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## **Icebreakers: Getting Your Training Off to a Good Start!**

*by Betty B. Stallings*

### **Section I - The In Depth View**

#### **The Purpose of Icebreakers**

Getting your workshop off on the right foot is essential. Like the appetizers to the full meal, icebreakers allow participants to get a taste of what is to follow. As with every other part of effective training successful icebreakers result from proper planning and interactive, experiential activities. Icebreakers and warm-up activities are best used for climate setting at the beginning of a training session, before a new topic is introduced, after a lunch break or as the introduction of the second day/session of training. They should be entertaining and highly energetic, but not frivolous. Too much levity could send the wrong message - such as a signal that nothing of value will be happening in the session.

The purposes of icebreakers may include any combination of:

1. helping to set a positive atmosphere for member interaction;
2. encouraging interest in the overall training experience;
3. building trainer credibility;
4. providing a feel for the group and assessing participants' attitudes, knowledge and experience with the topic;
5. building cohesiveness and trust among participants and between the trainer and participants;
6. severing the audience's preoccupation with work or personal issues;
7. diminishing the fear of the learning process;
8. aiding participants to become acquainted with each other in order to develop a spirit of cooperation and interdependence.

#### **Selecting the Right Icebreaker**

Choosing the right icebreaker can be the key to setting the tone for a training session's

content and format. Consider the following when selecting the best activity to "break the ice" for your session:

1. Select an icebreaker that is appropriate for the individual differences of participants such as physical mobility, personal interest, skill level and comfort with the activity's format. Icebreakers that work with a group of healthy adolescents may be entirely inappropriate for a group of conservative adults. Before selecting your technique, familiarize yourself with your audience. Tailor the icebreakers to those who will benefit from them. Avoid the temptation to reuse a familiar technique simply because it is one that you personally enjoy!
2. Base your strategy selection not just upon the individuals but on the nature of the group itself. Take into consideration the group's stage of development. If the participants are new to each other, select activities aimed at helping the individuals to get acquainted with each other. If you are working with an established group, select activities that build group relationships through the sharing of experiences.
3. Use the icebreaker to learn about your trainees' knowledge of the topic. You can utilize the icebreaker as a needs-assessment tool to gauge the level of participant experience or familiarity with the training topic. If it is a sensitive topic such as diversity, develop an activity that allows participants to disclose experiences or opinions on low-risk topics (e.g., origin of their name) so that they will begin to feel more comfort in taking greater risks in the training session.
4. Frame your icebreaker to coincide with your training topic. The closer your exercise ties in to the course content, the easier the transition to your next training phase.
5. An icebreaker design can mirror the structure for activities to come or it can offer information through a varied experience. Examples: If you are utilizing the facilitation, recorder, reporter, observer structure, you might design your icebreaker to utilize that same type of structure. Conversely, if you want to add variety to the training experience, you might try an icebreaker that uses a different structure (e.g., if most of the workshop will be involving the larger group, you may want to have your icebreaker done in pairs).
6. Make certain that your icebreaker fits well within the confines of your physical training location. Blindfolded "trust your partner" exercises do not work well in glass museums!
7. Choose your icebreakers based on your assessment of the open-mindedness of your participants. Is the group that you will be training

open to new ideas and activities or do you anticipate resistance or reservation at the beginning of the session? Always err on the side of minimal exposure and risk. Opening with an exercise that exposes participants' lack of knowledge or skill can be risky; participants may not be willing to expose their limitations. On the other hand, if you ask participants to comment on something familiar, it will ease them into the course content. Icebreakers should never be complicated, personally threatening or demeaning to participants.

In summary, a successful opening exercise sets the course toward a successful program; conversely, one that seems threatening, silly, unsuited to your participants or unrelated to the rest of your course can create an awkward atmosphere that will be difficult to overcome.

### **Questions to answer before selecting your icebreaker**

- What are my goals?
- How much time do I want to use?
- Who are the participants?
- What point am I trying to illustrate?
- What response am I anticipating?
- What materials, if any, are needed?
- What are the requirements of the physical setting?

## Designing or Tailoring an Icebreaker to Fit Your Training Needs

by Betty B. Stallings

Use this worksheet to assist you in creating or tailoring an opening icebreaker for your next training. You can modify one of the exercises used in this article or go to the resources listed below to discover hundreds of them!

### I. Goal (s) of the Icebreaker: (check one or more)

- Group or Team Building/ Individual Introductions
- On-the-spot Assessment
- Immediate Learning Involvement
- Other

### II. Check method(s) to reach these goals:

- Partner Introductions
- Name Bingo/Signature Hunt
- Three Truths and a Lie
- The Group Product
- Brief Openers
- Group Resume
- Sentence Completion
- One Word Descriptors
- The Line-up
- Opening Questions for Group
- Do's and Don'ts
- Forming Teams
- Song Title Charades
- Response to Agenda
- Icebreaker Quiz
- "Post-it" Questions
- Something New I've learned
- Jigsaw Puzzle
- Four Quadrant
- Cross the Line
- Other

### III. Outline activities involved in this icebreaker (use back or separate sheet of paper)

### IV. List materials and/or space needed to carry out this icebreaker (use back or separate sheet of paper)

**III. Outline activities involved in this icebreaker**

**IV. List materials and/or space needed to carry out this icebreaker**

## **Section II - Examples and Exercises**

### *Icebreakers that Accomplish Specific Goals*

## **Group/Team Building, Participant Introduction Icebreakers**

These exercises help participants become better acquainted and create a spirit of cooperation and interdependence.

### **1. Partner Introductions**

Participants pair off and get acquainted using discovery questions/topics suggested by the trainer. After an established brief acquaintance period, each partner introduces his or her partner to the entire group.

*Procedure, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- This exercise can take a long time to complete, so it is best done with smaller groups in which the participants are not well acquainted. Give participants a time limit for the interview and for the introduction.
- Carefully constructed questions designed to elicit substantive responses can give the trainer a sense of the skill and knowledge level of participants. (e.g., How long have you been a volunteer/volunteer supervisor? What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses in working with volunteers?)

### **2. Name Bingo or Signature Hunt**

This popular icebreaker involves utilizing a simulated bingo card where information about people is placed in each square (e.g., have volunteered with senior citizens, am the youngest sibling in my family, have two pets, etc.) The goal is for all participants to get each square signed by one person present in the seminar. An alternate way to do this is to give your group members a list of talents, experiences or qualities such as soccer player, sings in a chorus, etc., and have them seek signatures by each list item. Frequently there is a winner who is the first to get all spaces signed. This activity gets people moving around, acquainted with new people and energized to begin the session. I have utilized this icebreaker with staff members who are generally resistant to volunteers. For example, the trainer writes a number of volunteer activities on the Bingo squares. (e.g., soccer coach, church choir, girl scout leader, hospital visitor, etc.). Through this activity staff members discover the breadth of volunteer activities performed by the staff. Having staff talk about their own volunteer experiences can be a natural lead into their current work with volunteers in their organization.

*Procedure, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- Depending on your goal, you can list different characteristics or experiences. If it is strictly a get-acquainted icebreaker without the goal of preparing for the training, personal experiences and interests are best. If you have other goals, use

them to tailor the list of attributes for the exercise.

- Give a maximum amount of time for them to fill their cards and hopefully someone will fill the card prior to that time.
- It is important for circulation of participants that each person is allowed to sign each card only once.

### **3. Three Truths and a Lie**

One of my personal favorites, this icebreaker has participants give four pieces of information about themselves, making certain that three are truthful and one is a lie. The group tries to guess which one is the lie. This can be especially fun in a group that has begun to become acquainted but may not know each other well, such as the staff of an organization or a group of volunteers. This exercise is not threatening as each participant chooses what he/she wishes to share.

*Procedure, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- It is best to start with a person whom you know will be at ease and will perhaps initiate some humor to this form of icebreaker.
- This is also a great icebreaker for the trainer to personally share his/her information.
- If the group is large, the activity may be carried out in smaller groups. If it is important that the participants work as a team during the training, then it is best for all to participate in the icebreaker together.
- As it is a relatively long exercise, this may not be the correct choice for a relatively short training session (a few hours).
- A variation on this theme is to have people introduce themselves with their name and other information that may be useful to you as trainer and/or for the interaction with the other participants. The participant must then add one additional piece of information that they believe no one in the group knows about them. If they say something that someone knows, they must think of another. This is particularly fun with a group that works together and knows each other well. Often themes start to develop such as musical instruments that they play, teenage hi-jinks, etc.

### **4. The Group Product**

Ask individuals to write down from memory either the telephone keypad or a standard typewriter keyboard. Then allow groups of four to compare their answers and produce one answer that they believe is correct. Display the correct answer and stress that none of us is as smart as all of us combined. This encourages all to share during the training session and promotes the development of synergism. Having been involved in a group that was asked to do this activity, I can state from personal experience how amazed I was to learn what little we tend to know about things to which we have been exposed for years.

*Procedure, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- Because this generally begins with an individual trying to get the correct answer, it can be anxiety producing. Set a relaxed tone for this activity to avoid an anxious feeling permeating the beginning of the session.
- As a follow-up to this exercise, you might use another activity/question that relates specifically to the training topic. For example, if you are offering a risk management training session, you could ask: "What procedures do we follow when an accident occurs with a volunteer?" Look to see if there is consensus or if there is a better answer when people join together in a response.
- A possible variation would allow negotiations between the small groups. For example, if the first small group feels that they do not have the right answer, they could negotiate with another group to check it out.
- Another variation on this icebreaker is the "Brain Teaser" where individuals are asked to answer questions individually, and are then given a few minutes to join in a group to finish answering the questions. The groups should be able to answer more questions than any one individual can. Examples of questions might be:
  - What are the eight states that begin with the letter "M"?
  - What are the names of the planets, starting from the one closest to the sun?

The goal of these exercises is for the participants to learn that problems are best solved and situations are best handled when individuals pool their resources. This theme can be carried over to infuse the general atmosphere of the training.

### **5. A Variety of Brief Openers**

Most if not all training sessions should commence with the opportunity for participants to introduce themselves by sharing their names and a limited amount of personal information about themselves. When time allows, participants can be encouraged to offer additional information in an icebreaking format. For example:

- The participant uses an adjective that describes him/herself, one that starts with the same letter as his/her first name.
- Each participant offers his/her "stage name" which might be made up of a combination of a name of one of his/her pets and a street they have lived on. (Mine is "BlackJack Taylor") Not only does this warm up the session initially, but participants also find it fun to continue to use these names throughout the session.
- The participants decorate their tent nametags to best depict their personalities. During introductions, they are given the opportunity to explain their choice of decoration.
- Each individual is asked to find a coin that they have brought with them. They are told to look at the date and to share something that they did in that year that was significant, memorable, related to volunteering, etc. Endless variations are possible.

## **On-the-spot Assessment Icebreakers**

These assist the trainer in learning about the attitudes, knowledge, and experience of the participants. This is accomplished by asking participants to share their learning goals, raise questions about the course, relate their experience to the course and explore opinions and attitudes about the course topic.

### **1. Group Resume**

Participants divide into groups of at least six members. The group is asked to write a group resume displaying their collective backgrounds with information including educational experience, total years of professional experience, professional skills, hobbies, talents, major accomplishments, publications, experience in working with volunteers, etc. Each group must write out its collective resume and present it to the entire group. This is a great way to celebrate the total resources contained within the entire group and to afford the trainer a window into the experience of the group.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- It is important for the trainer to list the areas that the small groups need to include in their group resumes. The trainer should place this information on a transparency or on individual handouts given to each group.
- The group may add information after they have provided their collective response to those areas suggested by the trainer. Additional add-on categories contribute to the fun of the activity.
- This activity can be accomplished in 15-20 minutes if you give participants a timeframe for completion of the activity and for presentation.

### **2. Sentence Completion**

For training sessions where time is limited, sentence completion exercises can offer an efficient means of obtaining information about participants' attitudes, experience, skill level, etc. Depending on the topic of the training, you might ask participants to complete the following sentence, "My biggest frustration in recruitment (interviewing, delegation, etc.) is\_\_\_\_\_.

This, of course, also prepares participants for the topic that follows and encourages participants to feel that they have company in the problems that they are experiencing.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- It is best to have the first part of the sentence on a transparency or flipchart and to tell participants that when they get to a period in the sentence, they are done! (I will allow one "and" when the group is smaller.)
- The variations on this exercise are endless depending on your goal and the topic of the training.

- I generally give participants a minute to think of their sentence and start with a person who looks ready and eager at that time.

### **3. One Word Descriptor**

Often when I have a brief amount of time but am working with a small group (25 or less), I ask them to introduce themselves. The introduction includes brief pieces of information and then sharing a word that best describes their experience with whatever topic we will be discussing. To add interest, I ask that the word begin with the same letter as the topic on which we will be focusing (e.g., if the topic is supervision, the word must begin with an "S" such as superior, so-so, slim).

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- This can be done very quickly and is a quick insight into the participant's experience, attitudes and skill level with the topic.
- Again, it is best to choose someone who appears ready and eager to start the sharing.

### **4. The Line-up**

Ask participants to line themselves up according to how much experience they have had supervising volunteers. Alternatively, you could choose other questions related to the workshop topic. This is an active way to start a session and may be a way to relax the participants and also to discover the range of experience available within the group.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- Make certain that participants feel comfortable about revealing their level of experience. Have those with relatively little previous exposure see the potential of seeking assistance from the more experienced.
- Adequate physical space is a necessity for this exercise.
- This activity can also be used to share other information such as who has traveled the furthest to come to the training, who has been with the organization the longest to the shortest time.
- Another variation is to have participants get into groups that consist of: only children, the oldest child in the family, the youngest child, the middle child, etc.
- Remember to be clear on your purpose for doing this activity and on the choice of information you wish participants to reveal.

### **5. Opening General Questions for Group Response**

When working with large groups and in training sessions with limited time, you may wish to quickly obtain general information about your participants' experience, skills or attitudes through a show of hands. Your questions should be designed to tap into the topic or information you need, taking into account participant attitudes and experience. When training volunteers, for example, you might ask questions such as-

- "How many of you have volunteered in at least 5 organizations during your life?"
- "How many of you feel comfortable with our client group?"
- "How many of you like to be recognized for your volunteer work?"
- "How many of you would know what to do if \_\_\_\_\_ occurred while you were volunteering?"
- "How many of you feel comfortable asking others to do volunteer work?"
- "How many of you feel comfortable asking others for donations?"

A show of hands to questions such as these provides a very quick way to take the pulse of the group and assess any particular trends, concerns, etc.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- Some participants will be hesitant to raise their hand unless others in the group initiate their response first. I have discovered that if I use humor and funny transparencies to depict certain situations, I get more genuine responses.
- Variations are endless.
- It is helpful to be an experienced facilitator when this method is utilized, as experience helps you to assess the significance of the results of this polling method. Participants who raise their hands in response to these questions will expect their trainer to comment on the group response and to list conclusions that can be assessed from the distribution of the answers.

## **Immediate Involvement-in-Learning Icebreakers**

These create initial interest in the training topic. They draw the participants into the training program right from the session's beginning.

### **1. Do's and Don'ts**

Have participants introduce themselves by sharing their name, department and a "Do" or a "Don't" tip for the topic being discussed. Post tips on a flip chart.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- This activity must be accompanied by strict parameters. For example, participants should be encouraged to phrase their tip as a single sentence. Multi-sentence responses can eat away at the training time, yet yield relatively few positive results.
- This is an excellent way to start with participants who are eager to learn the material but are not comfortable about sharing personal information.
- A variation is to have participants share a nightmare experience related to the topic, or a topic-related lesson that they learned the hard way.
- Again, these openers must be carefully facilitated or they tend to use a lot of unproductive time. (And you will surely hear about it on the training evaluation

form!)

## **2. Forming Teams**

If your workshop will involve a great deal of small group work, you may want to ask your participants to form random groups or you may wish to pre-select these random groups in order to preserve valuable training time. There are numerous ways to assort participants into groups:

- Put a certain color dot on each participant's nametag either randomly or with the intent to structure groups for a specific purpose.
- Identify TV characters from different TV sitcoms on each nametag and have participants form groups of individuals with tags from the same sitcom.
- Write down body parts such as heads, arms, legs, etc., on the nametags and have participants sit in a group with all or most of its parts.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- Even if the primary purpose is to form teams, you may also wish to take advantage of this exercise to introduce your content. In such case you could distribute tags with the roles played in an organization (e.g., board member, line staff, management, etc.) and ask participants to form a team representing all or most of the organization's roles. You could use this exercise to rotate associations during the workshop. For example, individuals could start in groups that provide the full complement of organization personnel and later redistribute themselves into groups composed of all the individuals who hold the same role in the organization.
- Sometimes this exercise generates discontent from individuals who are unhappy to be separated from their "buddies." In most cases, participants generally grow to appreciate the benefits of meeting and understanding new people.
- It is particularly important to integrate volunteers with the "old guard" so as to set an environment for exploring new ideas and different perspectives.

## **3. Song Title Charades**

An active and fun way to get participants immediately involved in the learning is to ask them to think about their past three months in relation to something involved with their work (e.g., supervising volunteers, delegation, volunteer retention, etc.). Ask them to write down one word to describe their feelings, attitude or experience and then have them hold up their words. Participants are then asked to gather into groups of individuals who have chosen similar words. The groups are to collaborate to write a song, book or movie title that best fits their words. Each group gets 30 seconds to deliver their message to the rest of the training group participants. Some of the efforts are quite imaginative!

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- This is a particularly good icebreaker if you are dealing with one of the significant elements of training: attitudes. It encourages participants to express success or frustration in a fun atmosphere where they will find support from others who share their feeling. At the same time they will also be exposed to others who have had a different experience. A good trainer can play off this revelation during his/her lead into the training.
- It is important to have people understand there is no right or wrong way to feel but that attitudes and feelings are very significant in leading to eventual success.
- It is helpful to have a blank sheet of paper in front of participants and ask them to write their word(s) in big print.

#### **4. Response to Agenda**

If your training session requires that you immediately dig right into the topic, try an exercise in which you share the proposed agenda with participants and ask them to provide their immediate reaction. Participants are to introduce themselves and to share the area of the agenda with which they have the greatest concerns and questions. You may want to have available or make a list of agenda items, placing a check mark after an item of concern each time it is mentioned. From this you will immediately see where the group has its greatest concerns. Adapt your training to meet participants' needs.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- It is best to have the agenda in large print on a flip chart so that you can make check marks as concerns are expressed.
- Another variation is to have participants fill out a form prior to the training. They indicate their pressing concerns and you design the training around their perceived needs. In the introductory time, you would share the results of that survey information and indicate where you will be spending most of your time.
- One caution is that you will be dealing with perceived needs. So, if you are concerned that "real" needs will be neglected you will need to utilize this information to show participants that their perceived needs are actually related to other issues. Explain how addressing related topics will help to resolve their expressed concerns. (Example: In fundraising, people may say their concern is that people are not giving generously to their organization. The real issues may be board or volunteer attitudes towards asking for money, inadequate planning or prospecting, etc.)

#### **5. Icebreaker Quiz**

Develop a true or false quiz that deals with the topic of the training and, at the beginning of the workshop, hand the quiz out for participants to answer. The quiz could, for example, list stereotypic statements about the training topic that could be focused on volunteers, recruitment techniques, fundraising, etc. You can break up this exercise by dividing into the 4 major areas you will be covering during the course of your training. Prior to each section of the session you would have participants complete the portion

related to that section. At the start of each section, you could open the training with a general introduction related to the true or false statements

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- Often the word "quiz" strikes horror in the hearts of participants so it is necessary that attendees understand that they will not be graded on their responses. Make sure to explain that the "quizzes" will only be used to discuss perceptions, etc. No one will be singled out as a winner or loser unless the nature of the group is very competitive and they would all be stimulated and energized by this type of competition. The form could also be filled out anonymously to avoid any embarrassment. Another variation is to have participants discuss their answers in small groups. The groups would be asked to arrive at a consensus (or consensus with some dissensions).
- The quiz must be tailored to the group and training contents and can have many variations.
- The timing of the quiz may be short but you may want to debrief the questions as a way to begin the training.
- This type of icebreaker takes careful development and presentation but can be very successful. I facilitated a board retreat where the board president interjected a quiz on facts about the organization and the nature of its clients. The board decided it was an enjoyable and useful way to learn more about the organization and the disease of their clients. (National Multiple Sclerosis Society)

## **Multipurpose Icebreaker Exercises**

These combine two or more goals.

### **1. "Post-it" Questions**

Have each participant individually write a question they want answered in the training (e.g., "What is virtual volunteering?"). Introduce the agenda for the training and provide it in large format on a flipchart displayed in the training room. Ask each person to introduce him/herself with specific personal information and to share with the others a question they want answered in the seminar. Ask the participant to write their question on a post-it note and to place their post-it on the appropriate spot on the agenda chart. At the end of the training, you can ask the participants to answer these post-it questions.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- A variation of this exercise is to have each person write down his/her question on a post-it that is passed around to other participants. If the participant also has this question or concern, they put a check mark on the post-it. At the end of the activity the 3-5 issues that have the greatest concern or interest are shared. This gives the trainer an idea of what concerns are most crucial to the majority of the

individuals.

- This technique is a great lead into the training session itself.
- It also serves to connect people who share similar problems.

## **2. Something New**

The beginning of a second day of training or a follow-up or new training built on previous sessions is best started with each participant being given 1-3 minutes (or whatever time is reasonable) to teach one concept that they learned in the previous session. It is an excellent way to reinforce learning and it is known that the best way to accomplish this (90% effectiveness) is to have people teach someone else what they have just learned. This gives you an excellent way to assess participant learning and set the stage for the new session.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- If the group is large, have small groups do this exercise.
- There are many possible variations such as having each person state the most important "a-ha" they learned in a previous session. If this is asked, it is important that you ask participants to be keeping an "a-ha page" next to them in the workshop.
- This exercise will drag unless participants are asked to stay within a set time limit. No materials are needed but it enhances learning if the trainer writes the ideas on a flip chart or transparency.

## **3. Jigsaw Puzzle**

One way to accomplish multiple goals of getting acquainted, to introduce the topic and to elicit immediate involvement in learning is to give groups the opportunity to collectively assemble a puzzle. Each puzzle piece would bear the name of a specific element of the training. For example the puzzle might be composed of parts on which a specific rule of supervision is written. As participants piece together the puzzle they will be asked to share their learning along with the best example of its success (or failure).

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- This may be a good icebreaker when the group is composed of members who already generally know one another but would benefit from an opportunity that sets the stage for the learning.
- Variations could include pictures of people in volunteer situations where you would ask the group to make up a brief story about what is happening in the picture as it relates to the training topic. This will invite the group's creativity and begin the discussion of the focus of the workshop.
- Often this type of exercise is set up with missing pieces, which are in another group's packet. It becomes a second activity for the group to discover which group has the missing parts of their puzzle. This can be done as a contest. You

may wish to distribute small prizes to the winners.

- This icebreaker has numerous variations.
- The main question is to ask yourself what you are trying to accomplish with the icebreaker and design one that will meet those multiple purposes.

#### **4. Four Quadrant**

In this icebreaker, you select four words or phrases ( For example, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Agree and Strongly Disagree or Passion, Like, Tolerate, and Dislike). These words are prominently placed in the four corners of the training room. All participants stand in the middle of the room or wherever there is enough space for them. The trainer then calls out words or concepts such as: large dogs, attending the opera, winter skiing, shopping at Nordstrom, asking for money, supervising volunteers etc., etc. Participants head for the corner that best describes their response to this word, activity or concept. The participants find out a great deal about each other and begin to discover what they have in common. Moreover, they have fun looking at the folks in the other four quadrants. After you have done some get-acquainted words, you can start moving towards the subject matter of the training by throwing out concepts related to your training topic. You and those participating can begin to assess some of the attendees' attitudes and experience with the topics to be addressed in the workshop.

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- This activity requires using four words that give a full range of responses. You will need to place the words on large sheets of paper or posterboard and to display these prominently in four distinct locations in a room. This will help participants find what spot to head for when the words are read.
- Initially some "pleaser" participants will want to head for the word that seems most popular. Try to discourage this type of response, as it is much more useful for them to be very honest. As a trainer, you can encourage this by verbally rewarding those who are brave enough to "stand alone."
- Your choice of words and/or activities should depend on the group's readiness for revealing things about themselves.
- The icebreaker may be used after lunch as an active way to get the afternoon going while also introducing the topic and participants' attitudes towards it. This has been one of my favorite icebreakers to use with in-house groups after a meal.
- Space limitations can make this icebreaker prohibitive so knowing your training area is critical.

#### **5. Cross the Line**

Everyone initially stands on one side of a line. As the trainer calls out an experience, a trait, etc., participants cross the line if it rings true for them. You can say such things as:

- "If you are anticipating having fun at this workshop, cross the line." or
- "If you have had some difficulty supervising volunteers, cross the line." or
- "If you would like to see our volunteer program grow, cross the line." or

- "If you feel well recognized as a volunteer, cross the line."

Alternatively, you can ask more general get-acquainted questions such as,

- "If you have younger siblings, cross the line." or
- "If you volunteered as a teen-ager, cross the line."

*Procedures, cautions, variations, materials and timing:*

- It is quite obvious that this activity can start with very general, non-threatening or revealing statements. The level and subject matter of the questions should depend on the nature of the group and the topic for the training. With a comfortable group, it can extend into areas that will give the trainer and group members a sense of the experience and attitudes of the individuals.
- I have participated in this icebreaker as a very effective way to initiate a seminar on diversity.
- It is fun to have the last question be, "If you have lied at all during this icebreaker, cross the line!"
- This activity can be very serious and personal, but also supportive as participants realize that others have common experiences or share similar attitudes. The number of participants in your training is a significant consideration. This icebreaker works best with a group size between 20 and 30 people.

### **Section III - Forum for Sharing**

(This is ongoing and available only on the subscriber part of the site)

### **Section IV - Resources**

#### **Internet sites:**

<http://www.triangle.org/howto/teambuilding.html>

<http://www.ResultsThroughTraining.com/downloads/Icebreakers.HTML>

<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/sat4.html>

<http://www.cornell.edu/OHR/TNET/Icebreakers/Icebreakers.html>

<http://www.creighton.edu/StudentActivities/library.htm>

<http://www.susan-boyd.com/cope-lig.htm>

<http://www3.sympatico.ca/thetrainingoasis/mayspice.htm>

<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/icebreak.html>

<http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/~circlek/misc/ideas/icebreakers.html>

<http://www.smartbiz.com/sbs/arts/tdc6.htm>

<http://www.susan-boyd.com/tenways.htm>

### **Books and Additional Resources on Icebreaker Activities:**

Hart, L.B. **Saying Hello: Getting Your Group Started.** King of Prussia, PA: Organization Design and Development, 1989.

Jones, John E., Ph.D. And William L. Bearley, Ed.D. **Energizers.** King of Prussia, PA: Organization Design and Development, Inc., 1989.

Myers, S. and J. Lambert. **Diversity Icebreakers: A Guide for Diversity Trainers.** Amherst Educational Publishing, Amherst, MA, 1994.

Jones, K. **Icebreakers: A Sourcebook of Games, Exercises and Solutions.** Pfeiffer and Company, Erlanger, KY, 1991.

Silberman, Mel. **Active Training: A Handbook of Techniques, Designs, Case Examples, and Tips.** Lexington Books, University Associates, Inc., San Diego, CA, 1990.

Vineyard, Sue. **The Great Trainer's Guide: How to Train Anyone To Do Anything!** Heritage Arts Publishing, Downers Grove, IL, 1990.

Nilson, Carolyn. **Team Games For Trainers.** Mc-Graw-Hill, Inc., 1993.

### **Section V - Quarterly Gem**

#### **Two Great Websites**

In researching training resources in the field, I uncovered two websites that have wonderful training information on them. Check them out!

<http://www.cns.gov> - The Corporation for National Service Site has numerous resources and links that are helpful for all trainers in volunteer programs.

<http://www.mapnp.org/library/topics.htm> - Authored by Carter MacNamara and produced by a Management Assistance Program, this site has an amazing amount of training information when you click onto the category: Training and Development.

## **Section VI - Preview of Next Issue**

### **Training Ideas and Resources to Build Commitment to Your Volunteer Program**

The Winter 2001 edition of *e-Volunteerism* (<http://e-Volunteerism.com>) will address: *Training Ideas and Resources to Build Commitment to Your Volunteer Program*. I will share retreat and training ideas that could assist your efforts in working through staff and/or volunteer leadership resistance to creative and effective utilization of volunteers.

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#### **About the Author**

Betty Stallings, M.S.W., is an international trainer, consultant, author and keynote speaker, specializing in volunteerism, nonprofit fundraising, board development and leadership. She has written many popular books including: *Getting to Yes in Fund Raising*, *A Resource Kit for Managers of Volunteers*, *Training Busy Staff to Succeed With Volunteers* and *The 55 Minute in-Service Training Series*. She has also authored "Families as Volunteers," a chapter from the book, *Managing Volunteer Diversity*; an article for USIA Electronic Journal, "Volunteers From the Workplace," and a booklet entitled *Volunteer Program Assessment Guide*. She has four training videos: *Volunteer Trends, Recruitment, Recognition and Risk Management*. She has recently co-authored a book entitled *How to Produce Fabulous Fundraising Events: Reap Remarkable Returns with Minimal Effort*. She received the 1999 AVA Harriet Naylor Award for Distinguished Service to the field of volunteerism.

Formerly, Betty was the Founder and 13 year Executive Director of the Valley Volunteer Center in Pleasanton, California. While at the Center she initiated such programs as the Women's Re-entry Internship, Career-Links, Borrow-An-Expert, Project Manage, The Corporate Volunteer Council. Several of these programs have served as national models of volunteer utilization. While directing the Center, Betty obtained funding and supervised innovative research on volunteer management and this resulted in the publication of the book, *At the Heart-The New Volunteer Challenge to Community Agencies*.

Seeking resources for nonprofit organizations became Betty's hallmark while directing the Valley Volunteer Center. She obtained hundreds of grants from major foundations and corporations, initiated successful signature fundraising events and raised financial and in-kind resources from individuals and small businesses in the community, totaling millions of dollars.

Currently, Betty is an instructor in university nonprofit and extension programs, a popular trainer for state, national and international conferences on volunteerism and fundraising, and a trainer and consultant to many nonprofit organizations, corporations and public sector programs around the United States and Canada. Organizations that utilize Betty's training designs include the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the National Special Olympics, and the National Parks Service.

Betty's rich background in human services and volunteer management, her broad-based experience as a volunteer and fundraiser, and her humor, vitality and inspiration have made her a sought-after trainer, consultant and speaker throughout the nation.

You may contact Betty directly to obtain information about her seminars, retreat facilitation or materials development for nonprofit organizations, churches and public sponsored programs. Many of Betty's books and training materials are available in the Energize Online Bookstore and are listed below. She can be reached at the addresses and telephone number listed below:

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### **Some Books by Betty Stallings**

- *Training Busy Staff to Succeed*, available at <http://energizeinc.com/total/tra.html>
- *How to Produce Fabulous Fundraisers*, available at <http://energizeinc.com/total/howt.html>

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