

## Before You Begin...

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Balloons can be a lot of fun. It's amazing how such a simple material can add that extra ounce of fun to a teambuilding session. Before you begin, it's important to consider a few things in order to make your session successful, efficient, clean, fun, and safe for all involved.

- **Latex Allergies.** While fun for many, balloons can be a potentially dangerous medium for some of your participants. Be sure to check to see if any serious latex allergies exist. I've worked with some participants who are sensitive to a latex balloon even being present in a room and others who simply can't touch a balloon. Keep in mind that while you may be able to still do the activities, you might have a participant who won't be able to participate and might be isolated from the group (is that what we really want?). Latex free balloons are available, but do cost more.
- **Space (Indoors/Outdoors)** Outdoors is wonderful for water balloon activities, but can be VERY difficult for other activities especially when wind is stronger. Indoor spaces remove the wind problem, but lower ceilings, fans, desks, or chairs can create some obstacles and potential injuries as well. Survey the space and make sure the activities are possible & safe.
- **Water Balloons.** A few of these activities recommend a variation with a water balloon filled with water (or shaving cream). These activities can bring a lot of smiles during a summer retreat. Just be sure to let your participants know well in advance if they might get wet and/or messy so that they pack/wear appropriate clothing, can put aside electronic gadgets, and feel comfortable at the event.
- **Sequencing.** Balloons do take up a lot of space and can become a distraction. Consider doing some of these activities in a specific sequence as some activities include inflating a balloon, some need an existing balloon, and some pop a balloon. To help design your sequence, the following activities are marked with this key:
  - I=Inflation
  - E=Existing
  - D=Destroy
  - No Marking= Nothing in particular, could be 2-3 of these, go either way, and/or may not leave you with an ideal balloon to use again.
- **Clean-Up.** Have several pairs of scissors on hand and/or skewers. Instruct participants on proper way to dispose of balloons—pinch end, cut large hole, hold onto balloon until deflated. This can reduce a lot of noise and mess. Consider the above sequencing and maybe an activity can pop the balloons for you.
- **Health.** Really important that people have their own balloons and that the balloons are “fresh” (they do eventually age out). Some activities require fresh balloons. Just make sure you have a lot of balloons on hand.
- **Cost.** It's nice to have different color balloons grouped together for various activities. While you can purchase balloons pre-sorted, a mixed bag can often be significantly cheaper and only takes a moment to sort balloons into individual ziplock bags.

## Lesson Plan Activities

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### Balloon Brainstorm [5-15 min]

**Supplies:** 1 balloon for each participant, pad of small paper (or post it notes), pencil or pen

**Topic/Message:** Serving Self or Serving Group, Working Together

**Directions:**

- Have each participant write down an idea for an upcoming event/project.
- Fold up idea and place inside balloon (even better—make ALL balloons the same color)
- Instruct group to attempt to keep balloons up in the air through taps (no one can hold a balloon)
- If a balloon hits the ground it is out.
- Add in different rules: No one can hit the same balloon more than once in a row, people can't move feet, can't hit own ballon, etc
- Do a final round with only 1-3 balloons in the middle
- Utilize the **5 QUESTIONS** for discussion &/or focus on support of individual ideas and/or the best ideas for the group? The need to let some ideas fall into the background after their time has past?

### Balloon Skewer [5-10 min]

**Supplies:** Balloon (~9", Bamboo Skewer ~10", Cooking Oil, Marker

**Topic/Message:** Stress, The "Impossible"

**Directions:**

- There are a variety of sites with specific instructions on the best way to do this. The best? Steve Spangler Science ([www.stevespanglerscience.com/lab/experiments/skewer-through-balloon](http://www.stevespanglerscience.com/lab/experiments/skewer-through-balloon))
- Basic outline: Inflate balloon almost all the way and let a third of the air out. Use oil on bamboo skewer. Gradually put skewer through "thicker" parts of balloon (often where the knot is & the top of the balloon) in a twisting manner (read more detailed instructions at Steve Spangler Science)
- The balloon may pop so be prepared to make a mistake.
- Steve Spangler explains all of the science behind this, so I really recommend you visit the site.
- Message: The skewer goes through the least "stress" parts of the balloon. How can we reduce stress in our lives so that we too can achieve "the impossible?"

### Deflating Deprecation [5-10 min]

**Supplies:** 2 balloons

**Topic/Message:** Kindness, Impact

**Directions:**

- Say a serious of common negative comments heard around the organization (could either be about individuals or the organization as a whole)
- Blow up the balloon after each negative comment until it almost pops
- Discuss the breaking points that we have as individuals and organizations
- Deflate balloon and then take out a balloon that has yet to be inflated.
- Discuss the mark that we leave on people

## Balloon “Beauty?” [5-10 min] [I]

**Supplies:** 1 Balloon per person. Cameras (phone camera is fine)

**Topic/Message:** Necessary Tasks, The Process vs Product

**Directions:**

- Have participants get into partnerships or small groups
- Have half of the participants blow up their balloons while their partners take pictures of them
- Switch roles and repeat
- Partners share pictures
- “Does anyone actually look cool? No? No one looks good blowing up a balloon.”
- Discuss the stages of DOING that might not seem cool within the moment but are a necessary part of the process to achieve a finish product/event/outcome.

## Balloon Frantic [5-10 min] [E]

**Supplies:** 20 Inflated Balloons (plus a few backups just in case)

**Topic/Message:** Energizer, Helping Others or Self, Initiative

**Directions:**

- Ask for 10 volunteers. Hand each a balloon
- Say This: “You may not hit the same balloon more than once in a row. If the balloon hits the floor it is out of play. You have 30 seconds. GO!”
- After 30 seconds see how many balloons are still successfully in the air. Check on the letter grade (i.e 50%= F, 70%=C)
- Say This: “Would each of you now hand your balloon to someone new. You may choose who you hand it to.”
- Remind the group of the general rules, but let them know that workload is increasing, and that you’ll be asked to do more. Once play begins add in 5 balloons.
- After 30 seconds see how many balloons are still successfully in the air. Check on the letter grade (i.e 50%= F, 70%=C)
- Say This: Would each of you now hand your balloon to someone new. You may chose who you hand it to.”
- Remind the group of the general rules, but let them know that workload is increasing, and that you’ll be asked to do more. Also let them know that each balloon represents an important need in the organization/community. Once play begins add in 5 more balloons.
- After 30 seconds see how many balloons are still successfully in the air. Check on the letter grade (i.e 50%= F, 70%=C)
- Depending on how the group participates, highlight the fact that you never told the previous volunteers to sit down, and you also never permitted others from stepping up and helping. If others did STEP UP and help or not sit down, highlight this and the fact that tonight will be a lot about us not sitting down, but stepping up to lead.

## Inflating Effort [5-10 min]

**Supplies:** 1 Lightly Colored Balloon (White, Yellow, Pink), Thick Marker

**Topic/Message:** Planning, Preparation, Initiative, Effort

**Directions:**

- Blow up Balloon and twist (do not tie) end.
- Ask group to brainstorm activities/outcomes they hope to achieve during time together.
- Write brainstormed ideas on balloon.
- When complete, deflate balloon. All text normally remains.
- Discuss difficulty in trying to write those same ideas on a deflated balloon. “In order to accomplish this we need to spend some effort and energy planning and preparing so that each of these can be a success.”

## Balloon Animals [5-25 min]

**Supplies:** Longer thin balloons, Balloon Handpump (optional), Balloon Animal Instructions (optional)

**Topic/Message:** Planning, Strategy, Process

**Directions:**

- Learn how to make balloon animal(s). There are a number of books, step by step online pictures, online videos, etc. Pick a slightly easier design that you can eventually make without referencing instructions (actually totally possible after an investment of 15-30 minutes of your time).
- Make balloon animal(s) in front of your group.
- Discuss the instructions/methods that allowed you to do that efficiently and effectively.
- Discuss the strategies/process your organization uses for success.
- *Variation: Print up/photo copy several sets of instructions and have participants make their own balloon animals. Similar discussion points.*

## Group Activities

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### Moonball Challenge [5 min] [E]

**Supplies:** Balloon

**Topic/Message:** Communication, Overcoming Obstacle, Teamwork

**Directions:**

- **Challenge #1:** Keep the beach ball in the air with everyone hitting the ball once before anyone hits the ball twice. If the ball touches the ground, group must start over.
- **Challenge #2:** Go for the maximum number of hits without the ball hitting the ground in 2 minutes. Each time the ball hits the ground, the total number is reset.

### What Relay [5 min] [E]

**Supplies:** Balloons (1 per group), Square identifier (i.e. grocery bag, tape outline, plate, etc—4-5 per group)

**Topic/Message:** Communication, Overcoming Obstacle, Teamwork, Focus

**Directions:**

- *(this is similar to the old game Mastermind)*
- Divide larger group into smaller groups (6-10 participants is ideal)
- Each group has a series of four squares laid out in front of them and an object.
- The group must establish an order and follow that order in terms of who follows who.
- Each person can do one movement with the object: either run the object out and place it on a square, or pick up the object from a square and return it to the group.
- The first person will run out and place the object on a square. As monitor you let them know whether their placement is correct or incorrect. Either way, the second person in line runs out, picks up the object, and returns it to the group.
- If the group was correct, they continue into Round Two. However, if they were incorrect they must return to the beginning, and the third person in line will now place the object in another square.
- If at any point, the group is incorrect, they must begin again with Round One.
- Therefore, it is important that groups remember the proper squares from previous rounds and that you, as monitor, know which round your group is currently in. The first group to complete all five rounds error-free wins!
- Special Note: It's best to have one monitor per group as it is very difficult to keep track of two groups going at the same time.
- Variation: Add 1-3 additional balloons with specific colors and now the location AND color must be correct (if you do that, reduce square identifiers down to 3)
- Utilize the **5 QUESTIONS** for discussion (potential observations: Frustration, disengagement, communication, repeated mistakes, strategy, etc)

Example of potential locations rounds

Group	R4	R2	R1 R3	R5	Monitor
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## **Bloop** [10-15 min] [E]

**Supplies:** Balloons (1 per group of 6-10 participants)

**Topic/Message:** Teamwork, Communication

**Directions:**

- Divide into groups of 6-10 participants
- Groups should hold hands throughout entire activity
- The goal is to keep a balloon in the air using the following directions:
  - Heads only
  - Head and shoulders only
  - Hands or (heads and hands)
  - Knees and feet
- *Variation: Add in additional balloons*
- *Variation: Add in different color balloons and have group sort colors to specific parts of the circle (discussion could relate to committee work)*

**BIG QUESTION: Why do you serve others? (potentially highlight limiting factors/restraints as the activity progressed and ask next questions) Are we obligated to serve others if we are capable of it? If so, how have you fulfilled this obligation?**

## **Brack-WWHHF** [5-10 min]

**Supplies:** Balloons (at least one per participant, ideally color coded)

**Topic/Message:** Unexpected Obstacles, Unintended results, Achieving goals throughout the year

**Directions:**

- Divide large group into smaller groups (~4-10 per group is ideal)
- Create a starting line and a finish line (length of a basketball court is good).
- Each person is instructed to blow up his/her balloon, but NOT to tie it.
- Person at the front of the group releases his/her balloon. The spot where it lands is where the next person in line runs to and releases his/her balloon. This process continues until a balloon crosses the finish line.
- Potential Observations: Balloons that go backwards, “thrown” balloons that don’t go any further, balloons that basically land in the same place they were released, balloons that go far.

## **Balloon Trolleys** [5-10 min] [E]

**Supplies:** Balloons (at least one per participant, ideally color coded)

**Topic/Message:** Teambuilding

**Directions:**

- Divide large group into smaller groups (~4-10 per group is ideal)
- Create a starting line and a finish line (length of a volleyball/basketball court is good).
- Each participant blows up his/her own balloon, ties it, and places it in between him/her and the person standing in front of him/her.
- Once everyone is in position, everyone removes hands from balloons so that they are kept up in the air only due to proximity to the people in line.
- Group works together to advance to the finish line without dropping any balloon and without using hands. If a balloon is dropped group either returns to starting line (very difficult), or must stop and go back to the place where the balloons lost contact.
- Utilize the **5 QUESTIONS** for discussion

## **Inflation Expansion** [5-15 min] [E]

**Supplies:** Several inflated balloons different colors & sizes, super large tshirt (optional)

**Topic/Message:** Teamwork, Strategy, Creativity, Perceived Limits

**Directions:**

- Divide larger group into smaller groups (~4-10 is ideal)
- Groups select one group member to be representative.
- Group has set amount of time to get group member to hold/carry as many balloons as is they possibly can.
- Variation
  - Group member has to then complete obstacle course
  - All group members must carry large amount of balloons in a relay race, removing all balloons and having the next participant hold the batch.

## **Balloon Blitz** [5-15 min] [E]

**Supplies:** Several balloons different colors (smaller the better), Large Bins/Garbage Cans/Boxes, straws (optional)

**Topic/Message:** Teamwork, Strategy, Initiative

**Directions:**

- Divide Larger Group up into smaller 2-5 smaller groups in a large open space (gym is perfect for this)
- Set up bins on opposite sides of the room
- Method #1: Groups try to score their color balloon in as many bins of the opposing groups (cannot guard own bin)
- Method #2: Groups try to place as many balloons into their own bin (different colors have different point values)
- Variations
  - *Balloons can only be tapped*
  - *Balloons can only be blown with straws*
- Discussion can focus on strategies & setbacks in activity and during the year in organization

## **Curling** [10-20 min] [E]

**Supplies:** Several balloons different colors (smaller the better), straws (optional), timer, painter tape

**Topic/Message:** Teamwork, Strategy, Initiative, Fun

**Directions:**

- Secure a long open space (basketball court works well) & define starting point and end goal
- Divide larger group into smaller groups or have representatives (3-4 per group is probably ideal for this activity)
- Set up a goal zone either like a curling target OR like shuffle board
- Determine how many rounds you'd like to have (4-7 works well)
- Have a limited amount of time (will vary due to length of space), for group to attempt to get balloon into goal area using only their breath (straws is ideal). Play around to find the appropriate length of time for your space that makes it challenging, but doesn't force your participants to hyperventilate. (~20-45 seconds)
- Once a group scores, place a tape to mark location (you could attempt to keep balloons in the goal area, but there will likely be arguments as to whether or not another group bumped/or blew a balloon already in position)
- Go back and forth and tally the score.
- Discussion: This is more of an amusing/fun activity, but make observations as it's likely it can be more difficult than individuals anticipated and/or may be surprised by the powerful/weak impact of breath. If that happens consider discussing the surprising effect of our actions at times.

## Team Juggling (with Consequence) [5-10 min] [E]

**Supplies:** 1-4 water balloons

**Topic/Message:** Teambuilding, Communication, Focus

**Directions:**

- Group should be about 8-12 people
- Stand in circle and number everyone off
- Have circle mix up, but not stand next to number that goes immediately before or after own number
- Say name and number and check to make sure everyone is mixed up
- Say name and number again but pay attention to the name of the person whose number comes after (last person says the name of the person who was #1)
- Say just the name of the person who comes after your number (no need to say number again). Repeat.
- Introduce single water balloon. Explain the goal is not to drop the water balloon. Say the name of the person and gently toss the water balloon underhand until the water balloon has traveled around the circle in the proper # order just via names.
- If successful, add in a second water balloon (either person #2 or #3 depending on total number of people in group). Repeat.
- If successful, add in a third water balloon (either person #4 or #6 depending on total number of people in group). Repeat
- If successful, add in a fourth water balloon (either person #6 or #9 depending on the total number of people in the group). Repeat.
- Special Note: Make sure each balloon makes a full rotation around the circle. In other words, you should physical throw the total number of balloons in the circle.
- Discussion: Why or why not were we successful? When else do we get distracted by “fun” and prevent ourselves from succeeding in our tasks?

## Balloon Tower Build [10-25 min]

**Supplies:** Timer, Balloons (ideally different sizes and shapes), tape & paperclips, measuring tape

**Topic/Message:** Resources, Teamwork, Planning/Preparation, Collaboration vs. Competition

**Directions:**

- Distribute equal number of building resources to each “group.” (~4-12 people in each group)
- Provide the basic instructions:
  - Using only the materials provided, groups will have XX minutes to build the tallest freestanding structure.
  - Whoever builds the tallest freestanding structure wins.
- Let groups build. Be vague in replies, repeating only the initial guidelines. Call out time remaining.
- Special note: Your time limit will develop based on your building materials. When deciding the time limit be sure to allow extra time which will tend to make groups over-think/over-tinker.
- When time expires, measure towers.
- Utilize the **5 QUESTIONS** for discussion

## **Water Balloon Toss** [10-25 min]

**Supplies:** Water Balloons, cones (optional)

**Topic/Message:** Teamwork, Planning/Preparation, Collaboration vs. Competition, Communication, Trust

**Directions:**

- Get into pairs
- Line up on different lines (potentially use cones as markers)
- After each successful round, take a step back/move back to next cone marker
- Goal is not to pop balloon
- Variations
  - Switch partners multiple times throughout. Change the instructions for **GROUP** success rather than just individual pair success
  - Add letters, symbols, etc to balloon and each person has letters, symbols, colors, etc on nametag/shirt. Each round tosses must go to correct person and that person will change. Throws will then vary in length and group must communicate in between rounds

## **But this isn't Paper** [varies] **[E]**

**Supplies:** Balloons, Markers, Helium (optional), String & Weights (optional)

**Topic/Message:** Varies

**Directions:**

- Take any activity where you might write or draw on paper and replace paper with a balloon. Just the medium of a balloon itself will add a fun element especially in life story, family crest, etc type of activities.
- Consider hanging finished balloons around room.
- Variation: Before doing activity fill up balloons with helium and attach them to string with weight. Length of sting should allow the balloon to float just around eye level. Creates a unique environment for participants to walk through.

## **RELAY!!!** [5-10 min] **[E]**

**Supplies:** Balloons (different sizes depending on relay)

**Topic/Message:** Teamwork, varies

**Directions:**

- Divide large group into smaller groups. Size limits depend on the nature of the relay.
- Substitute standard relay objects with balloons.
- Over and Under Relay with bigger balloon
- Orange Neck exchange relay with smaller water balloon (filled with air—or if you want to add a bigger element of risk: water/shaving cream)
- Egg/Spoon relay switched up with balloon and a straw (probably using air to balance it)
- Just get creative—look up relay races and see what substitutions you can do
- Replace any balloon with a water balloon and an element of risk/play is added to any race.



## **Balloon Fortress** [10-25 min]

**Supplies:** Balloons (different sizes), tape (optional), “attack objects” (tennis balls, paperclips, etc), egg (optional)

**Topic/Message:** Teamwork, Strategy

**Directions:**

- Divide larger group into smaller groups (max of 4-5 groups).
- Give each group equal set of building supplies and a set amount of time to build a fortress using those materials (~8-15 minutes depending on number of materials)
- Groups must then see how well their fortress survives an attack from attack materials (tennis balls, paperclips, darts)
- *Variation: Consider adding an egg that the fortress must protect.*
- Discussion: What are the elements/traditions/values our group strives to protect? What is attacking those things we hold dear? What can we do to protect them better?

## **Steal the Bacon** [10-25 min] **[E]**

**Supplies:** Balloons

**Topic/Message:** Response, Communication

**Directions:**

- Divide large group into smaller groups (2-4 groups is ideal)
- Assign each member of those smaller groups a specific call sign (can be #, letter, name, etc). Each group will have a representative for that specific call sign.
- In the center of the groups, place the “bacon”
- Call out the specific letter and see who can grab the bacon and get back to his/her group first.
- Variations:
  - Use water balloons
  - Fill bin with a variety of balloon colors and call out specific balloon color as well.
  - Assign different call signs for each group (ideally only 2 groups now). One group could have #'s the other letters. If 5A is called out, person 5 is trying to successfully get the balloon back to the group while person A is trying to pop the balloon first.
- Special Note: This is a much more physical activity and can result in injury. Not appropriate for all groups.

## **Balloon Fashion** [15-25 min]

**Supplies:** Balloons (Ideally different shapes and sizes), Tape

**Topic/Message:** Creativity, Fun, Teambuilding

**Directions:**

- Divide large group into smaller groups (~4-8 people in each group)
- Using materials provided groups must design the best “Outfit” in the time allotted.
- Consider proposing a specific theme for the outfits.\
- (similar to Newspaper Fashion show, but with balloons)
- After time expires have a runway to show off designs
- Special Note: Small balloons or long balloons for balloon animals work best for this activity.

## **Balloon Stomp** [5-15 min] [D]

**Supplies:** Balloons (1-2 per participant), Yarn, String

**Topic(s)/Theme(s):** Competition vs. Collaboration, Initiative

**Directions:**

- Each participant receives 1-2 balloons and ties balloon(s) to his/her ankle(s) with yarn/string. Note: A slightly longer piece is better.
- Instructions/Goals for the activity can vary depending on the desired theme for discussion
  - Pop as many balloons as you can: “Did you pop your own balloons?” (consider having other balloons from previous activity on the side as well) “Did you pop other balloons first?” “Do we focus on sacrificing others before making the tough decisions ourselves?”
  - Last person with balloon(s) remaining wins: “Did you hide/play defense or did you play offense and take initiative in popping other balloons?” “Do we go through our organization only focusing on our own self preservation or do we actively engage?”
  - Pop specific color balloons: “What are the ‘negative’ balloons we want to pop in our group?” or “Who are the people in our organization/campus that people seem to be attacking?”

## **Balloon Pop Relay** [5-15 min] [D]

**Supplies:** Balloons, Chairs (optional)

**Topic(s)/Theme(s):** Teambuilding, Fun

**Directions:**

- Select 6-7 representatives from each group (you could do the whole group, but if a group is larger than 10, the activity starts to feel long).
- Have one “leader” from that group stand in the middle back to back with other “leaders” (two groups is ideal for this, but more are possible if the groups are arranged like spokes in a wheel).
- Each representative other than the “leader” holds his/her own inflated balloon. Once the activity begins, he/she will run to the leaders, give them a bear hug, and attempt to pop his/her balloon, running back to the other representatives and giving the next person in line a high five allowing him/her to go.
- Alternative: Eliminate the need to hug and have the participant simply sit on his/her balloon on a chair.
- Variations: Leaders are not associated with a specific group, but rather a specific color. Balloons could be distributed in random color order and popping must be done with the specific color representative. Discussion could follow focusing on resources & contacts and how we utilize them.

## **Snowstorm** [5-15 min]

**Supplies:** Balloons (smaller size) & Markers or Balloons (normal size), Pencils & small paper

**Topic(s)/Theme(s):** Reflection, Summary, Fun

**Directions:**

- Participants write key learning concepts/ideas on outside of smaller balloon OR on a small piece of paper, fold that paper and place into larger balloon.
- A snowstorm erupts and/or a snowball fight.
- After a few moments, instruct specific participants to read the snowball they have in their hand by either reading the balloon or popping the balloon.
- Repeat a few rounds (if not placing paper inside balloon)
- *Variation: have participants write down more ideas on various pieces of paper/balloons increasing the number of snowballs.*
- *Variation #2: If you have a helium tank, write ideas on the outside of one balloon (see Inflating Effort activity), deflate, and then fill with helium OR write all ideas on one piece of paper and attach to one helium filled balloon. Discuss what it will take to have these ideas take flight.*

# Patrick Maurer

Patrick Maurer is an award-winning speaker and leader, transforming campuses, communities, and individuals of all ages. Maurer, a trained communicator and educator, is best known for his perfected approach of fusing compelling topics with real-life accounts, humor, and pop culture savviness. His unique style garnered him a Certified Speaking Professional ® designation by the National Speakers Association, an honor earned by only the top 10 percent of speakers worldwide. Patrick's proven track record of delivering value has impacted individuals across North America for over a decade, including top-tier organizations such as the National Association of Student Councils and the Sundance Film Festival. He continues to serve and lead, serving on the board of his local Kiwanis Club as well as his local Alumni Chapter.

For a more detailed biography about Patrick, please visit [www.pmaurer.com](http://www.pmaurer.com)



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## The 3 Elements

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Every good partnership/small group exchange in a teambuilding or large group mixer contains 3 Elements: Play (or activity), some Conversation (or sharing), and a Celebration. Far too often one of these elements is left out. While the length of each element can vary depending on the purpose of that interaction and/or how long a partnership/small group will be together, they should still always be present.

Special Note: Be purposeful with timing. Better to end each element earlier rather than to allow too much “extra” time to expire—especially during the Conversation portion.

## Play

This handout describes many activities in the next few pages you can use for this part. Just be sure to consider sequencing both in terms of set-up and in-terms the level or “risk” involved. Space is your next biggest consideration in terms of sound (and how many instructions an activity might include) and which types of activities might work best.

## Conversation

There are two main approaches for conversation time:

- 1) Structured time for each individual participant in a pairing/group
- 2) Total time that the group shares. It’s a good idea to do a few rounds of structured time to set an expectation of how conversation can go before switching to shared time.

Conversations can be basic: “favorite book? Movie? tv show?” “what did you do yesterday?”

Conversations can be more purposeful: “what is one thing you hope to change in your community this year?”

I like to do maybe one or two basic conversations to make the group feel comfortable and then switch to more purposeful questions often related to a theme addressed in a play activity.

I’m also a very big fan of using very specific time amounts 23 second, 34 seconds, etc. While I never actually time the conversational exchanges, a specific time often produces a better conversational exchange.

## Celebration

Celebrations are quick acknowledgements of partner(s).

Often times a simple handshake a funny phrase are the best:

*“Shake your partner’s hand and say ‘wow.’ Now shake your partner’s other hand and say ‘wow’ backwards.”*

*“Shake your partner’s hand and say ‘it was nice to meet you.’ Now shake your partner’s other hand and say, ‘of course it was, I’m awesome.’”*

Other times, especially in groups of 3+, a specific action celebration can work even better:

*“You’re ONEderful” (perfect when person #1 goes)*

*Round of Applause*

*Phone Call—it’s for you (pretend a phone rings, answer it, give a thumbs up to the person who shared)*

*Fireworks*

*Applause explosion*

*Slow clap*

Design your own celebrations. I have a few I use only for specific Activities and Conversations. These are a great chance to keep things moving and energetic

## Transitions

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It's important to have a plan ahead for transitioning between partners and groups. This is often the most time consuming piece of a large group teambuilding session and almost always has a few bumps in the road. Be sure to know what you'll do if your total number of participants isn't divisible by the size of groups you want (often I have bonus "leaders" who can step in or step out of an activity and know fellow leaders that they can swap out with so that everyone has a chance to participate)

## Mad Scramble

PROS: Easiest setup. Needed at least once in almost all teambuilding sessions with partnerships/groups

CONS: Takes the most amount of time in between partner rounds.

Simply instruct everyone to find a partner or get into a certain sized group. Just be sure to provide parameters: I often use "member of the opposite sex" & "someone you don't know well." You can provide additional ones—someone of a different grade, different organization, etc. Provide a specific time limit (some will wait until the last moment to get a partner). Keep an eye out for partnerships/groups with the wrong number of people; It is not uncommon to find two groups with three people will instructions specified only one partner. It can be helpful to have partnerships/groups sit down when they find their partner/group and/or have those without a partner/group go to a specific location to easily find others to complete partnership/group.

## Mad Scramble with Structure

PROS: Reduces number of people moving. Provides a bit more random choice.

CONS: Some people aren't moving and can get bored. Can potentially take a lot of time.

After getting into initial partnerships/groups, define which person(s) will stay and which will go. I find it often helps in the person not moving sits on the ground and raises hand in the air until partnership is formed. This helps identify those still looking for partners. Once everyone is in a partnership, then everyone can stand up if needed for the next Play activity. Once again, it's important to look out for the same potential flaws as in mad scramble (wrong sized groups/people who didn't follow instructions)

## Circle Rotation

PROS: Quickest transitions in between different set of partnerships

CONS: Not as easy to separate genders, groups of friends, etc. Also requires an exact even number. Only works with pairs and spaces large enough to form a big circle (basketball court can handle up to ~225 participants)

After getting into initial partnerships form an inner and an outer circle. Partners can play, converse, and celebrate in position. Have groups stand in a "permanent high five position" & one group will walk around in a clockwise direction the other in a counter-clockwise direction (a gym space with a volleyball court or basketball court really helps with size and space, but is not required). It's best to have a series of jokes or quick exchanges lined up. A round in between might sound something like this.

*"Move ahead one person and stop. Smile at this person and say 'hello'"*

*"And move ahead one person and stop. Smile at this person and say 'hey'"*

*"And move ahead one person and stop. Smile at this person and say 'hi'"*

*(a few more along those lines...)*

*"And move ahead one person and stop. Shake this person's hand and say, 'I'm smiling because you are my partner'"*

Keep an eye for people who aren't moving (as that will create wide gaps) or people who are moving before it's time as that might create a situation where someone doesn't have a partner.

## Partner Line Rotations

PROS: Works well for an especially large group. Quick transition between different set of partnerships

CONS: A more complicated rotation process than Circle Rotation. Not as easy to separate genders, groups of friends, etc. Also requires an exact even number.

Get groups into an even number of parallel lines. Ideally, lines are about the equal size. You can do a number of “line up” activities beforehand or object relays. When ready, match up two lines beginning at one end and partnering up as you walk down the line. It’s helpful to have one line face one way and the other face the other direction. In other words, the two lines would be standing side to side facing opposite directions while people in each line would be standing immediately behind the person in front of them. As you “zip” up the line, move any “extra” people to the next line until a maximum of one person sits out the activity (if total number of participants is odd). One everyone is in a partnership, instruct everyone to get into a “permanent high five position.”

The rotation language is someone similar to the Circle Rotation except that now each time, it’s a two step process.

“Move ahead one person and stop. Turn the corner at the end. And move ahead one person and stop. Smile at this person and say ‘hello.’”

The “turn the corner at the end” has to do with the two people one in each line that have walked forward to discover they aren’t in a high five position with anyone. Simply have them join the back of the other line (truly just making a quick 180 turn and standing behind the person at the back of the other line). Once they move ahead in the next set of instructions, everyone will be perfectly matched up.

It’s REALLY important to keep an eye for people who aren’t moving (as that will create wide gaps) or people who are moving before it’s time as that might create a situation where someone doesn’t have a partner. This gets especially complicated with the “turning the corner at the end.”

This method is a key component of the Link Crew Freshmen Orientation ([www.linkcrew.com](http://www.linkcrew.com))

## Predetermined Combinations

PROS: Able to really define partnerships and groups and potentially create best teambuilding opportunities. Able to use for a variety of group sizes even in the same day. Best method to get large group divided into smaller groups of 8+ participants

CONS: Requires most amount of set up. Very difficult to accommodate last second additions/absences.

There are three main ways of using predetermined combinations:

- 1) Still a bit random with people drawing a playing card, color, sticker on a nametag, etc. This is a fast method, but can still result in a large grouping of friends to be together.
- 2) Do an activity (see *Rock Around the Clock* that purposefully mix groups within the activity. While the initial activity can be a Mad Scramble version, once the different sizes of groups have been established, people can return to them throughout the day.
- 3) Decide how many different partnerships/groups one will be in throughout the day and place an identifiable trait on a nametag, tshirt, etc that one can reference throughout the event. You can vary the way in which you use colors for groups if you’d like (one round could be “get together with all of the blues” next could be “get into a group where all the colors of the rainbow are represented”).

Works even better if there is a specified meeting location and/or poster identifying where specific #'s, symbols, colors, etc should meet.

You can do an activity that blends the play and the mixing at the same time. Here is an example.

## Rock Around the Clock [20-25 min]

**Supplies:** none required/music can make it more fun

**Topic/Message:** Varies based on questions asked. Can also address idea of “fitting in”

**Directions:**

- Demonstrate the 5 dances [Swing (2), Twist (5), Swim (4), Disco (3), Robot (6)]
- Play music or call out dance names. Try to mix up even and odd groups maximizing the mixes of groups/people. A good mix can be this:

Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Round 5
Robot (6)	Swim (4)	Twist (5)	Swing (2)	Robot (6)
Swing (2)	Disco (3)	Swim (4)	Disco (3)	Twist (5)
Twist (5)	Robot (6)	Disco (3)	Swim (4)	Swing (2)

- Notice that each round ends with a different number.
- At the end of each round, do a “lost and found” to assemble a group.
- Ask a question in each group/celebrate.

## Determining Order

A well-planned teambuilding session will have fun instructions on even simple things like who will go first. You can quickly have partners determine “who is (blank) and who is (blank)” and then play with it. Example: after having partners select “who is going to be A and who is going to be B,” I’ll say, “Person B, you’re going to go BEFORE person A.” “Person A, you’re going AFTER person B.” It’s a simple instruction, but it normally gets a quick laugh. Here are several more partnership ideas you can use:

### PAIRS

- A & B
- Long & Short Hair
- Taller & Shorter
- Youngest & Oldest
- Bert & Ernie
- Peeta & Gale
- Edward & Jacob
- Thelma & Louise
- Fred & Barney
- Batman & Robin
- Cream & Sugar
- PB & J
- Etc, etc. etc

### GROUPS OF THREE

- Alvin, Simon, Theodore
- Curly, Larry, Moe
- Huey, Dewey, and Louie
- Harry, Ron, and Hermione
- Wendy, Peter Pan, and Tinkerbell
- Bacon, Lettuce, Tomato
- Etc etc etc

### GROUPS OF FOUR

- Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer
- Carrie, Charlotte, Miranda, Samantha
- Earth, Wind, Fire, Ice
- Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tinman, Lion
- Mickey, Minnie, Donald, Goofy
- Coke, Diet Coke, Sprite, Dr. Pepper
- Etc etc etc

**Remember to BUILD. PAIRS + FOURS + EIGHTS. Consider Tag. Don’t forget level of depth of sharing or risk involved in activity.**





## Pairs

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### WOW [5 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Connection, Communication

**Directions:**

- Assign partners
- Teach the four different signs: 1) Thumbs Up, 2) Thumbs Left, 3) Thumbs Right, 4) Thumbs Down
- Partners stand face to face and do a rhythm of *clap clap sign clap clap sign clap clap sign...*
- If the signs are a mirror image of one another (i.e. thumbs going the same direction), instead of doing a *sign* after the next two *claps*, both partners with point to one another and say **WOW**.
- Tips
  - Best to demonstrate how it works with one person
  - Best to do 2-3 rounds to attempt to get a semi universal rhythm
  - Opportunities for discussion: A) the joy people felt when they “connected” with a partner and the connections we have to our organizations and/or B) the fact that most people would think that we are simply reading minds because they are unaware of the simple “mirror” rule—we must make sure that those outside our inner circle are also aware of important information.

### Gotcha [2-3 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Success, Rushing to Conclusions

**Directions:**

- Assign partners
- Each person places left palm up about belly button height
- Each person takes right index finger and places the finger tip down (finger and palm would form a 90° angle)
- Say the following instructions: “I’m going to count to three and say the word GO. Only when I say the word GO, again only when I say the word GO, you’re going to attempt to grab your partners finger while at the same time remove your finger from their palm. If you can successfully grab their finger and remove yours, you win. Again only when I say that magic word.
- Tips
  - Be sure to make it clear that the word GO is the trigger
  - Be playful with each round. Do ~3 rounds: one normal, one with a delay, one with fake out calls.
  - If doing another partner activity AFTER this one that requires a “count to three and say go” (i.e. match face, fast finger, etc.) be sure to clarify that you won’t psych them out.

### Fast Finger [2-3 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Success, Rushing to Conclusions

**Directions:**

- Assign partners
- Each person places both hands behind back
- Say the following instructions: “I’m going to count to three and say the word GO. When I say go, you’ll take out one of your hands and display a number of fingers 0-5. Between the two of you, there will be a total number of fingers 0-10. First person to add it up and shout out that sum wins.”
- Tips
  - Do 3-4 Rounds.
  - Final round do BOTH hands (final total 0-20)
  - During instructions, it can be fun to crack a *The Princess Bride* six finger man joke and/or fingers that are “appropriate for school”

## **Match Face** [5 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Connection

**Directions:**

- Assign partners
- Teach the three signs “Surfer, Lifeguard, Shark” (or create your own three signs—make them fun)
- Have partners stand back-to-back. Instruct partners that you’ll count to three, they’ll jump around, and the goal (WITHOUT TALKING) is to match up.
- Do three rounds, checking in after each round to see who matched up
- Tips
  - Round one: If matching “Give High Five and say OH YEAH!” If not “ Give High Five and say Focus”
  - Round two: If matching “Give High Five and say We’re doing this!” If not “Give High Five and say Don’t Mess this up for me!”
  - Round three: If matching “Give High Five and say Great Minds Think Alike!” If not “Give High Five and say Diversity Rocks!”

## **Toe Tap** [5-10 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Collaboration or Competition

**Directions:**

- Get into partnerships.
- Instruct partners to place hands on each others’ shoulders. Tell them they have 30 seconds and that their goal is to step on their partners toes as many times as possible.
- Observe the group. See who goes defensive, offensive, and who collaborates with partners.
- Demonstrate “solution” to group: Each partner puts left foot on top of partners right foot and quickly taps—two people can work together and get 30+ taps in time provided with NO INJURY to other person AND both succeed.
- “In service, it’s about us working together”

**Potential Discussion Area (time permitting): “How can we collaborate with other groups on campus/in our community to better serve our home, school, and community?”**

## **Thumb War+** [5 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Connection, Focus

**Directions:**

- Get into partnerships.
- Instruct partners to hold out right hands and link fingertips.
- Simply say “1,2,3,4, I challenge you to a Thumb War” (they’ll honestly play immediately)
- After a few moments stop group, instruct them to hold out left hands and link fingertips.
- “1,2,3,4, I challenge you to a LEFT HANDED Thumb War”
- After a few moments, stop group. Get one partner to cross forearms. Instruct them to link fingertips on both hands.
- “1,2,3,4, I challenge you to DOUBLE Thumb War”

## Groups of Three

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### Robots [5-10 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Leadership, Control, Communication, Fun

**Directions:**

- Get participants into groups of 3 and select roles A, B, & C
- Each person will have a turn as “Robot Master” who will control the two robots for 1 minute using the following controls:
  - One tap on top of the robot’s head moves it forward
  - One tap in the middle of the robot’s back moves it backward
  - One tap on the robot’s left shoulder turns it 90 degrees left
  - One tap on the robot’s right shoulder turns it 90 degrees right
  - Two taps on the tops of the robot’s head stops the robot.
- Play three rounds giving each person a turn as Robot Master
- Potential observations: Creating chaos, not being a safe “Robot Master,” Taking care of robots.

### Magic 7-11-21 [5 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Compromising, Decision Making, Cooperation, Integrity

**Directions:**

- Divide participants into groups of 3-4
- Have participants put both hands behind their backs
- Groups count to three and bringing out one hand, displaying a number of fingers
- GOALS
  - Round One: Have the total number of fingers add to 7
  - Round Two: Have the total number of fingers add to 11
  - Round Three: (using two hands) Have the total number of fingers add to 21
- RULES
  - Only communication allowed is “1...2...3...”
  - No planning allowed
- Play all 3 rounds back to back (in other words, if group succeeds with Round One, they go immediately onto Round Two...). At the end see how far groups got
- Potential observations: People NEVER change, always change, disengage, break rules, and/or succeed

### Good Advice/Bad Advice [5-10 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Communication, Trust, Advice, Focus

**Directions:**

- Get participants into groups of 3 and select roles (Walker, Good Advice, Bad Advice) taking a turn at each role
- The activity begins with a standard trust walk with the Walker having his/her eye’s closed while walking from one point to the other.
- Neither Advice person may touch the Walker, but both can provide Advice—one providing Good Advice, the other Bad Advice.
- Consider providing limits on volume so that one can’t simply shout out the other.
- Potential discussions: How did we respond to the advice here? Where else do we have bad advice trying to drown out good advice? How do we silence the bad advice in our daily lives? How do we know the difference?

## Groups of Four

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### Hog Call [10-15 min] (Great Transition Activity from Pairs to Groups of Four)

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Communication, Integrity, Example, Searching

**Directions:**

- Assign partners
- Instruct partners to come up with a “compound word” such as “toothpaste, doghouse, or teapot”
- Partners will break the word into two parts/each claiming half.
- Partners go to opposite side of room and prepare “bumper” arms (elbows bent, hands in front of chest)
- Partners close eyes and shuffle a bit on respective sides. Partners then try to find each other using only their words.
- Optional: Repeat in groups of four with a four word phrase like “Teenage Mutanta Ninja Turtles”
- Group members now go to four sides of the room and try to find one another.
- After this round ask how many “cheated” and the example that sets.
- Allow groups of four to brainstorm strategy of finding one another. Repeat again.
- Potential Observations: Strategy, Cooperation, Consistency

### Earth, Wind, Fire, Ice [10-15 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Leadership, Responsibility, Opportunities, Engagement

**Directions:**

- Allow groups of four to assign four partners (can be different names, but this example will use Earth, Wind, Fire, Ice)
- Each person will have a chance to be “the leader”
- Leader had 10-15 seconds to tell her group what they will do for 1 minute (must remain in the room, must not violate school rules): Purposefully be vague here. Provide no examples—just the rules. See what students come up with.
- Leadership role shifts. Always have group return to starting position
- (Special Note: pay attention to leaders that WATCH their group do an activity, but don’t actually do it. Look for groups that do the ridiculous rather than the purposeful)

**Potential Mini Message: How are we utilizing our opportunities to LEAD?**

### Triangle Tag [5-10 min]

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Control, Communication, Teamwork, Fun

**Directions:**

- Get participants into groups of 4, and label A, B, C, D
- Each person will have an opportunity to be “the tagger,” “the tatee,” and “the protectors”
- If person A is The Tagger, then B, C, & D would form a triangle by holding onto shoulders. Person C would be the Tatee, and B & D would serve as protectors.
- Person A would attempt to tag person C, while B & D would work to prevent this by rotating around the circle.
- Play 15-30 second rounds changing roles after each round.
- Variations:
  - Have group members hold hands instead of shoulders.
  - This makes it MUCH more difficult for the tagger.
  - Do not allow tagger to dive under or over linked arms to reach tatee.

## **Goal, Fear, Success, Dream** [10-15 min]

*Note: This is not a Play Activity. Still need a Play activity prior to this one, but something like HOGCall could be a great Play prior to this.*

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Relationship Building

**Directions:**

- Have groups of four sit in a close circle preferably on the floor
- Share your own examples of GOAL, FEAR, SUCCESS, DREAM (repeat the four categories many times in your explanation as it helps the group remember them).
- Encourage Group to ask follow-up questions if person finish before time is called
- Each person gets his/her own minute to share his/her GOAL, FEAR, SUCCESS, DREAM
- Celebrate after each person (round of applause, “fireworks,” thumbs up cell call, “you’re ONE-derful”)

## **Four Square Questions** [5-10 min]

*Note: This is not a Play Activity. Still need a Play activity prior to this one, but something like HOGCall could be a great Play prior to this*

**Supplies:** None

**Topic/Message:** Communication, Teambuilding

**Directions:**

- Get participants into groups of 4
- Have one person claim the “going first” spot.
- Remind participants about the four square game played in elementary school and basic rules—no hit backs, had to keep the ball inbounds (couldn’t hit it too hard or too soft).
- Encourage participants to begin to do questions with that in mind. Person going first “hits” the first question to someone. Questions shouldn’t be too soft (*what’s your favorite color?*) or too hard (*what do you hate about yourself?*), but should be somewhere in the middle (*what’s something you enjoy doing in your free time?*).
- Once that person has replied to that question he/she “hits” a question to someone else (but not to the person who just asked the question). Ideally he/she asks a different question.
- Participants take turns “hitting” questions around the group.

# Patrick Maurer

Patrick Maurer is an award-winning speaker and leader, transforming campuses, communities, and individuals of all ages. Maurer, a trained communicator and educator, is best known for his perfected approach of fusing compelling topics with real-life accounts, humor, and pop culture savviness. His unique style garnered him a Certified Speaking Professional® designation by the National Speakers Association, an honor earned by only the top 10 percent of speakers worldwide. Patrick's proven track record of delivering value has impacted individuals across North America for over a decade, including top-tier organizations such as the National Association of Student Councils and the Sundance Film Festival. He continues to serve and lead, serving on the board of his local Kiwanis Club as well as his local Alumni Chapter.

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