



BUILDING YOUR TEAM

A MEETING ICEBREAKER GUIDE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

THE ONE-WORD PULSE

Icebreaker Games for Meetings

One word each, thirty seconds a person, and a facilitator suddenly has a live read on what the status report isn't saying.

Building Your Team
buildingyourteam.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One Word, Read Out Loud, Changes the Room



The One-Word Pulse asks everyone to describe their current state or perspective on a project using a single word — then reads the full list back to the group.

It takes about four minutes for a group of 12, needs almost no materials, and works for meetings ranging from 5 to 60-plus participants. This paper walks a facilitator through setup, group-size guidance, the full five-step run, ten ready-to-use prompts, and a real example of how a single round of one-word answers surfaced a problem a project's status report had been hiding.

~4 min

for a group of 12 participants

5–60+

participants the format scales to

30 sec

approximate time per participant

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Materials and Group Size



The setup takes less time than reading this section.

- **A whiteboard, flip chart, or shared screen** to capture the words as they come in.
- **A marker**, or a chat window for virtual groups.
- **A pre-written prompt**, chosen and announced before participants arrive.
- **About 30 seconds per participant** — roughly 4 minutes total for a group of 12.

Teams of 5 to 15 can run as one group. Larger groups should split into tables of six, with one representative reporting the patterns from their table back to the room. The format is suitable for weekly meetings, project launches, workshops, and virtual calls alike.

Run the Icebreaker



Five steps take a prompt from the facilitator's notes to a shared board full of honest, one-word signals.

1 Choose and announce your prompt

Decide on the prompt before participants arrive, so the room isn't waiting while you think of one.

2 Set the one-word rule clearly

State the rule before anyone responds — one word only, no explanations yet.

3 Go around the room

Capture every word as it's given, without commentary or reaction that might steer later answers.

4 Read the full list back

Read every word aloud to the group so the whole board is heard at once, not just seen.

5 Ask about two or three words

Pick a couple of words that stand out and ask the person who said them to say more, for deeper insight.

Sample Prompts and Debrief Questions



A good prompt is specific enough that "fine" and "busy" stop being safe answers.

- “ *What is one word for how the project feels right now?* “ *Describe last week in one word.*
“ *One word for how prepared you feel for the deadline.*

Once the words are on the board, these debrief questions turn the list into a conversation:

- What surprised you about the words on this board?
- Which word did you almost say, but decided not to?
- Where do you see the biggest gap between our words and our last status report?
- If we run this again in 30 days, what do you want the board to look like?

Case Example: What the Words Revealed



Sometimes the status report and the room are telling two different stories.

FROM THE FIELD

A manufacturing client's project board was entirely green. But a one-word round revealed “stalled,” “guessing,” and “waiting” from different departments.

That mismatch prompted leadership to address the real underlying issue — one the status report alone had never surfaced.

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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 One-Word Pulse, or another meeting icebreaker, for your group.

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