

A background image showing a group of people at an offsite event. In the foreground, a woman with blonde hair is seen from the side, looking towards the left. In the background, other people are visible, including a man with glasses and a woman with dark hair. The overall atmosphere is social and professional.

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DIY Offsite Games

Some warm up games
to play at your next offsite

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WARM UP GAMES: what's in this DIY offsite games pack

These are 10 to 15 minute exercises or games which cause people to

- commit (you get out what you put in)
- help each other get there
- be open to an exciting and rare opportunity to learn something new
- open up, be creative, stop blocking new ideas.

They are not the only games, but they will give you a starting point.



The Buddhists say how you do anything is how you do everything.

Correctly framed and debriefed these games can cause rapid team culture transformations

They are powerful. So use them wisely. I strongly suggest that if you've never facilitated or trained a group before that you engage a professional. But if you cannot, then trust your intuition.

Gindy



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How these instructions are laid out

These instructions are laid out in the following structure.

WHY: a rationale for the exercise – this is for you, the facilitator, and could include some covert aims

VERBALISED WHY: a rationale you can present to participants (it will be similar to the normal why, but you should probably customise it to the audience)

PRE-BRIEF: a big picture description of the game / exercise

WHAT: Questions you could ask them to think about while doing the exercise

HOW: nitty-gritty bits to watch out for or tease out

DEBRIEF: Questions you could use to debrief



POINT PATTERN

The team sets up a simple pattern. Then we make it more complex and watch it fall apart, and debrief on complexity, interdependencies, supporting and challenging each other.

WHY PLAY THIS GAME

The covert reason to play this time is to get people to be present in the room

It also requires them to concentrate, and you will get a sense of how they play with each other: do they support, compete? Do they enjoy playing or want to get to the "important stuff".

If they don't know each other this can give them names (and make them remember at least 2 of them).

It's a simple game which you can make complex. It can stand in for any work process they do or for the process of the day (planning, analysing, strategising, whatever).

It's also a good game to play layered through a day or longer, provided the same participants stay in the room.

VERBALISED WHY

This is a reason to tell the participants that you're playing the game.

How you do anything is how you do everything.

Watch how this works / not works.

Pay attention to how you freak yourself out (or not).

How you respond to other people's freaking themselves out....

Complex pattern, as complex as work interactions...

PREBRIEF

Ask any of these pre-brief questions:

- As you're playing this game, ask yourself what this team does to help each other succeed? How does the team overall respond to failure or setbacks?
- Notice what specifically you do when you fail (because you will fail). How does this pattern help or hinder you?
- Notice what it's like to learn something new - what's fun about it? What's hard about it?
- Notice how you respond to increasing complexity: How does this pattern help or hinder you?

WHAT

SET UP A PATTERN

- Stand everyone in a circle, ask them to each put one hand up
- Set up a pattern (first person points, says name and puts hand down; next person says name, points at a new person whose hand is still up, and puts their own hand down, 3rd person continues until they go back finally to the last person. The first person will have to say who they are because their hand is down). This way you have a single chain.

REPEAT THE PATTERN TILL THEY HAVE IT

- repeat the same pattern, then people can drop their hands
- repeat the pattern a number of times until it's smooth

PLAY WITH THE PATTERN

Then send more than one of the same pattern around (you can start with anyone in the circle if you want to, or you can be the first person). Count how many you put out, and how many are there when you stop it.

INCREASE THE COMPLEXITY

- make it more complex; set up a second pattern, this time instead of a name they say a different category: suggestions below (remind them to point to a different person than they did the first time)
- when they have that pattern straight, and can do it smoothly, introduce the first pattern back again - run them simultaneously
- see more ideas for complexity below

WATCH IT FALL APART AND PLAY WITH WHAT THAT MEANS

It will fall in a heap and we'll drop patterns a lot, it's the nature of the game; people will laugh.

HOW

You can introduce as many patterns as you like: 3 seems to be enough for most groups.

Try coming back to the patterns throughout the day.

There is video of me facilitating this pattern with a group of 40 here: http://youtu.be/Y4ZarD_8VXU

OTHER CATEGORIES YOU CAN USE

It's nice if you can make these relevant to the themes of the day, so consider asking them to come up with words like:

- values that are important to the team
- attitudes of successful strategists / planners / team players
- how you want to feel at the end of the day

Or make it about getting to know each other. We've shared names, now let's share:

- what city / country we were born in (nice if they don't duplicate, but if they do this will require better listening)
- mother's first name
- my first pet's name
- things that make me smile (keep it positive: you could do things we hate, but it's not a great way to prime a group)
- my favourite food

Or keep it generic - one of their

- products or services
- key customers
- missions

CIRCLE SIZE

This works well with up to 20 people in a circle, but groups of 10 or seem to be the sweet spot. You need a minimum of 6 to do it at all. It's fine to demo with one group and then let the group do it (even setting it up can be a great debrief).

WAYS TO CHANGE IT UP

- Get them to change places in the circle after you've set up the pattern: watch them cope with that
- Get them to move around the room while still throwing the pattern around - this can be quite fun (you could do this with just one pattern set up)
- Set up a pattern where instead of saying a word and pointing, they say the word and change places with the next person
- Set up one pattern which is throwing an object around (a hacky sack, a whiteboard marker, a shoe, something not too heavy or fragile unless you're creating a metaphor for something they are doing which is hard or broken.)

DEBRIEF

Whatever questions you asked for prebrief, ask them to debrief

- As you're playing this game, ask yourself what this team does to help each other succeed? How does the team overall respond to failure or setbacks?
- As you're playing this game, notice what specifically you do when you fail (because you will fail). How does this pattern help or hinder you?
- As you're playing this game, notice how you respond to increasing complexity: How does this pattern help or hinder you?

They will tie it to

- the nature of communication: just sending the pattern isn't enough - you need to see it's been received and passed on (otherwise it dies)
- Customer service: asking for something isn't enough; providing something isn't enough
- The nature of memory
- Self-management: how do they freak themselves out; how do they track the complexity?
- Do you look after each other or every one for themselves?

TEAM JUGGLING

The team has to compete against themselves to improve the process of juggling a ball between them.

WHY PLAY THIS GAME

This game gives them a single point of focus.
Gets them touching something.
Give you a read on what works or not in the team.

VERBALISED WHY

How you do anything is how you do everything.

Improve a process: we're here to improve the way we work / do things differently:
let's see how we do it in microcosm.

PREBRIEF

Ask any of these pre-brief questions:

- As you're playing this game, notice how you participate (or not) in the group. Is this helping or hindering the process of getting better?
- As you're playing this game, notice how you are able to help someone else or let them find their own answers. What does it feel like to do that? How could you do it differently?
- As you're playing this game, notice what works in improving a process (and what doesn't).
- As you're playing this game, notice how this is like work (or not).
- How was it that they were able to get to the best time?

WHAT

You will need:

1. A stopwatch (there's one on your phone)
2. 3 Juggling Balls (more if you want to be adventurous!)
3. A flip chart or white board and marker

This activity is essentially a problem solving activity where in successive rounds the team has to work out better solutions.

You tell the group that you have a challenge for them. As they can see, there are 3 juggling balls and the problem is that they have to find a way for all their hands to touch all the balls in the fastest time possible. The balls have to finish in the same position as where they started - on the floor - and during the activity all the balls must be moving.

On the flip chart rule up 2 columns with headings of "Round" and "Time".

When you are ready, start round 1. Have the scribe record the time taken by the team in round 1.

Give them 1 min to think.

Do round 2. Record the time.

Repeat until the team has reached its best time.

HOW

This will work with a group as large as 15. With larger groups you can invite a smaller group to participate and get the audience to observe. You could also create a timer role and a scribe role.

One group of very creative engineers had their team line their hands in a channel from the top to the bottom and dropped all the balls down this "channel".

A team of lawyers had their team stand in a close circle with their hands held up in front creating a "surface" and one team member in the centre of the circle spun around in the middle.

Great way to help the group to naturally discover the Action Research model of Plan-Act-Review when you ask them how was it that they were able to get to the best time? What happened? What was the process?

DEBRIEF

Whatever questions you asked for prebrief, ask them to debrief

- As you're playing this game, notice how you participate (or not) in the group. Is this helping or hindering the process of getting better?
- As you're playing this game, notice how you are able to help someone else or let them find their own answers. What does it feel like to do that? How could you do it differently
- As you're playing this game, notice what works in improving a process (and what doesn't)
- As you're playing this game, notice how this is like work (or not)
- How was it that they were able to get to the best time?

ZOMBIE TAG

Say my name before I turn you into a zombie.

WHY PLAY THIS GAME

The covert reasons to play this game include

- get people to be present in the room
- put a little pressure on and forces people to remember each others' names
- it's fun
- requires no equipment
- it can lead very nicely into a discussion of culture / norms / values / expectations

VERBALISED WHY

Learn each others' names and have a little fun

Important lesson about how we support each other and the rules we impose on ourselves

PREBRIEF

Ask any of these pre-brief questions:

- As you're playing this game, pay attention to the rules you impose on yourself
- Notice how you respond under pressure
- How is this like your work (or not?)

WHAT

- Set up in a circle
- Elect the first zombie
- They shuffle zombie-style across the circle towards their victim
- The victim must say a new victim's name before the zombie reaches them
- if they do, then the zombie goes towards the new victim
- if they don't, then the zombie takes the victim's place and the victim becomes the new zombie.

HOW

People can help each other but they often don't – this gives a great debrief: they make up their own rules about what they can or can't do, and most often they assume that they have to know names without ever being told them.

If they don't know each other they don't even guess a name.

Even if they know each other the pressure of having someone come towards them can be too much (talk about what other pressures may be occurring today: what do they expect from themselves, each other – can lead into a good discussion of ground rules, values, expectations)

It goes without saying that if you have nametags people may not use them (again a rule they make up!).

Or this exercise can make nametags redundant.

WAYS TO CHANGE IT UP

Try these variations:

- Give them some preparation time to go find out names. Play again.
- Find what "rules" they gave themselves, ask them to break these rules or devise better ones.

DEBRIEF

Whatever questions you asked for prebrief, ask them to debrief

- As you're playing this game, pay attention to the rules you impose on yourself
- Notice how you respond under pressure (is this a pattern for you?)
- How is this like your work (or not?)

PASS THE CLAP

Send a clap around the circle like a ball.

WHY PLAY THIS GAME

The covert reason to play this time is to get people to be present in the room.

It also focuses, it's really simple, and requires no equipment.

You can pretty much make it be anything you want it to be, since it's pure process.

VERBALISED WHY

How you do anything is how you do everything: watch how this works / not works; pay attention to how you freak yourself out (or not); how you respond to other people's freaking themselves out.

Or try any of these opening frames.

This is a game about: (choose one)

- focus
- looking after each other
- listening
- learning and improving
- bringing our energy to the task at hand.

PREBRIEF

Ask any of these pre-brief questions. As you're playing this game notice:

- how you support people around you and the process itself
- how what you bring to the game influences what you get out of it
- what people say to each other (and what you say to yourself)

WHAT

- Stand everyone in a circle
- “pass” a clap around the circle – first just go all one way
- demonstrate and coach them to pass with their bodies and their eyes, not just their hands
- make sure they are doing it with energy (if not, then get them to “fake” the energy)
- then give them permission to go both backwards and forwards (to the left or to the right)
- when this is smooth try increasing speed
- then when that works, allow them to pass across the circle (so they now have three options: across, left or right).

HOW

When they move from passing left or right to passing across there is a major change in how the group focuses – this is a step change in perception: they need to switch from foveal vision to peripheral vision. This won't work if they hold their breath. You may like to use as a metaphor for any changes you are introducing or proposing.

CIRCLE SIZE

- works best with circles 6 – 10, but I have done it with up to 40 (important to keep focus if it's larger)
- if you have a larger group try splitting groups
- you can make 2 circles and if someone “gets it wrong” they swap circles
- this moves everyone around. You do need to have them owning up to getting it wrong.

WAYS TO CHANGE IT UP

- the energy is important. If they do it with high energy they will laugh when they get it wrong. Low energy can end up in shame or rebellion.
- If they are too wired for any reason ask them to breath together before doing it
- do it with different emotions (excitement, love, hatred, annoyance, surprise) if you like (this leads nicely into a “you get out of it what you put into it” debrief)
- do it while walking about the room
- pass multiple claps (important in a larger group)
- simultaneous clap (you and the next person clap at the same time: this is a degree of difficulty harder, but not impossible at all). It will tell you a lot about who's in synch and who's not.

DEBRIEF

Whatever questions you asked for prebrief, ask them to debrief

- how you support people around you and the process itself
- how what you bring to the game influence what you get out of it
- what people say to each other (and what you say to yourself).

If you would like a friend or colleague to have a copy please feel free to pass it on or get them sign up themselves at cindytonkin.com/free-stuff

And when you're ready for a professional facilitator and coach to bring your team to the next level, contact Cindy Tonkin: cindytonkin.com/chat

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