

Facilitator Tip: 52 Card Pick Up

Recently someone asked about my current favorite Icebreaker activity. I have so many 'favorites' that it is hard to pick just one! One of my favorite icebreakers that has some 'meat' to it has to be 52 Card Pick Up. Now, this is not the same game your older sibling played with you when you were a kid. You know the one, where your older brother says, "Hey, you wanna play a game?" (and being the game-lovin' type you enthusiastically say, 'YES!', and then he throws the cards in your face and says... '52 card pick up'...) (Not an awesome game.) The re-designed version of 52 Card Pick Up is designed to surface behaviors that the group experiences on a regular basis in a fun way.

Before I get into the why it's my favorite, here's the basic rules for the game:

52 Card Pick Up

You need a deck of 'cards' with specific 'jobs' written on them. A Word doc in table format printed on regular paper works quite well though we created a specialized deck of cards called Stack the Deck Cards. You need one deck of cards for every 20 players or with larger groups simply recycle the cards as jobs are accomplished. Place all 52 cards with the playing card side face up on the floor or table top. You will need lots of space for participants to move around and perform various tasks. Alternatively hold the cards in your hands and after framing (see below) toss them in the air. Here's how I set the game up:

"The next game we are going to play is called 52 Card Pick Up. (wait for the groan...) How many of you remember this game as a kid? Not such a fun game, right? Well I'm happy to report that the rules have changed for that age-old game. Here are the new rules for 52 Card Pick Up. You can see that there is a full deck of cards scattered about here on the floor (or which I will toss in the air). On one side of these cards there is a 'job' that you have to accomplish. In a minute when we start the game, each person will pick up a card and read the job that needs to be completed. It may require your getting help from one or more other people. As soon as you have finished your job to the best of your ability and efficiently within the confines of this room, place the card in a basket and you may then pick up another card. The game is over when all 52 jobs in the deck have been completed. Now, because I'm a big believer in Challenge By Choice, if you pick up a job and it pushes you a little too far outside of your comfort zone, you may put that job back down. There is no shame in that – though challenging oneself is also an objective. That said, recognize that someone else will have to complete that job because the name of the game is 52 Card Pick Up, not 51 Card Pick Up. Are there any questions? (pause) Let's begin!"

Once you begin the game and participants start performing their first few jobs, immediate chaos and insanity ensue.

So imagine how if 5 different small groups are doing 5 different jobs all at the same time, it will be chaotic (not to mention pretty darn funny!), and there are 52 different jobs! Some of the jobs themselves will definitely conflict with one another, which makes for conflicting needs of our participants. For example, if you have the card ' Find out who is willing to join in a dance move from your cultural tradition that you lead.' ...and one someone else has the card, 'Teach someone how to make a favorite appetizer from a cultural tradition of your choosing', there may be a conflict of interest. Some participants find themselves having to put their own job on hold in order to help another person which, after all, is the whole point. (can you relate?)

Or let's say you were so busy 'standing really close to someone until they tell you to go away' that you didn't even notice the person 'shaking for 60 seconds.' Were you so busy doing your job that you completely missed the other things that were going on? What if this person was having an epileptic seizure only 5 feet away from you and you were too busy to notice?

The reason why this activity is one of my favorites, is that you can pick and choose the behaviors you want to debrief after the activity is over. As soon as a group is finished, I ask them to sit on the floor (or in chairs) and ask them to go around the circle and tell the group about some of the activities they had to do during the game. These are silly in nature, but there are many debriefing points you can relate to real life behaviors and community values. Many participants will be surprised at all of the things that happened that they did not even see!

From a debriefing point of view, the process of letting them share what their jobs were takes care of the first phase of debriefing, the 'What Happened' phase. Once the group has had a chance to giggle and review what some of their jobs were, that's when I step in and start asking questions about 'Why this is important and, How does this relate back to the real world?' Depending on the specific outcomes and needs of the group, this is where I talk about specific behaviors that came up in the different jobs they performed, and how they relate to this specific group.

- How is this activity like everyday life?
- How are the behaviors demonstrated in this activity like interacting in a group setting?
- Each behavior demonstrated in this activity could relate to a behavior in the real world. Which ones do you think pop up in your day to day?
- How many of you were surprised to hear some of the jobs that were done? Why do you think you missed them?
- Do you ever have to put your own needs on hold in order to help out another person? Give an example.

In this game, there were a lot of quirky behaviors that came up. As humans, we all have our little quirks. We don't always get to choose who we have on our teams or who is in our group. Effective teams figure out how to work with the quirk! They also address behaviors that come up that might negatively affect the group.

After I have finished with a few initial questions, I then let the group do a small group debrief. Now that they have new information to process, and realize that this is so much more than a silly icebreaker game, it's good to give them a little time to process how this relates back to the real world. After about 5 minutes of small group process, I then open it back up and ask them to explain different ways they see this relating back to the real world.

So you can see why it's one of my favorites! There is so much good meat to this activity, which also happens to be really fun to participate in as well. Give it a try and let me know how you like it!