Escape Room
Target Audience: Airmen at all levels

Purpose To assess team dynamics and communication, while building camaraderie with a fun, problem-solving activity. Teams will strengthen and improve the ability to work together.

Description Mix together puzzles, immersive environments, and team-building exercises and you have the recipe for an Escape Room, a concept taking off around the world. Basically, a team is given 60 minutes to solve various clues and puzzles which enable the members to "escape" from a room. Not only are Escape Rooms fun, they also provide a controlled problem-solving environment, where teams must collaborate in order to solve a series of problems. Corporations have seen the team-building potential in this concept and have begun using them for offsite events. A typical Escape Room costs $20-$40 per person for one hour. Military teams can use Escape Rooms as a way to build communication and problem-solving skills, while gaining a better understanding of team dynamics and leadership tendencies. To avoid the cost of an offsite event, units can create Escape Rooms within their own workspaces. After completing the room, teams can then debrief their experiences. Going through the problem-solving cycle will ultimately showcase team strengths and identify weaknesses that can be improved upon.

Employ
o Identify a "Game Master" team to lead Escape Room development and execution. Keep the team to 3 or 4 members to maximize opportunities to participate.
o Locate space for an Escape Room. Locations could be a non-utilized space that can be left set-up for the Escape Room (storage, vacant office space, etc.) or an occupied space that will need to be set-up each time (training labs, conference rooms, auditoriums, etc.).
o Create an overall theme or scenario for the room. If time and budget allows for decoration then go for it. If not, design the game around the space utilized to find some savings.
o Escape Rooms should be difficult enough that not every team will escape within the time limit, but easy enough to allow for continuous progress. 20-40% success rate is the average.
o Develop clues and puzzles for the team to solve. Utilizing a variety of puzzles and clue delivery systems that fit the scenario and build upon each other is important. For example, clues could include a padlock code, the key for another puzzle, a door to another room, a piece for an overall puzzle, or even a red herring (a distraction clue).
o Manufacture, purchase, or borrow clue, puzzle, and decoration props for the room. Utilizing items already available is a cost-saver (unused file cabinets, locks from UDM, etc).
  • Prop examples: Digital timer (for time tracking), locks, lockboxes, art, safes, puzzle boxes, cipher tools, black light flashlights, invisible ink, USB drives, laptop, books
o Often teams become stuck and need clues to help them continue. The Game Masters must have a way to monitor team progress and communicate clues to the team.
  • Communication possibilities include audio/video equipment, VTC capabilities, tablets with Skype/Facetime, or a Game Master physically present in the room.
o Beta-test the room to identify potential problems and difficulty levels.
o Advertise the Escape Room and create a method for 4-6 member teams to sign up.
o Go over the rules with each team, provide a safety brief, and prohibit discussion with unit members who have not yet gone through the scenario.
o Once the activity has ended, teams should take advantage of the opportunity to debrief. An observer trained in team dynamics, problem solving, and/or communication methods will enhance the lessons learned. If possible, allow teams that have already completed the scenario to watch other teams during debrief for even more learning opportunities.
o Foster interest and competition by tracking and publicizing team times and success rates.