: 3+ (this is great for both large and small groups)

Instructions: Have your team members submit a photo that they took through an email thread or create a thread on a different media platform to share. After everyone submits, you can either have everyone vote for their favorite or you can designate certain people to be judges. They will choose their favorite and declare a photo the winner.

This activity does not require any fancy equipment, photo editing programs, or cameras. Anybody with a smartphone can participate! This activity allows people to share insight into their lives and interests. They can have a chance to show what their lives and hometowns are like.

If you choose to, there can be a theme around each photography competition such as: UTRGV spirit, family, hobbies, nature, architecture, pets, and so much more! A great idea for the winner of the competition is to create a framed print of their photo or something of the like that is fun! You may learn something unexpected and interesting about your team. You will get a view of their lifestyle, interests, and personality!

Involved Activities – Prep Needed

Name That Throwback

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: A video chatting platform, a playlist, and a way for people to "buzz in" their answers

Number of Participants: 3+

Instructions: Before the start of your meeting, make a playlist of songs that were popular ten or more years ago. You could also find a premade throwback playlist online if you do not have time to make one on your own.

Play your songs through your video chatting platform and have people "buzz in" through the text chat. They can simply type in an "x" and send it or something of that nature to show who buzzed in first. This one will have your team tapping their feet to the beat, laughing, and chatting about the nostalgic songs while creating a little healthy competition!

Company Bake-Off or Cook

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: Notecards and writing utensils

Number of Participants: 5+

Instructions: Have everyone bake something representing their culture, the country they live in or come from, something they love to make, something their mom or dad used to make them when they were little, or anything that represents their story.

Have them take a picture and send it through email with the recipe to another team member. You could have the whole team share through a "reply all" email, or everyone could be assigned a partner to swap with. Encourage everyone to replicate their teammate's recipe and share their experience with the group!

Movie Night

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Materials/Prep: A shared movie platform or access to streaming services

Number of Participants: 5+

Instructions: Agree to watch the same movie or TV episode during the week then challenge members to share and compare something about what they saw. It could be suggested alternate endings, favorite characters, an early plot twist that would negate the whole point of the show, or anything else your imagination suggests. Share reviews and get requests for the next movie night selection!

You can also assign a book or course via E-Learn to the team and then discuss findings and opinions.

See What I Mean?

Duration: 10-30 minutes

Materials/Prep: Participants need to have a paper and pen or a computer drawing software

Number of Participants: 4+ (more numbers work best)

Instructions: One participant draws a picture using only basic shapes. A selected team member then describes the picture that was drawn to everyone else using only words. Without seeing the picture, each person must attempt to reproduce the picture based only on what the selected team member is saying to them. The ultimate goal is that everyone is able to create the same picture as the original.

This can be done through video chatting software (zoom) and chat rooms. It's like the classic telephone game but with art!

This activity emphasizes how important verbal communication is while working with others and how communication can be interpreted differently by different people. This exhibits how some people interpret directions and communication differently from other people, and how certain methods are more easily understood than other methods. You should do a few rounds of this game to really drive the point home and give more participants to try different roles.

Shark Teams

Duration: 25-30 minutes

Materials/Prep: Participants need to have a paper and pen or a computer drawing software

Number of Participants: 4+ (need enough for a few teams)

Instructions: This activity is based off the popular television show *Shark Tank.* It can take three different shapes: (1) Participants come up with ideas for use in their own company (2) Participants can work with a local charity and make a donation at the end (3) Unrestricted where teams are unlimited in their ideas.

Together, teams will create a new product or feature for you company (or charity) that would actually sell in the real world. Each team will engage in product development, process improvement, and marketing. Teams must put as much thought into their presentation as their invention because they have to wow the sharks! Have your team present their ideas over your video chatting platform and consider having some VIP's from your company (if possible) to help "judge" the competition!

Alternative: You can also allow teams to create wacky inventions instead of having them stick to realistic creations.

Teambuilding Online Games

Jeopardy

Website: https://jeopardylabs.com/

Info: Jeopardy is a team quiz game. This website allows to access premade games or to create your own games for free.

Instructions: Visit the website and choose the quiz you want your team to play. If you want to create your own, follow the website instructions. Once you have your game, divide your group into teams. Open the game, let everyone see it through the screen-sharing function on Zoom, input the number of teams, and begin playing.

Each team takes turns choosing which category and amount of points they want to go for. The higher the points, the harder the questions. They must phrase their answer in the form of a question: "What is…?" The team with the most points by the end wins!

Kahoot!

Website: https://kahoot.com/

Info: This website will allow you to create your own quizzes and trivia sets for free. Once created, everyone will join from their smart phones using a code specific to your set of questions.

Instructions: Create an account through the website. Once you have an account, you can create your own quiz game for you group meeting. When your team meets, share your screen over zoom. Have everyone join either through the website. They can use their computers or their smart phones. They will input the game pin and their names. Conduct the quiz and have a blast!

Trivia

Website: https://www.randomtriviagenerator.com/

Info: This website will allow you access to pages and pages of random trivia questions.

Instructions: Share your screen on zoom and make a game out of it by reading the trivia question and having everyone answer. Reveal the answer. The person with the correct response wins a point! You could also divide into teams and play together.

Pictionary

Websites: https://randomwordgenerator.com/pictionary.php
https://www.thegamegal.com/word-generator/

Info: This website provides drawing prompts for your game of Pictionary.

Instructions: As the host, share your screen on the whiteboard mode. Divide into teams, choose a set of drawing prompts, and begin. Each team chooses someone to draw. The first team's drawer goes to the

website, picks a prompt, and gets their annotate tool ready. They have a minute to draw the word and have their team guess it correctly!

Catch Phrase

Websites: https://randomwordgenerator.com/pictionary.php
https://www.thegamegal.com/word-generator/

Info: This website provides prompts for you game of Catch Phrase.

Instructions: Divide into teams. One of the teams will begin, choosing a member to start. The person chosen will access the website and obtain a prompt. They must get their team to guess the word or phrase. They may use any physical gesture and almost any verbal cue. They CANNOT say something that rhymes with the word or phrase, give the first letter of the word, say the number of syllables, or say part of the word in the clue.

When their team guesses correctly, it becomes the next team's turn. The game continues with the teams switching turns whenever a word has been guessed correctly.

The team whose turn it is not gains a point. If the word has not been guessed yet, they may collaborate and guess the word together for an extra point. Once a team makes it to 7, they win!

Mad Libs

Websites: http://www.redkid.net/madlibs/
https://www.madtakes.com/index.php?page=6

Info: This website provides fun mad lib sheets to fill in.

Instructions: Have your team fill in the blanks of the mad lib page. It will ask for nouns, verbs, adjectives, and the like. Once finished, have someone read the completed page out loud.

For larger groups, divide into break-out rooms and designate one person in each room to access the website, screen-share with their group, and lead the activity.

Name, Place, Animal, Thing

Info: This is a quick-paced game that you can play for many rounds.

Instructions: Have everyone in the meeting open their chat box. Pick a letter. Each player must type in the chat a famous person's name, a place, an animal, and a thing that begins with that letter. The first person to type it into the chat wins.

PSYCH!

Info: From the creators of "Heads Up!" & by Ellen DeGeneres. Choose from a variety of fun categories in which each player makes up false answers to real trivia questions.

Instructions: Everyone needs to download the free app. Can you choose the outrageous real answer among your friends' fakes? Get points for guessing the right answer, and for each other player you PSYCH! into choosing yours. For an extra challenge, add Ellen to your game and try not to get Psyched by her answers!

(Re)Sources:

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