



BUILDING YOUR TEAM

A LEADERSHIP ICEBREAKER GUIDE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

JOURNEY LINES

A Leadership Icebreaker

One line, drawn in five quiet minutes, showing every peak and valley of a career — and ninety seconds to tell the room what it means.

Building Your Team
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nobody's Line Goes Straight Up

Journey Lines asks leadership team members to draw a simple line charting the peaks and valleys of their career, then present it to the group in 90 seconds.

Where most icebreakers stay at the surface, this one is built to go deeper — the article's own framing is that it creates meaningful conversation rather than small talk. This paper walks a facilitator through materials, group-size guidance for teams above and below eight people, the full five-step run, sample career touchpoints to prime the room, and the debrief questions that turn individual lines into a shared sense of psychological safety.

~15 min

total: setup, drawing, and presentations

90 sec

presentation limit per person

8

people — the threshold for breaking into trios

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Materials, Group Size, and Timing



The setup is simple, but the format changes once the group passes eight people.

- **One blank sheet of paper per person**, letter size or larger.
- **Markers**, preferred over pens for visibility when lines are held up or shared.
- **Five minutes of quiet drawing time.**
- **A shared digital whiteboard** for remote participants.

Groups under 8 people run as one full group. Groups above 8 should break into trios for internal sharing, then bring one theme back to the larger group. The whole activity runs about 15 minutes: roughly 3 minutes of setup, 5 minutes of drawing, and the remaining time for presentations.

Run the Icebreaker



Five steps move the room from a blank page to a set of shared, named themes.

1 Draw sample axes

On the whiteboard, sketch a horizontal axis for time and a vertical axis for emotional quality, with 3 to 4 example points to model the format.

2 Allow silent drawing time

Give the group five minutes to draw their own line without interruption or discussion.

3 Announce the presentation limit

Set the 90-second cap per person and keep time visibly so pacing stays fair and predictable.

4 Move through presentations

Go through presentations in a set order, and ask listeners to hold questions until everyone has finished.

5 Name the recurring themes

Identify and say aloud the themes that showed up across multiple people's lines.

Career Touchpoints to Prime the Room



Offering a few example touchpoints upfront helps participants move past generic "got promoted" moments into something more honest.

- Promotion into uncertain roles
- Mentorship experiences
- Difficult firing decisions
- Stagnant roles lacking growth
- Missed promotion opportunities
- Industry transitions
- Project successes doubted by others
- Family-versus-career choices

Debrief Questions and the Key Insight

The debrief is where individual lines turn into a shared understanding of what leadership actually looks like up close.

- What surprised you about someone else's trajectory?
- Which low point proved most instructive?
- Where did your experience align with another person's?
- What single element would you want on your line five years forward?

KEY INSIGHT

“Nobody's line goes straight up.” Naming that plainly creates psychological safety by normalizing messy career paths across a leadership team.

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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 Journey Lines, or another leadership icebreaker, for your group.

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