



# 5 Quick Activities to Keep Your Team Energized and Connected During Covid-19

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The end of 2020 has found us still coping with the challenges of Covid-19 and in most organizations, teams and work groups are operating virtually. This means that employees, already under stress from adapting to multiple changes in their personal and professional lives, do not have access to the informal camaraderie and support that is a natural part of in person workplace interactions. Virtual work groups can provide that support. However, it won't automatically happen, so it needs to be structured and intentional. The following five short activities provide processes that can begin any on-line meeting or session to stimulate the kind of support, validation and connection that is an antidote to the stress, pressure and isolation they may be feeling. Use them as is or adapt, but their goal is to have people intentionally interact to increase connection.

## 1. OPEN ENDED STATEMENTS

This process generates participation and focus immediately. The key to successful open-ended statements is that they are relevant, and require short responses from all who are present. The team gains people who are more invested in the work of the group, a common frame of reference with a variety of opinions, and a team meeting where everyone starts participating instantly. This process begins to start changing norms, expectations and behaviors and fosters trust and openness. Statements should be real, relevant and require quick responses. Here are a couple of examples:

- In the last month, our team has demonstrated the most growth in the following area...

- One change in our team dynamics or structure that would make a big difference is...
- One of the best things we've done to stay connected during this period is...

## 2. PAIRED SHARING

This process also creates common ground, familiarity and trust between people who work on the same team. It builds strong connections, more open relationships and increases comfort in talking candidly with one another. Common topics can be used and we offer a few examples:

- Our biggest priorities this month
- Our biggest concerns on this project
- The good news of our team relationships in a time of Covid

Pick topics that are relevant where there is both energy and opinions. Team members will gain not only engagement but also insight.

## 3. STORY TELLING

If you talk to people who speak for a living, you will discover that telling a memorable story is THE best way to get people's commitment to listening and really hearing the message. It is also a powerful way for team members to build deeper understanding and connection. If the story is real and meaningful, people don't forget it and they build empathy for one another. That bond provides support and mutual commitment, the ties that bind. Examples of topics for story-telling are:

- A turning point in your career
- A mistake you learned from
- A lesson that was instrumental in your growth
- An important role model of yours

## 4. RELEVANT QUESTIONS

The importance of always asking a group or team relevant questions is that it sets the expectation that members need to actively participate by thinking, analyzing, and giving feedback during the meeting. Responses can lead to processes for problem solving, idea generating or decision making. The questions make people think and question their own and other's responses and that can be a helpful in deciding next steps. Examples might be:

- What have we been most successful at during Covid and why?
- What new processes have we developed that we should continue using?
- What have been your biggest learnings in dealing with the challenges of Covid?

## 5. PROVERBS AND QUOTES

One of the most engaging and energizing things we do with a group is start their session with pithy proverbs or quotes that can go back centuries from wise sages or be as current as writings from contemporary humorists and storytellers. You can provide them, or team members can bring their own. What matters is that the quote or proverb selected offers some meaningful and insightful reflection for participants. Decide if they are to furnish the quotes or proverbs, or you can compile a list that offers variety for the different styles and interests and they can choose from those. Ideas will be explored, discussed and considered that can benefit both the group and individuals.

The sharing can be done in numerous ways, individually, in pairs or in small groups. Most importantly, the quotes and proverbs should connect to whatever issue your group is currently talking about, for example change, resilience, leadership or teamwork. At the end of the sharing, hold a discussion about overall responses involving new ideas, learnings and insights. Examples of quotes and proverbs are:

- *No wind blows in favor of the ship that has no destination.* (Montaigne)
- *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.* (African proverb)
- *You can't shake hands with a clenched fist.* (Indira Gandhi)

The point of these five processes is to stimulate connections, engagement and support, which is part of what we all need during this time of isolation and virtual work.