

7 Free Ways to Inspire, Motivate, and Bond Your Team

by Jim Connolly



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#1 Listening

Active listening can be the biggest gift you can give to another person because after all, don't we all just want to be heard? We put this action in the category of "simple but not easy" because as simple as it is to do, our conditioning makes it problematic to deliver. So be kind to yourself and take it one day, one moment and one person at a time. Make

the determination that for the rest of the day that you will focus on this mantra, "two ears one mouth, two ears one mouth, two ears one mouth..." This is your cue to pause before speaking and to give the other person more space to communicate. Your only response should be the nodding of your head, maybe a feedback "I hear you" or "I see what you mean" or "I feel what you are saying". This is the part that makes this

exercise not easy. You are breaking years and years of conditioning which is not an easy task.

Please stick with this first step until you have fought the urge to jump right into a conversation. But you will eventually get to that point which elevates you to step 2, asking an empowering or clarifying question. When you've conditioned yourself to openly listen, now you can form great questions that give you more insight to the speakers point or perspective. Resist the urge to ask simple yes or no questions or sway a conversation toward it being about you. Instead, put your detective questioning hat on and really make a commitment to dig in and learn as much as you can about what is really on the speakers mind.

Now step for of active listening is a bit tricky but I'll share it with you anyway.

Step 3 is when you tell a story as your response to your conversation that will empower the speaker. So to put this step into perspective, make sure you stay focused on step 1, deep listening and step 2, empowering or clarifying questions first. Sharing a story becomes the cherry on top of the sundae, not the sundae in itself.

So if you share this technique with everyone within your office, department or pro-

ject team, people will be inspired to eventually share the good stuff on their mind knowing that they will be finally heard. What a great feeling!

#2 Organize a Potluck

Nothing says family like sharing a meal together. Now with saying that, it's up to the team to step it up and share something that represents them individually. Yes I know, most potlucks should be called "good lucks" as in good luck if the food is edible or good luck if the food was really homemade and not just a platter of Costco roasted chicken taken out of the original container and put onto your own platter. Like any good leader, how you frame a request and communicate a message will determine the response and ultimate result of your potluck.

Communicate greater meaning to your potluck will force people to up the game and cook full out. Even the bachelor excuse should be banned from the conversation. What better way to gain a skill like cooking than in the present. Start off your first potluck request by having everyone bring in one dish that represents their heritage, culture or family favorite. So the dish that is brought and shared with the team represents who you are. Encourage people to

do the research or call their culinary expert family member to learn how to make and serve their food. Then when you have the actual potluck, make it like a show and tell experience where each person share some of the history or background that makes this dish so important to your family history. Give people enough time to do the research, purchase the specialty ingredients and put it all together. Attempt to schedule this at the end or conclusion of the work day so all of the energy is put into enjoying this bonding event uninterrupted.

#3 Compliment Day

Negativity can be the cancer within any organization. Make a determination to create an environment of positivity with making a day of complimenting the main focus of communication. Yes you can already imagine the silliness of the potential of this exercise. I mean imagine how after the first initial compliments, you really need to stretch yourself to find something new to compliment each other. For instance, the first compliments tend to be the surface type, physical compliments on the hair, teeth, skin, etc...But if you make the parameters that you can only use a specific compliment only once, it forces you to say things that you've probably thought about in your head and actually speak them out loud.

This opens up the floor to hearing positive stuff that you rarely mention. Just as main steam news tends to report mostly negative, discouraging stories, your environment will be flooded with positivity which will carry over into everything you do and produce. I know you can do it because you are so awesome :-)

#4 Visit Vets

When you are in gratitude you are more thankful for your what you got, your job, your career, your health, your kids, your wife, your husband, you got the idea. And I've found nothing so satisfying and being in gratefulness than visiting service veterans. Just being in the room with them you can feel the impact that their service lives had on them. When you talk to them, you realize further of the sacrifices they gave to protect me and my country. They may have lost a limb or another part of their body, but the scars that affected them all was mostly on their head and heart. If your being of service to them like fixing them lunch or celebrating a holiday, you can't help but feel that you haven't done enough to show your appreciation.

#5 Talk About Your Life's Goals

Sometime talking about what excites you about your own life inspires both you and the person who hears you. For some reason in our modern work history, any conversation that did not involve work was taboo. Well we are humans, not automatons, so we have many different parts of our life that make us whole. And to involve and acknowledge those other parts puts our work and career life in perspective of importance and not minimize it.

Ask of each person what's their life purpose, what do they aspire to as a human being, who do they love, what hobbies do they enjoy, what do they want to accomplish while on this earth. Zig Ziglar, a personal development guru to millions was famous for this quote, "You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help other people get what they want." So by first understanding a more complete picture of the people that you work with enables you to outline and help them get what they want.

Back in the days when I was a chef owner of a popular Silicon Valley restaurant, I would encounter this very challenge. One young cook's apprentice showed a real pre-

ponderance toward pastry and baking had a sit down with me about his future. Just as I figured, his love was mostly in learning and producing pastry, not savory foods. Even though we served desserts in our restaurant, pastries were more aligned to a pastry shop or large hotel. If we hadn't had this discovery conversation he would have become more disinterested in his job and possibly produce poor quality food for my patrons. By discovering what his real aspiration was, I was able to outline a plan for him to learn as much about how to be a pastry chef in a large hotel by understanding all facets of the kitchen, not just the pastry part, so he could be of more value to his organization. He committed to another year with us and did a sensational job. Years later he found his dream job as Executive Pastry Chef of a major San Francisco Hotel. When I bumped into him at a local restaurant show he acknowledged that the time that I had outlined and prepared him for being a pastry chef by training him at complimentary positions in my restaurant had really paid off for him and was the determining factor in his being hired as the head of their pastry department of that five star hotel.

#6 Organize a Can Drive

When you give to a worthy cause and your attention is off of you and directed to helping someone else, you can't help but to be thankful and be of appreciation for all that you have in your life. Gather your group together and collectively, pick a charitable organization that you're going to help. Set a goal to deliver a set amount of canned and packaged food by a certain date. Maybe set-up the can drive over a couple of weeks and make requests of people outside of your office or organization to contribute to the cause as well so they can feel a part of your quest. Get a clear view of who you are helping so it becomes personalized and more meaningful. At the completion of the can drive, make it a group delivery. Have everyone involved in organizing and collecting get the full effect by being part of the final delivery. Doing these type of charitable drives become addicting to making you feel good and in contribution as a team and that will continually bring you together naturally.

#7 Puzzle Master Mind

Recess had a real function when going to elementary school. It was meant to switch our focus and refresh our mindset so we go into class ready to absorb new information. Well we are all just oversized version of kids and we still need a break from the monotony of our daily function in order to become refresh and renewed.

Pull out a brain teaser or thinking outside the box type game that everyone can play. One that I did with a group was simple and consisted with asking the question, "how many squares do you see?"

It was a picture of 16 squares, or four by four squares stuck to each one. It was facilities by one person who kept asking, "Do you see any more squares?" challenging the group to keep on looking, keep on focusing and determining where the next square is.

What made it fun was that it was not so challenging that it would be easy to give up and it was done with the whole team or what we called it, our master mind. Exercises like these bring the group conscious together in a natural way much like how we must have done during prehistoric

times that allowed us to survive as a species.

I especially like doing these type of exercises before tackling some real business issues that affect our operation. Two things happen during this exercise. The first thing is that everyone learns to listen and trust the other members contribution. It become less about the “me” and more about the “we”. Next, the exercise stretches the mind and increases neuroplasticity for the whole group making the actual problem solving following the exercise more effective.

You can go onto Amazon search for brain teasers and team building ice breakers to keep challenging your group and keep the exercises fresh.