

TALKING 'BOUT MYSELF

AN EXERCISE TO GET ACQUAINTED WITH OTHERS IN A GROUP

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

This exercise is done in pairs or trios. As long as a good process for breaking the whole group into pairs or trios is used, and the whole group can hear the facilitator, it can be done with an unlimited number.

MATERIALS

None

SET UP

Participants must have enough room to move around easily and should remain standing for the whole exercise.

BEGINNING

People are often shy about finding a partner in a group of people they don't know well. While it is simple to instruct group members "to turn to the person on your left," or "to find a partner," what will often happen is that people will choose as partners people they already know, which erodes the purpose of creating new connections among members. Consequently, we often use silly but effective exercises to force group members pair up quickly. "Fingers Up!" is one of the easiest.

Instruct group members to put one of their index fingers up in the air, as if to say, "I'm Number One!" They then look around until they find someone whom they don't know well, whose finger is still up, and touch their finger to that person's finger, kind of like God giving life to Adam. They should keep their fingers up and touching until everyone has found a partner. If there is an odd number, one group may form a trio instead of a pair.

Pairs are the preferred structure, however, trios may also be used. As the exercise progresses, you may make somewhat larger groups of 3 or 4 if you wish.

INSTRUCTIONS

First, the trainer identifies which partner will go first, using a humorous identifier such as “the person with the longest hair” or “the person who can recite his or her Social Security number fastest.”

Then the trainer calls out a question which each partner answers for the other. Any appropriate questions may be used—not too personal or potentially embarrassing—but something that reveals more about the person. “Yes/no” or single word answers are not what you want; rather, use questions that require a bit of explanation. Instead of “Who is one of your role models?” ask “Who is one of your role models, and what is it about that person that you wish to emulate?”

The pairs are given just a couple of minutes to answer the question for each other. Then the trainer calls out, “Fingers up!” and everyone finds a new partner. A different “who goes first” is given and a different question for the pairs to answer.

The questions should ask the group members to share an opinion or experience about themselves:

- Talk about someone, living, dead, or imaginary, that you consider to be a great role model, and why
- Describe the neighborhood in which you mostly grew up, and what impact you think it may have had on you.
- Talk about a time when you’re pretty sure you accidentally hurt someone’s feelings.
- What was something that took a lot of courage for you to do? It can be small, the first time you stood up to speak in front of a group, or big, the time you stood up to a bully, but something that you had to screw up your courage to do.

I usually end the questioning with the same question, first telling the group that this will be the last, and by far the hardest, question:

- Talk about something you really, really like about yourself.

CHECKPOINTS

Be wary of using extremely personal questions in any group, but particularly in a group of strangers. Don't ask "What is the worst thing that has ever happened to you?" You could say "Talk about a time when you felt like an outsider." You should also avoid questions that might embarrass group members who do not have an experience to share. For example, don't ask "What was the most important experience you had in college? Because chances are not everyone attended college. Instead, you could ask "What was the most important experience you had in your early twenties?"

DEBRIEFING

When you have finished the exercise, ask for volunteers to share what they heard from someone else. It may take a minute for someone to volunteer, but typically, after the first person speaks, you have to call an end to what they want to share.

If you have used "warm up" questions for a focused meeting on fund raising or volunteer recruitment or the like, you will want to allow a little more time for debriefing, in order to hear many ideas and perhaps even record them for later use.

THE QUESTIONS

A partial list of some of the questions we have used successfully follows. It is an ever-changing list that we use with a number of different processes that all require group members to share some information about themselves. Whenever we hear a good question, we add it to our list. Create your own ever-increasing list. There are a number of good books that list questions, including some that are specific to certain groups, such as teenagers .

The questions may be tied to the kind of meeting you are about to have, in order to “warm up” the subject. For example, if you are about to have a hard budget discussion, you might ask:

- What’s a lesson you learned as a young person about money?
- What’s the best advice you’ve ever heard or read about money management?
- What would you want your kids to understand and practice about money management?

If you are going to look for new fund raising ideas for an organization, you might say:

- Talk about a time when you or someone you know or even heard about gave money generously and cheerfully to a cause or event. What do you think motivated the giving?
- Talk about a time when you have refused to support a cause or event, even though financially you could have. What kept you from writing that check?

Who Goes First? Options (Choose any one from this column for one round)	Questions (Choose any one from this column for one round)
The one with the longest hair	What is a good piece of advice you’ve been given?
The one wearing the most jewelry	If you could be an invisible observer for any five minutes in the past, and learn what really happened, which 5 minutes would you choose, and why?
The one with the largest foot	Talk about something you have learned to do fairly recently.
The most brightly dressed	If you could change one thing about yourself— <u>not</u> something to do with your appearance—what it be and why?
The tallest	Talk about a time you changed your opinion about someone or something, and why.
The oldest	How do you like to spend your leisure time? What’s fun for you?
The youngest	What did you think you were going to be when you grew up, and why or why didn’t that turn out to be what you do now?
The most petite (never the “shortest”!)	If you could change one thing that many people do that annoys you, what it be, and why?
The one with the shortest hair	What’s the luckiest thing that ever happened to you, and why?
The one with the smallest hand	Tell your partner about one of the best surprises you ever had.
The one with the darkest hair	Tell your partner about a time when you felt like an outsider.
The one whose first name comes last alphabetically	Tell your partner about a risk you once took, and how it worked out for you.

