

Ask the Genie!

Dear Genie,

*I'm taking my team offsite for a team retreat, and I'm concerned about people grouping off into their same cliques. One of the frustrating things about our meetings is that we've got a few pairs of team members that are joined at the hip and don't really interact with the rest of the group. Believe it or not, it's caused real problems because the entire group just doesn't work well together. Our group is really just a bunch of cliques! I hate to take the group offsite and have the same polarized clique dynamic manifest itself there. I can't **force** them to get to know others on the team and break out of their comfortable cliques can I?*

Lawrence in New Orleans

Dear Lawrence,

You're right to be concerned. Cliques are natural in the sense that some people naturally gravitate towards each other due to similar interests, previous experiences, complimentary personalities, etc. The problem though is that for teams to function optimally, there must be a certain level of respect, trust, and relationship among all the team members. True – you can't force people to “bond”, but you can certainly be strategic about encouraging a lot of interaction at your upcoming event. Here's how...

- Assign seats! I know it sounds very high school, but you can certainly provide preprinted name tents and organize seats strategically to encourage interaction among team members who may not normally socialize (and thereby discourage cliques)
- Have participants “count off” (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3) when developing teams for activities. This way if two buddies sit next to each other, they definitely won't be members of the same activity group.
- Have participants each submit a “little known fact” (something no one else in the group knows about them...e.g. they've seen every episode of “24”, they ran marathons in college, they repeated kindergarten) prior to the event. Then create a “networking card” resembling a bingo card with an interesting fact in each square. Ask participants to compete against one another to see who can complete their card by getting the owner's initials in each square first (without asking participants to identify their box outright). Provide a prize for the winner – competition really heats up when there's a prize 😊
- Spice up the normal “introductions” section of the agenda by asking each attendee to share something interesting (e.g. first paid job, favorite vacation, proudest accomplishment, etc.).
- Assign pairs. Then have participants interview each other and introduce their partner during the “introductions” section of the agenda.
- Ask attendees to sit next to someone they don't know well

If you have a question that you'd like to pose to the Meeting Genie, send it (along with your name and city) to askgenie@meetinggenie.com