



THE LEADERS INSTITUTE

A TEAM-FORMATION ICEBREAKER GUIDE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

PLAYING CARD SHUFFLE

A Fast Way to Split a Large Group Into Teams

Hand every arriving guest a single playing card, and the room organizes itself — no roster, no name tags, no waiting for a facilitator to assign teams.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Let a Deck of Cards Do the Sorting

Playing Card Shuffle organizes a large group into smaller teams using nothing but a standard deck of playing cards.

Each participant receives a single card, and one matching card sits on each table or station. Finding a seat becomes the icebreaker itself: participants scan the room for their match and start talking to strangers before the facilitator says a word. This paper covers the materials and setup, how to run the activity in its simplest form, three ways to adapt it to group size and energy level, and why fewer spoken instructions produce a livelier room.

4

ready-to-run variations for adapting group size and energy

1

playing card per table — the only setup needed to start

Low

cost — a standard deck of cards is the core material

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Materials and Setup

The setup is a single deck of playing cards and a few minutes before the room fills up.

- **One playing card on each table or station**, placed before participants arrive.
- **For large groups, cards are organized by color or suit** to keep the shuffle simple to follow.
- **Cards go out to participants either at random**, or from a "pick a card" station run like a Las Vegas dealer.

Run the Icebreaker

In its simplest form, the activity is three moves and almost no talking from the front of the room.

1 Place one card per table

Set a single playing card on each table or station before the group arrives.

2 Hand out the matching cards

Distribute individual cards to participants at random, or let them "pick a card" from a dealer-style station.

3 Announce "Find your team"

Give the room that single instruction and let participants self-organize by matching their card to the one on the table.

Three Ways to Adapt It

The base version scales up or down with three adjustments to the cards themselves.

COLOR OR SUIT SEPARATION

Direct participants by card color or suit to different areas of the room first, then have them find their specific group from there — useful for very large groups.

EQUAL TEAM BALANCING

Include Jokers or "Wild" cards in the mix. Collect them as they surface and redistribute them to whichever groups end up short a member, keeping team sizes even.

COMPLEXITY SCALING

Give larger groups fewer instructions to keep the energy high; give smaller groups more complexity to stretch the activity out.

Why Fewer Instructions Win

The activity's own operating principle is also its best facilitation advice.

“ *The fewer instructions that you give, the more active they will become.*

Playing Card Shuffle works best when it's followed immediately by energetic, action-packed programming that keeps the momentum the shuffle just created — rather than a lull while the facilitator explains what's next.

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ABOUT



The Leaders Institute®, led by CEO Doug Staneart, pioneered the Build-A-Bike® charity team-building activity in 2005 and has run team-building events, professional-development seminars, and the Fearless Presentations® and High Impact Leaders programs for corporate groups nationwide ever since. This activity comes directly from the company's own facilitator playbook.

Want us to facilitate this activity for your group?

Talk with our team about running Playing Card Shuffle, or another icebreaker, for your event.

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