Team Building Activities for Work

Twelve activities chosen by the trust behavior they build, nine five-minute prompts, the debrief script and a six-week check.

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The full activity table

Activity	Group size	Time	What it makes visible	12 Cs
Written First Pass	3 to 20	10 min	Whether people hold a position after the senior voice speaks	Collaboration
Bad News Drill	4 to 12	20 min	How long bad news sits before it travels	Communication
Assumption Audit	6 to 20	25 min	Expectations that were assumed, never stated	Clarify
Pre-Mortem	4 to 15	45 min	Risks the room already sees and has not raised	Courage
Commitment Round	4 to 12	20 min	Whether commitments land, slip, or quietly die	Commitment
Standard Walk	3 to 15	20 min	Two people meaning different things by done	Competence
Handoff Map	4 to 10	40 min	Handoffs the sender calls clean and the receiver does not	Closeout
Consistency Check	4 to 15	15 min	Whether behavior survives a bad week	Consistency
Day in the Life Swap	4 to 20	40 min	What each function has misread about the other	Connection
Dependency Round	6 to 20	40 min	Needs that have never been said out loud	Clarify
Load Round	4 to 10	15 min	Who is carrying more than the group knows	Caring
Feedback Exchange	4 to 8	40 min	Whether a request can be made to someone's face	Coaching

Eleven of the twelve Cs appear in that table. The missing one is Character, and no activity produces it. Character is whether your behavior in the room matches your behavior outside it, which cannot be demonstrated inside an exercise. The team scores you on that in the four weeks afterwards, by whether the commitments you made survived a bad quarter.

Activities that build communication

These four target the information problem: what people know, when they say it, and who they say it to.

The Written First Pass

Before the group discusses a contested item, everyone writes their position for ninety seconds. Then they read out, in reverse order of seniority. Ten minutes, works from three people to twenty. Targets Collaboration, because it invites dissent before a decision instead of tolerating it after one. Watch for whether anybody's spoken position drifts toward the most senior written one once it has been read. Debrief question: whose written position was furthest from what you expected, and why did you expect otherwise?

The Bad News Drill

Each person names one thing going wrong in their area that the group does not know about yet. You go first, with a real one that costs you something. Twenty minutes, four to twelve people. Targets Communication, the behavior of moving information early and in both directions, including the part nobody enjoys sharing. Watch the second speaker. They will either match your level of candor or retreat one level, and whichever they do sets the ceiling for everyone after them. Debrief question: how long had you been sitting on that?

The Assumption Audit

Put people in pairs. Each writes what they believe their partner's single biggest priority is this month, then they compare against the real answer. Twenty-five minutes, six to twenty people. Targets Clarify. Watch for how many pairs miss, and for whether the person who guessed wrong asks a follow-up question or defends the guess. Debrief question: what has it cost us that you were working from that assumption?

The Pre-Mortem

Take a live project. Tell the group it failed badly six months from now, give everyone four silent minutes to write the cause, then read them aloud in turn with no discussion until the last one is read. Forty-five minutes, four to fifteen people. Targets Courage, the behavior of naming the risk nobody wants to name. Watch for whether any cause names a person in the room, including you. Debrief question: which of these did you already believe before today, and who had you told?

Activities that build follow-through and accountability

These four target the gap between what gets said in the room and what happens after it.

The Commitment Round

Each person names one thing they committed to in the last two weeks and reports whether it landed on time, landed late, or never happened. One sentence each, no explanations until everyone has gone. Twenty minutes, four to twelve people. Targets Commitment. Watch for the person who says "basically done" more than once, and for whether anyone volunteers a miss the group did not know about. Debrief question: which of these did the rest of us not know about until just now?

The Standard Walk

Pick one deliverable due this week. Everyone writes, in one sentence, what finished looks like for it. Then compare the sentences side by side. Twenty minutes, three to fifteen people. Targets Competence, because reliance breaks when two people mean different things by done and neither one is wrong. Watch the spread between the highest bar and the lowest, and whether the person actually doing the work holds the lowest one. Debrief question: whose definition are we shipping against, and when did we agree that?

The Handoff Map

On a whiteboard, draw every point in one current project where work passes from one person to another. Each handoff gets rated green, amber or red twice, once by the sender and once by the receiver, independently. Forty minutes, four to ten people. Targets Closeout. Watch for handoffs the sender marked green and the receiver marked red. There are always more than the room expects. Debrief question: pick one red handoff, what would have made it green, and who owns that?

The Consistency Check

Each person commits to one behavior they will hold constant for six weeks regardless of workload, stated specifically enough to be checked. "I answer every decision request within one working day" qualifies. "I will communicate better" does not. Written on the board, photographed, reviewed at week six. Fifteen minutes, four to fifteen people. Targets

Consistency. Watch for anyone who picks something that costs them nothing. Debrief question: which week is this going to break, and what happens then?

Activities that build connection across functions

These four are for groups that work across a boundary: engineering and sales, clinical and finance, field and head office.

The Day in the Life Swap

Each person sits in on one other function's standing meeting, as an observer, for thirty minutes. Then the group reconvenes and each reports one thing they had misread about that function. Thirty minutes plus a ten-minute report-back, four to twenty people. Targets Connection. Watch for whoever reports that they learned nothing, which usually means they spent the meeting on email. Debrief question: what will you stop asking that team for now that you have seen their week?

The Dependency Round

Each function states out loud the one thing it needs from each other function to hit the quarter. Each receiving function answers with yes, no, or by when. Nothing else. Forty minutes, six to twenty people. Targets Clarify, at the boundary where it fails most. Watch for the requests that get met with a long explanation instead of one of the three permitted answers. Debrief question: which of these requests was the first time you heard it said out loud?

The Load Round

One sentence each on the thing taking the most out of them at work this month. No advice, no fixing, no follow-up questions until everyone has spoken. Fifteen minutes, four to ten people. Targets Caring, which the 12 Cs define as concern visible in decisions rather than in words. Watch for the person who reports a light month every time, and for your own urge to solve it in the room. Debrief question: what did you hear that you did not know, and what changes this week because of it?

The Feedback Exchange

Each person prepares two sentences for one named colleague in another function: one specific thing that person does that makes their work easier, and one specific request. Delivered out loud, one pair at a time. Forty minutes, four to eight people, and never the first session you run with a group. Targets Coaching. Watch for requests that dissolve into compliments halfway through, and for anyone who says thank you and then starts arguing. Debrief question: what request did you almost not make, and what stopped you?

Five-minute team building activities for a weekly meeting

The twelve activities above need a dedicated session. These nine fit inside an ordinary weekly meeting: one structured question asked in a fixed order, one sentence per person, and no discussion until the round finishes.

Read each prompt aloud as written. The wording is doing work. Each one targets a specific behavior from the 12 Cs of Trust in the TrustFlow™ framework.

1. The Commitment Check. "One thing you said you would finish since we last met. Did it land, slip, or die?" Targets Commitment. Watch for the person who reports "basically done" two weeks running, and for anyone who volunteers a miss nobody had noticed.

2. The One Ask. "Name one thing you need from someone in this room this week to hit your date." Targets Clarify. Watch the person who gets named. A yes, a no, or a date is a good answer. A paragraph is not.

3. The Written First Pass. "Before we discuss this, take ninety seconds and write your position. We will read them out in reverse order of seniority." Targets Collaboration, because it invites the disagreement before the decision rather than after it. Watch for a spoken position quietly drifting once the most senior one has been read.

4. The Unsaid. "What is the thing about this project we are all avoiding saying out loud?" You answer first, with a real one. Targets Courage. Watch the second answer, which is calibrated against yours and sets the level for everyone after.

5. The Handoff Check. "Who is waiting on you right now, and do they know when they will get it?" Targets Closeout. Watch for how many people can name the person but not the date. That number is usually higher than the room expects.

6. The Credit Round. "Name one person outside this room whose work made your week easier, and say exactly what they did." Someone sends those messages before the meeting ends. Targets Connection. Watch for vague credit aimed at a whole team, which costs nothing and lands nowhere.

7. The Correction. "One thing I got wrong since we last met." You go first, thirty seconds each. Targets Character, or as close as a five-minute exercise gets to it, since Character is mostly proven outside the room. Watch for whether anyone's correction involves a person sitting in the meeting.

8. The Definition Check. "In one sentence, what does done look like for Friday's deliverable?" Everyone writes, then you read them side by side. Targets Competence. Watch the spread between the highest bar and the lowest, and who is holding which.

9. The Skip Check. "What decision got made this week that you found out about afterwards?" Targets Communication. Watch for the person who says "nothing" while looking at someone else.

What to do when the room goes silent

It will go silent, usually around week two. The recovery move is fixed, and it is the same one every time.

Wait through the first silence. It runs about twenty seconds and feels considerably longer than that. Then name it instead of rephrasing the question: "nobody wants to go first, so I will." Answer it yourself with something that costs you a little. Then go round in a fixed order rather than reopening the floor, because an open floor asks people to volunteer twice.

Amy Edmondson's 1999 paper in *Administrative Science Quarterly* explains why the first speaker matters so much. She defined psychological safety as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, and a belief like that gets updated by watching what happens to whoever goes first. In a five-minute round, that update happens in front of everyone within about ninety seconds.

The debrief script that turns an activity into a change

Run these five questions in this order. Ten minutes for a short activity, twenty for a long one.

- **First.** What happened? Facts only, no interpretation yet. This sounds pointless and it is not: the group usually disagrees about the facts, and that disagreement is the first finding.
- **Second.** What surprised you?
- **Third.** Where else have you seen that same pattern in the last month, outside this room?
- **Fourth.** What does it cost us when that happens? Push for a real unit: a week, a rework cycle, a customer call.
- **Fifth.** What is one thing you will do differently before Friday, and who will notice?

The third question is the one that does the work. Without it, the group treats the exercise as a special case that happened inside a workshop. The fifth is the one people skip, and skipping it is why most sessions evaporate.

When nobody answers, and at some point nobody will, the recovery move is fixed. Wait through the first silence, which runs about twenty seconds and feels longer. Then name it instead of rephrasing the question: "nobody wants to go first, so I will." Answer it yourself with something that costs you. Then go around in a fixed order rather than reopening the floor, because an open floor asks people to volunteer twice.

Never fill silence by restating the question in easier words. That teaches the group that waiting long enough gets them a softer version, and they will wait every time after that.

How to measure whether it held

Baseline before, run the activity, re-score at six weeks. Skipping the first step is the most common mistake and the only one you cannot correct later.

Score the team against the 12 Cs before the session. The Team TrustFlow Index rolls twelve individual dimension scores into a single team number between 1.00 and 5.00, and sorts the result into one of three bands: Constrained Trust, Developing Trust, or Sustained TrustFlow. Six weeks later, score it again with the same people answering the same instrument. How to Measure Trust covers the mechanics of running it properly.

A real move looks narrow and specific. A 0.4 improvement on Closeout after six weeks of handoff work is a result. A 0.1 rise across all twelve dimensions is usually mood, or the team being generous because they enjoyed the day. Compare the four quadrants rather than the average, because a team with strong Essentials and weak Results reads as healthy right up to the deadline that exposes it.

Pair the number with what you can observe. Commitments from the session appear in the next status meeting unprompted. A problem gets raised in the meeting instead of in a side message afterwards. A red handoff gets fixed by the two people involved rather than escalated to you. Those, plus a second score at week six, tell you more than any feedback form collected on the way out of the room.

Score your team on the 12 Cs before and six weeks after: dreamsmartbehavioralsolutions.com/trust-score