

SIVASAILAM "THIAGI" THIAGARAJAN

50

ACTIVITIES

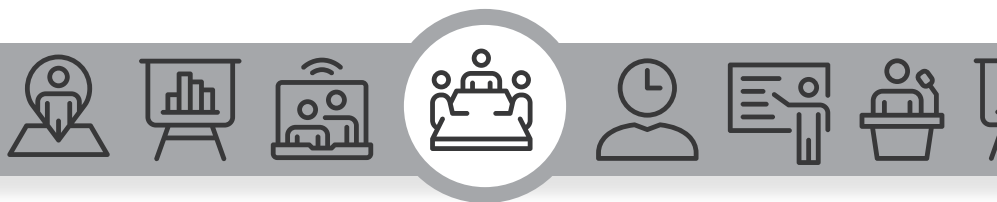


**TO KICKSTART
YOUR MEETINGS**

WILEY

50 ACTIVITIES TO KICKSTART YOUR MEETINGS

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Sivasailam “Thiagi” Thiagarajan

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To V. Thiagarajan
1938 to 2020

My oldest friend, who passed away just
before I could give him a published
copy of this book

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1

MEMORABLE MEETINGS

Here's an activity based on the appreciative-inquiry techniques that build upon positive encounters and successful results.

Synopsis

The participants individually create a story about an engaging and effective meeting. They then pair up and share their stories. Later, they work in teams to identify the factors that contribute to these positive meetings.

Purpose

To identify factors that contribute to engaging and effective meetings

Participants

Minimum: 4

Maximum: Any number

Best: 8–20

Time

30–50 minutes

Flow

Form teams. Divide participants into two or more teams of equal size, each with around two to five members.

Create stories about positive meetings. Ask each participant to work independently to come up with a story related to a positive meeting. This story should feature an engaging meeting that produced effective results. It could be a real or fictional narrative. Encourage the participants to keep their stories short.

Share stories. After a suitable pause, invite the participants to walk around the room and pair up with someone from a different team. The two participants should share their stories with each other. Ask the participants to listen carefully so they can recall details of the other person's story at a later time. Announce a four-minute time limit for this activity.

Return to the team. After each pair has shared their stories with one another, ask all the participants to return to their original teams. At this time, each participant will have his or her own story along with a story from someone else.

Discover common themes. Ask members of each team to think back on all the stories they heard and identify the common themes among them. Ask them to make a list of the factors that contribute to an engaging and effective meeting. Also encourage the team members to brainstorm techniques for increasing the probability of such positive meetings occurring.

Pair and share the conclusions. Ask each participant to pair up with another participant from a different team. Ask the participants to take turns sharing their list of ideas that contribute to positive meetings.

Link to the Meeting

What's your story? Ask the participants to recall and apply the success factors from the stories they created. Encourage them to make the meeting the basis for a future success story.



2

WISHES

What wishes do participants have for your training session? Which of these desires are shared by most of the participants?

Here's an opening activity that helps the participants generate a list of wishes, discuss them, and identify the highest-frequency wishes.

Synopsis

Each participant writes a personal wish for the training session. Later, the participants exchange these wishes and identify those that occur with the highest-frequency by comparing them two at a time.

Purpose

To generate a set of wishes for the training session and explore their relative importance

Participants

Minimum: 10

Maximum: Any number

Best: 15–30

Time

15 minutes for the activity and 5 minutes for debriefing

Supplies and Equipment

- Blank index cards
- Pencil or pen

Flow

Identify two mediators. At the beginning of the activity, randomly select two participants to act as the mediators. Tell them that you will explain their task later.

Ask participants to come up with wishes. Invite participants to think of things they wish for the subsequent meeting. Provide examples as needed, such as these:

- *Frequent breaks*
- *Relevance to my job*

Listen to one or two examples from the participants.

Ask participants to write a Wish Card. Give each participant a blank index card. Ask the participant to select the most important personal wish for the meeting and write it on the card. Instruct the participants to work independently and keep their wish statements brief and legible. Also, tell the participants *not* to sign their card or write their name: submissions should be anonymous. Announce a two-minute time limit for this task.

Brief the mediators. While the participants are busy writing, explain what the mediators will be doing. During the activity, when two participants cannot decide which of the two wishes is more appealing, they will bring their cards to a mediator. This person will review the cards,

listen to the participants, and quickly select one of the two. While they wait for indecisive players to approach them, encourage the two mediators to talk about their wishes for the workshop and try to predict which wishes are likely to be the most popular ones.

Exchange the Wish Cards. After two minutes, ask the participants to stand up, hold their Wish Cards with the written side down, walk around the room, and exchange cards with one another—without reading any of the cards. Stop this exchange after about 30 seconds.

Explain the goal. Tell the participants that while all the wishes are important, you are going to conduct an activity to identify the ones that appeal to the greatest number of meeting participants.

Ask participants to pair up and select. Tell the participants to pair up and show their Wish Cards to their partners, briefly talk about them, and decide which wish is likely to be more popular among the meeting attendees.

Explain what to do after the selection. The participant who had the Wish Card that was *not* selected should cross out that wish and copy the selected wish on the other side. Each of the two participants should pair up with someone else and repeat the discussion and selection process.

Explain how mediation works. If a pair of participants cannot decide which wish has higher popularity, they should go to a mediator. Both participants should take turns to briefly present their case to the mediator. This mediator should listen to the arguments and quickly decide which wish is likely to be more popular among the larger group.

Explain what happens after the mediation. The two participants who presented their cases should give their Wish Cards to the mediator. The mediator should ask the player with the unselected wish to cross it out and

copy the selected wish on the other side. Both players now continue to pair up with new participants and play as before.

Explain what happens when the same wish appears on two cards. When this happens, the two players discuss the importance of the wish while they wait to pair with another person with a different wish.

Explain what happens when the wish on the other side of a card is not selected. When this happens, the player with this card joins the mediator and discusses the relative importance of different wishes for the workshop.

Conclude the session. Announce the end of the activity after a suitable time (depending on the number of participants). Randomly select different players to read the wish on the card. Ask the rest of the players to join the reader if they have the same wish on their card—or if they feel that the wish is more important than the one they have on their card.

Link to the Meeting

Review the selected wishes, one at a time. Discuss the following types of questions:

- What are the benefits of implementing this wish?
- What should the facilitator do to realize this wish?
- What should the participants do to realize this wish?

Tell the participants to keep thinking of these wishes while engaged in the subsequent meeting.



3

REDUCTION

Here's an opening activity that requires the participants to come up with their own definition of an effective meeting.

Synopsis

Teams of participants each write a definition of an effective meeting in exactly 16 words. A panel of judges selects the best definition. Later, the teams reduce their definitions to exactly eight and four words.

Purpose

To identify the essential characteristics of an effective meeting

Participants

Minimum: 6

Maximum: Any number

Best: 12–20

Time

10–15 minutes

Supplies and Equipment

- Paper
- Pens

Flow

Assign teams. Divide the participants into three to five teams, each with two to seven members. Make one of the teams a panel of judges.

Get started. Ask this open-ended question:

What is an effective meeting?

Ask each team to come up with a response in exactly 16 words—no more, no less.

Assign a three-minute time limit.

Review the 16-word responses. Ask each team to read its response. Encourage everyone to listen carefully so they can “borrow” ideas from other teams’ statements for later use. After listening to all responses, ask the panel of judges to identify the best response.

Shrink to eight words. Ask the teams to rewrite their responses in exactly eight words. In this process, they may borrow ideas from other teams’ statements. Suggest that teams reduce the size of their responses by removing unimportant ideas, superfluous words, and redundant language. Assign a three-minute time limit.

Judge the eight-word responses. As before, ask each team to read its response. Instruct the panel of judges to identify the best eight-word response.

Reduce by 50 percent. Now ask each team to reduce its statement to one-half of its current size (to exactly four words) while retaining the essential idea. As before, select the best response.

Link to the Meeting

Proceed to the scheduled meeting. Encourage the participants to recall and implement the key factors related to an effective meeting.



4

WHISPERS

You can use *Whispers* as an opening activity before a meeting begins to encourage the sharing of definitions for what makes a meeting successful.

Synopsis

The participants explain their individual definitions of a successful meeting. Each participant predicts the answer of the person seated to the right. The facilitator relates this activity to the success of the ensuing meeting.

Purpose

To identify key features of a successful meeting

Participants

Minimum: 3

Maximum: Any number

Best: 5–10

Time

5–10 minutes

Flow

Brief participants. Ask the participants to envision the ensuing meeting. Encourage them to think of an answer to this question: *How would you define the success of the meeting?*

Encourage reflection. Pause for about a minute to give the participants time to come up with their best answer to the question.

Ask for predictions. Instruct each participant to turn to the person on the *left* and whisper their prediction of how the person on the *right* will answer.

Ask for responses. Tell participants in each group to take turns giving their personal response to the question.

Give feedback. If a participant's response matches the prediction made by the person on the left, then congratulate the predictor for his or her empathetic thinking ability.

Link to the Meeting

Tell the participants to begin the scheduled meeting. Encourage them to work through the meeting in such a way as to achieve their definitions of success.



5

BORING AND USELESS

This opening activity uses a creativity technique called the *double reversal*.

Synopsis

Invite the participants to brainstorm ideas for ensuring that the meeting will be *boring* and *useless*. Later, invite the participants to flip these negative ideas into positive ones for achieving an *interesting* and *useful* meeting.

Purpose

To generate ideas for achieving an interesting and useful meeting

Participants

Minimum: 3

Maximum: Any number

Best: 10–30