



BUILDING YOUR TEAM

A MEETING ICEBREAKER GUIDE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

THE ALTERNATIVE USES GAME

A Fast Ice Breaker Game

Two minutes, one paperclip, and a room full of ideas nobody expected.

Building Your Team
buildingyourteam.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Fast, Energizing Warm-Up for Quick Creative Thinking



The Alternative Uses Game is a fast, energizing ice breaker built for teams who need quick creative thinking before a meeting starts.

A facilitator hands out a single small object, sets a two-minute timer, and asks participants to name as many possible uses for it as they can — no matter how strange. The activity works through “hitchhiking” on ideas: hearing one answer from a teammate spawns similar answers from others, and the group’s creativity builds on itself. This paper walks a facilitator through setup, running the game, and the debrief questions that turn it into a real conversation about how the team solves problems.

4–8

people per group works best

2 min

on the clock per round

15–30

ideas a group typically generates

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Setup Before Your Meeting



Setup takes less than five minutes total.

- **One small object per group** — a paperclip is recommended.
- **A visible timer.**
- **A whiteboard, flip chart, or shared document** to record answers.
- **Pens or markers.**

Groups of four to eight people work best; split larger meetings into multiple small groups. Other objects that work well include a thumbtack, a rubber band, a fork, a stone, or a piece of string.

Run the Game



Five steps take the room from a blank stare to a wall full of ideas.

1 Introduce the object and the rules

Hold up the object and explain: everyone has two minutes to name as many uses for it as possible, and silly answers count just as much as practical ones.

2 Start the timer and open the floor

Invite participants to call out answers while a facilitator records them on the board.

3 Capture every answer without editing

Write down every idea exactly as it's called out, even the strange ones.

4 Call time and tally the results

Groups typically land somewhere between fifteen and thirty ideas in two minutes.

5 Award a quick prize

Have the group vote on their favorite non-obvious use and award a small prize for the most creative answer.

Debrief for Real Learning



A few guided questions afterward turn a fun warm-up into a real discussion about how the team solves problems.

- Which answer surprised you the most, and why?
- Did the group get stuck at any point? What helped break through it?
- How is generating wild ideas here similar to solving problems at work?
- What would change if we had five minutes instead of two?

Teams rarely run out of ideas. They run out of confidence to say the odd ones out loud.

Why It Works



This isn't just a party trick — it's based on real research into creative thinking.

The exercise is based on a classic creativity test psychologists call the Alternate Uses Task, which measures how flexibly a mind can jump between ideas. That's also what makes it useful well beyond icebreaking: it works well in department meetings, off-sites, leadership workshops, and even virtual meetings held over Zoom.

WHY IT SPREADS

Hearing an answer from one team member spawns similar answers from others — the “hitchhiking” effect that pushes the group toward increasingly creative responses as the clock runs.

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ABOUT



Building Your Team is a division of The Leaders Institute®, the company that pioneered the Build-A-Bike® charity team-building activity in 2005. Building Your Team publishes practical, field-tested team-building activities and facilitation guides for corporate meeting planners, HR leaders, and event professionals.

Want us to facilitate this activity for your group?

Talk with our team about running the Alternative Uses Game, or another team-building activity, at your next meeting.

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