

# Team Building Exercises



Positive, high performing teams don't happen by accident. They are built, cultivated and developed through great communication, shared experiences, positive interactions, common challenges, and vulnerable story telling that connect people at a deeper level. Having worked with many business and sports teams I've witnessed firsthand what many great leaders do to build their teams and want to share with you a few of my favorites.

**1. Share a Defining Moment** – When a leader and each team member share a defining moment in their life you learn things you never knew before. Immediately you know your team members a whole lot better and feel more connected to them. When doing this exercise I like to have each person in the room simply stand up and share a defining moment in their life. It's amazing how simple and powerful this exercise is.

**2. Hero, Highlight, Hardship** - I learned this one from Cori Close, the UCLA women's basketball coach, who told me this idea when I spoke to her team a few weeks ago. With this exercise each person talks about one of their heroes and why they are their hero. Then they share a positive highlight as well as a hardship from their past. You learn a lot about your team members when you know their heroes, their past highlights and challenging moments. Note: for this to work it must be understood that what is said in the room, stays in the room. You must create a safe place (one leader I worked with called the meeting room "the safe place" where people feel comfortable being honest and vulnerable.

**3. Get on the Bus Together** – A lot of leaders have their teams read [\*The Energy Bus\*](#) to create unity and a common dialogue but Rhonda Revelle, the University of Nebraska Softball coach took it one step further. She paired up her team and had each pair present to the rest of the team 1 of the 10 rules of *The Energy Bus* in a fun and creative way. Some made a video, others sang a song, some gave a speech, some made a painting, etc.. Rhonda told me the team took on a whole new life and energy after these teammates brought the rules to life for each other. She said this energy propelled them to the College World Series that year.

**4. Fuel up the Tanks** – The Brown University Women’s Lacrosse team gave each player a manila envelope with a picture of a bus and their name on it. The envelopes represented their energy bus tanks and were placed on a table in the locker-room. Players were also given index cards where they could write something positive about a teammate and place the card (positive fuel) in their teammates manila envelope (energy bus tank). After practices and games players were encouraged to write positive comments and fill their teammate’s energy bus tanks with positive energy. The exercise created more positive interactions and generated appreciation and encouragement that fueled the team throughout the year.

**5. If You Really Knew Me.** If you really knew me you would know \_\_\_\_\_. I learned this exercise from my friend and author Mike Robbins and it is one of the most vulnerable but powerful exercises a team could do. I recently took a leadership team through this exercise and at first they shared very shallow comments like “you would know that I’m very generous and wonderful.” But after challenging them to go deeper and sharing something vulnerable about myself they started sharing meaningful stories and feelings that connected the team in a deep and powerful way.