

# Techniques for Building Community

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## Sentence Completions

One of the quickest and easiest ways to get a conversation started among strangers is to give them a list of half-finished sentences to complete and explain -- or to let the partners interview each other, turning the sentences into questions. The best sentences to use are ones that are completely non-threatening and yet give people a chance to share some interesting facts about themselves, such as sentences that begin with "My favorite" or "If." For example: My favorite time in the day is..., If I had a million dollars to spend for the benefit of humankind, I would....

## Multiple-Choice Questionnaire

A series of sentences, each with a set of choices, allows people to get into deeper material without wasting a lot of time. Indicate your first and last choices for completing the sentences, then each person in the group explains his or her choices for the first sentence, and why. The *why* is more important than the answer because it allows a person to volunteer a little more about himself. For example:

My idea of a good time is:

- a. a quiet evening with a good book
- b. a stroll through the park with someone I like
- c. a shopping spree
- d. watching a pro football game
- e. a long walk in the country by myself
- f. a good bull session
- g. going out to eat with some friends

## Reminiscing Choices

This is similar to the sentence completions, but you choose only *one* of the four experiences and go on to describe it. Include interesting anecdotes of significant lessons you learned from the experience. For example: The first time I tried to dance....

## Four Questions

A series of questions develop a particular subject area. They range from the ridiculous to the sublime and can deal with areas such as friendships, games, heroes, expectations, etc. Each person in the group answers the first question and elaborates on it. Then each person answers the second question, etc., until you have gone around on all four questions. See how the following series develops the subject area of "warmth."

Where were you living between the ages of seven and twelve... and what were the winters like?

1. How was your home heated during that time?
2. What was the center of warmth in your life when you were a child? (This can be a place in the house, a time of year -- or a person.)
3. When did God become a "warm" person to you...and how did it happen?

## Fantasy

Think and dream your perfect vacation. For example:

1. Where would you like to go?
2. What transportation would you like to use?
3. Who would you like to visit along the way?
4. What book would you like to re-read while you are gone?
5. What would you like to bring home with you?

## Imaginative Questionnaire

Try describing your spiritual condition right now in one of the following ways:

- Choose a color and explain.
- Choose a weather condition and explain.
- Choose a number from one to ten.

## Pop Quiz

To surface information in a hurry that can be used as the basis for a sharing experience, one of the best approaches is the Pop Quiz. It gives the person a chance to collect his or her thoughts for a few seconds before having to share. Here are possible models.

**Fire Drill:** Write down 10 items you would grab and take with you if your house caught on fire. In your imagination, run through every room and jot down the specific items that you would try to take. (Assume the children and pets are safe.) After 30 seconds, in groups of four, share the three most important items on your list and explain why. You could vary this by taking a trip into space or a camping trip.

**Success Analysis:** Write down two accomplishments for different age periods (e.g. 1-5, 6-10, 10-13, 14-17). For instance, when you were between 7 and 12 you may have won a dance contest or an athletic award. Then, in groups of four, share your accomplishments and explain how they reveal your changing values.

**Family Fun Times:** Quickly write down nine or ten things your family enjoys doing together, such as camping, playing ball, eating popcorn, square dancing, etc. Then, beside each activity, put the symbols that apply. For example: \$ -- if it requires more than \$10, T -- if it requires traveling more than 100 miles, O -- if it brings your family closer together, etc. Then put a circle around your three favorite activities.

## Time Line/Turning Points

Assuming the line below is your lifetime, divide the line into the major periods of your life, such as childhood, adolescence, college, young adult, and adult. Think back over your life and try to pinpoint on this line the major "turning points." A turning point can be considered anything that has significantly influenced or altered your life, or shaped your present values. It can be a happy or painful experience, but it is one which is now viewed by you with great meaning. It may be the death of your mother when you were 12, a spiritual commitment you made while in high school, etc.

**Time Line:**

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## Continuum

On the continuum lines, participants picture where they are between the two extremes. In groups of 4 each person shares his or her profile and allows others to agree/disagree with his or her estimate. For example: talker -- listener, thinker -- doer, leader -- follower, adventurer -- nester, giver -- receiver.

## Self-Evaluation Chart

People can see how they have grown through a program, a course, or a retreat by placing a mark on the top of the line for the way they feel at the beginning and a mark on the bottom of line for the way they feel at the end. For example:

About myself, I'm feeling...  
useless and worthless \_\_\_\_\_ valuable and important

About my group, I'm feeling...  
I couldn't tell them anything \_\_\_\_\_ I could tell them anything

About God, I'm feeling...  
very cold \_\_\_\_\_ very warm

About the Church, I'm feeling...  
indifference \_\_\_\_\_ involvement

## Make Your Name Tag

Instead of having prepared name tags, make your own. Tear a piece of colored construction paper into a shape symbolic of you: a heart, a butterfly, a... Write your first name on it, punch two holes in it and wear it on a string around your neck like a medallion. When groups are formed, explain your name tag to your group.

## Magazine Collage

Leaf through a pictorial magazine or daily newspaper and tear out titles, pictures, words, slogans, want ads, that portray you in some way, such as: 1) the concerns in your life at the moment, 2) the important things in your world, 3) your hopes and dreams for the world, etc. Then paste your tear-outs together on a sheet of newsprint, add color, and design with magic markers.

## Clay or Play-Doh

With a piece of clay or Play-Doh about the size of a golf ball make an object that symbolizes you in some way, such as a box, an animal, a free-form piece of sculpture. In your group, explain why you see yourself as you do.

## Wire Sculpture

Using bailing wire (available from farm supply stores) or pipe cleaners make a sculpture that describes your spiritual life at the moment. When you are in your small group, share the meaning behind your sculpture.

## Sculpturing

In Two's: one person is the modeling clay and one is Michelangelo. Sculpture feelings like fear, joy, tension, despair. In Four's: two people are the clay and two people are Michelangelo. Sculpture relational words like distrust, trust, confrontation, affirmation. In Eight's: four are clay; four are Michelangelo. Sculpture collective items like celebration. In Eight's: everyone can be clay and the sculptor. Sculpture concepts like Christian community, discipleship, etc.

## Mystery Person

On a blank sheet of paper, answer several questions. Fold the slips of paper and place them in a bowl in the center of the group. One person takes out a slip, reads the clues aloud, and everyone tries to guess which group member matches the answers. Finally, the mystery person confesses and explains the last answer. Sample questions: a *color* that reveals your personality, an *animal* that portrays the way you see yourself, a *song* that illustrates your philosophy of life.

## Roving Reporter

Group size may vary from 5-10. Each group is given a spoon. Tell the group that what may look like a mere spoon is actually a sophisticated microphone in disguise! The exercise works as follows:

1. People may speak only when they have the microphone in their hand.
2. The microphone will be passed around the group, each person handing it to the next, until the facilitator says "stop."
3. At that point a question will be asked, and each person will think of their response, but only the person with the microphone may speak. When that person has shared his or her response, he or she will hand the microphone to a person of his or her choosing, who will then share a response to the same question. This continues until the facilitator calls time after 2-4 people have shared.
4. The microphone is once again passed around the group until "stop" is called.

Repeat the process for several rounds, asking a different question each time. Before you ask the question in the third round, you may want to suggest that the microphone be given to someone who has not shared in any of the previous rounds.

## Roll-of-the-Dice

Give each group a set of dice. On the wall post newsprint on which 12 questions have been written, each with a corresponding number. Each person will roll the dice and share their response to the corresponding question. Several rounds can be played. If a person rolls the same number more than once, he/she simply re-rolls for a new number. (This activity can also be done with one die and six questions.

### Variations

- After sharing, each person can ask one other person to share a response to the same question.
- Each person is given two "Choice" tokens (i.e. small pieces of paper with the word "choice" on them, or pennies, or poker chips). If a person rolls the number for a question they do not wish to answer, they may play a "Choice" token and choose any other question to answer.

## Lottery Draw

Assign each person in the group a “lottery” number consisting of three digits. The facilitator randomly draws a number from 0-9, and asks a question. Every person in the group who has that number appearing in any of the three digits of their lottery ticket shares their response with the group. When sharing is finished, the facilitator draws a different number. **Example:** The number drawn is 6. The lottery numbers of members of a group are: Person A: 236, Person B: 870, Person C: 662, Person D: 001, Person E: 547, Person F: 069. Then persons A, C, and F would share their response to the question.

## Four Corners

Gather the group in the center of the room, and explain that a statement will be read with four choices for responses. Each person must choose one of the options as their response. They then go to the corner indicated for that response. When everyone has gathered in the appropriate corners, they introduce themselves to one other person who is standing in the same area. The facilitator then reads a question and the partners share their responses with one another. After a brief time for sharing, the group gathers back in the center of the room, and a different statement is read with four choices for responses. Several rounds can be facilitated with different questions each time. Examples of “choice” statements and sharing questions:

- Choice for dessert; ice cream - apple pie - cheese cake - fudge brownie.
- What would you do if you won the lottery?
- Choice for a free Saturday: hiking - movie - read a book - wander the mall.
- Who would you like to interview from history, and what one question would you ask (excluding Jesus)?
- Choice of season for year round (assume no school): spring - summer - fall - winter.
- With a free ten day trip for two, where would you go, who would you take?
- Choice of career: medicine - law - education - business.
- Your picture and “words to live by” will appear on the cover of TIME magazine, what would they say?