

Stand up/Sit down

This exercise is great for building a group, and especially for large groups to get to know each other as a preliminary introduction. The exercise is straightforward: someone stands up, and says, “Stand up if…” They finish that with something true about them. If it’s true for others, they also stand – and the group gets a moment to see who else is in the room. It then continues.

Example of it being used in a campaign context for a group of 80 that didn’t know each other:

I had ditched the idea of introductions. The group was too large— such a go-around would be deadly. Yet I wanted to address people’s need to know who was in the room. Every group starts with that preoccupation, and I wanted to address it in a way that built safety in the room.

I quickly jumped into the activity. “Stand up if you are not a morning person.” I stood, encouraging others who were the same to stand up, many with coffee cup in hand. “Okay, now we sit back down and someone else goes, saying something true about themselves.”

Cautiously, people picked up the theme: “Stand up if you are a morning person.” The other half of the group stood. “Stand up if you kinda want to be outside in the sun.” With the first sprinkles of laughter, most of the group stood up, including myself.

I was not surprised that the group soon turned to the common issue at hand. “Stand up if you have lived in your home for more than twenty years.” More than a quarter of the room stood. An elderly woman got up next: “Stand up if your family has lived in your home for more than two generations.” A dozen people stood. A middle-aged man stood next: “Stand up if you have been terrified all through the holiday season about this.” With resounding exhales, most people stood. For the next several minutes, people stood in literal solidarity with each other over a range of emotional states: fear, defeat, hopefulness, nervousness, excitement, and anger.

As they sat down, one person joked, “So I’m not alone!” As the group laughed, I saw tense shoulders relax. We were building some safety, some group cohesion in which people could take small risks of vulnerability and find they were not alone. There was more group safety to build, but we needed to begin diving into content—and that task was tricky.

Written by Daniel Hunter in *Strategy and Soul* (www.StrategyAndSoul.org), an exciting first-person story of direct action campaigning