

Family Meeting Icebreakers

"Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him" - Virginia Satir, People Making

You are planning the family meeting and getting down to the specifics of what you will say. What direction is the meeting going to take? How will you get the meeting started? Will there be a speech or a sermon? Each participant is probably a little bit pensive as to what might happen during the meeting. Although, hopefully everyone has been briefed beforehand and is ready.

So, what are you going to do to get the family members engaged? How are you going to get the family members to bond and build some trust? Will you be able to keep the meeting on track? Clearly, to some degree one goal of holding the family meeting is to understand and build each person's relationship with money, and that for the family overall. However, we believe that starting out with money orientated questions will trigger a lot of positive and negative emotions which will derail the meeting.

A powerful way to connect the family members is to start the meeting with some "ice-breaker" questions. These are relatively light opening questions that are not necessarily directed at the specific topics which may get discussed during the meeting. However, they may nevertheless make launching into the discussion easier. Further, these questions can be responded to by any family member regardless of their age. So, asking these questions will create involvement which puts everyone on a more even platform for the meeting.

Very often, these questions can spark some very insightful discussion in their own right which will be very beneficial in the meeting later on. The great thing is that someone is bound to share a personal story which will be very revealing and lead to improved understanding of each other.

The ice-breaker questions that you choose will depend somewhat on the family members and the circumstances of the family meeting. In our book "Family DNA - Powerful Family Questions" we have included a list of ice-breaker questions that we know work. For example, some of these questions include:

1. What is a great achievement for you this year?

2. What is the most adventurous thing you have ever done?
3. What is one place you would like to travel to that you have not been to yet?
4. Who is one person that you would like to meet that you have not yet?
5. What do you think makes people successful?

Also, an “icebreaker” exercise you may like to consider is to get each family member to share their dreams (not goals). You would be amazed what will come out during this exercise that you did not know. The bonds that get built are very deep and powerful. This will particularly be the case if you can get the family to start talking about how some of these dreams will get realized and how they can help each other. There will even likely be some dreams which will be family related. To prepare the family for this exercise, I would encourage everyone to read a book called “The Dream Manager” by Matthew Kelly. The book is easy to read and will guide you to flush out what you want for your life and to express it.

Guidelines for Family Meeting Ice-Breaker Questions

Whether you are a family member, advisor, or independent facilitator, in preparing yourself to ask ice-breaker questions at a family meeting, consider the following guidelines:

1. Work through what the overall agenda for the meeting will be based on the goals and objectives.
2. Reflect on how well you believe the family is going to naturally open up and talk freely with each other.
3. Observe what the challenges may be for each of the family members in communicating within the family.
4. Based on the above steps, consider how you want the family to “break the ice”. Ensure the ice-breaker questions are positive, inclusive, will encourage discussion, and are not directly money related. Choose some topics or themes which everyone can relate to.
5. If you assess there is going to be discomfort in the meeting then the ice-breaker questions need to be lighter, more gentle, and easy to respond to.
6. Also, consider an “ice-breaker exercise” to get people connected.
7. Remember, this is a relationship building part of the meeting. So, keep it fun and allow some humor when asking questions - laughter will build trust.

If you would like more assistance with family meetings and understanding family dynamics, please contact us at wealthmentoring@financialdna.com

For more insight into this topic, please refer to Hugh Massie's book "[Family DNA - Powerful Questions for Families](#)".

Other Recommended Reading

"The Dream Manager" by Matthew Kelly

Visit the DNA Behavior for Families Website:

<http://www.dnabehavior.com/families>