

Teambuilder: “Q-WORDS”

Target Audience: All Teams

Purpose

To emphasize the importance of a team’s diversity of thought and experience by helping your team understand they are exponentially more effective together than any member individually. By presenting the information in a fun, interactive manner, it capitalizes on the psychomotor (doing) and affective (emotional) domains to attach meaningful and long-term understanding of the concepts.

Description

In this activity, your team is given a short amount of time to write a list of as many words that begin with the letter “Q” as they can. In the time allotted (somewhere between 45-90 seconds seems to work best) members write down their words without talking or communicating. This prevents any anchoring to a specific thought pattern (i.e., animals, locations, science, literature, etc.) as well as any group think where they might decide the list is comprehensive before others are complete. Each team member’s life experiences will likely shape what words come to mind quickly. It is important that no one is negatively critiqued on their words (a key principle in brainstorming). Even if you’re not sure that it is an actual word, consider writing it down to keep your team feeling valued and included. After the time is up, find who has the most number of words. The typical list will likely include between 5 and 15 words unless you have an individual in the group with a powerful memory. Your team will find that the problem solving ability of the individual can’t even compare to the synergy of the entire team which should be able to come up with 30 or more unique words.

Employ

Group Size: Between 5-20 seems to work best, but larger groups will also work if you have time for all members to add to and discuss the team list.

Time: Approximate 15 minutes for a group of 15.

Materials: 5-20 note cards, pens (everyone should have a pen but have some just in case), a designated recorder for the group, a notebook or a computer with projector, a timing device.

1. Don’t call the activity by its name at the start to keep folks from starting the thought process early.
2. Pass out note cards to all the members including the recorder.
3. Let everyone know this will be an individual effort. There will be no communication of any type (eyes on your own card...integrity first) during the first phase of the activity.
4. Prepare your timing device for the allotted time. Between 45-90 seconds seems to work best. Less than 45 seconds and folks are still feverishly writing, and more than 90 seconds it seems to start causing “brain cramps.”
5. Read the following line or put it up on a slide if you are using a projector: “You have XX seconds to write down as many words that begin with “Q” as you can. Remember this is an individual effort. GO!”
6. When the time is up tell everyone pencils down
7. Ask your team to raise their hands if they have more than 4 words. Then keep them up if you have 5. Then 6... you get the idea, go until you find the individual with the most words and ask the recorder to write down that number.
8. Start with the member who had the lowest number of words. This will ensure everyone feels valued and included in the activity. Ask him/her what their words were and have the recorder write them down. Don’t record duplicates. This is where a projector might be the best option, so everyone can see all the words listed and identify duplicates; it also seems like everyone has a good time watching the words add up.
9. Go through each person until there are no more unique words.

Debriefing questions:

The debrief can be accomplished in multiple manners. If you have a good understanding of the PACE material you can review the following concepts:

Diversity of Thought (“Green Blocks”)
Psychomotor/Affective domains
Bias (Groupthink and Anchoring)

If you like, you can form each one into a question for discussion; for example: How did this exercise prevent groupthink and allow everyone’s input to be heard? What are some ways you can use this technique to prevent groupthink here in your squadron, flight, section...?

If you don’t have time to explore all the concepts, it would be best to end the exercise by expressing the most important take away: diversity. No matter how experienced or knowledgeable we are as individuals, there is almost no limit to what a diverse group of motivated Airmen can accomplish together.

Special thanks to Lt Col Marc Vassallo, 379 EMXS/CC, for this idea.
