

**2025 Edition**



**A SHORT GUIDE  
TO BECOMING A  
WORLD-CLASS  
FACILITATOR**

**Teamwork & Teamplay**  
[www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com)

*In the future,  
there will be a critical  
moment when you will  
be the deciding factor in  
the success or failure  
of your group.*

*When that moment  
arrives, will you  
be ready?*



For over fifty years, Teambuilding Guru Dr. Jim Cain has spent his professional and personal life working and playing with groups. During that time, many of his books, cards and teambuilding props have become essential resources for teachers, trainers, facilitators and group leaders of all kinds. In this publication, you'll find a unique collection of techniques and resources to help you become a world-class facilitator. Enjoy the journey, and please share this PDF with your students, friends, colleagues and anyone interesting in becoming a better facilitator.



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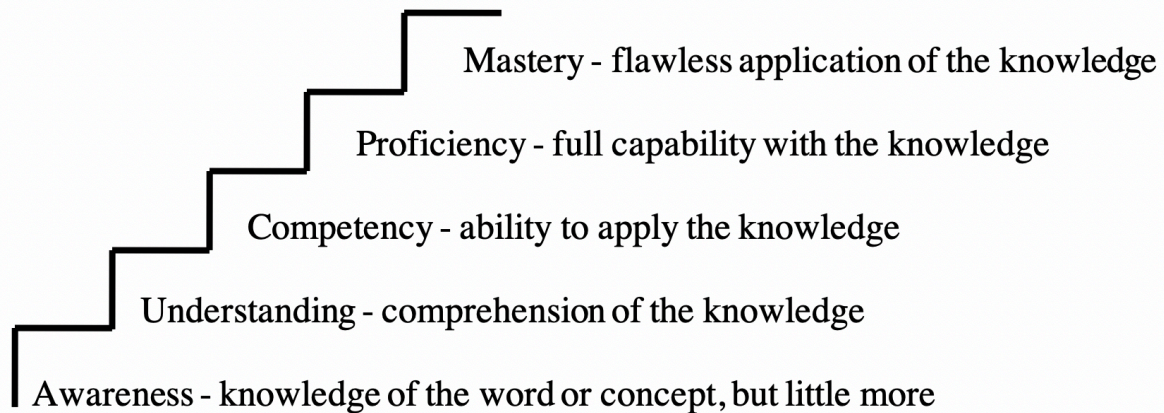
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# The Learning Staircase – A Path to Mastery

Each step up the Learning Staircase requires time, effort, resources and skill development.



It's easier to get where you're going if you know where you're starting from. Consider the learning staircase model shown here for any random subject matter, such as ballroom dancing. At the awareness level, some people have heard of ballroom dancing. They know that it exists, but they may not have had any personal experience with the subject, nor could they identify any particular dance style or specific dance movements. At the understanding level, people have some knowledge of the subject matter. They may have seen a movie or documentary. They may be able to identify the difference between a waltz and a rumba or even demonstrate a few steps.

As learners progress up the staircase, they become competent in their knowledge, perhaps by taking a course on the subject, or practicing with a partner. As they continue to progress, they become highly competent at the proficiency level and at the highest level, mastery, they are flawless in their abilities.

*The CEO of a large corporation was chatting with the groundskeeper of his company. "I'd like you to plant a row of Oak trees along the entrance drive to our facility," he said. The groundskeeper replied, "but sir, oak trees take a very long time to grow." To which the CEO replied, "then you better get started right away."*

World-Class or mastery level facilitation requires substantial effort. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, suggests that 10,000 hours are required to achieve this level. That calculates to roughly 2000 hours per level on the learning staircase model above. But the good news is, anything you do to increase your competency in facilitation counts. Attend a workshop and observe the facilitation style of the presenter – that counts. Visit your library and check out a dozen books on the subject – that counts. Facilitate a program for a local community group – that counts. Create a new group activity and fine-tune its performance – that also counts.

So, assess your current competency level, and plot a course to reach the level your desire. The rest of this document will give you dozens of ideas to help you achieve your goal.

# Twelve Tips for Becoming a Better Facilitator

The following tips were borrowed from the first chapter of the book *Extraordinary Facilitation* (ISBN 978-1-60679-507-1), which features one hundred tips (and homework assignments) for becoming a better facilitator.

## Tip #1 – Squeeze the Lemon

When I want to make lemonade, I take a fresh lemon, cut it in half and then squeeze. Then I take the lemon juice, add sugar and ice, and make lemonade. Life is good! But if I squeeze harder, I get more out of the lemons.

When I choose an activity to share with my audience, I want to squeeze harder and get more out of the activity than just the activity itself. The harder I squeeze, the more I get.

You probably already know enough group activities, but perhaps you have not yet learned how to get more out of your favorite activities. By squeezing harder, you might just be able to turn a good activity into a great one.

*The Story of Your Name* activity is a great example of squeezing the lemon. Not only is this activity an interesting way to learn the names of the members of a group, it also builds respect.

*Which of your favorite activities can you “squeeze” to make them even better?*

## Tip #2 – The Law of Seven Minutes

Never perform a single icebreaker or an opening activity for more than seven minutes. I would rather lead three activities in a twenty-minute period, than a single activity for twenty minutes. The attention span of most people is fairly short. By limiting the length of an activity, especially an opening activity, you can maximize the energy and the engagement level of the group.

*The Big Question* is one of my favorite icebreakers, but if I play that activity for sixty minutes, trust me, no one will ever want to do the activity again. By switching activities just after the energy reaches its highest level, participants will always want to revisit or replay the activity again in the future.

I first learned of this principle in my youth, volunteering as a camp counselor for our local 4-H junior camp. One of our recreation leaders encouraged us to *kill it before it dies*. Simply stated, this means to end an activity long before the group has lost interest in playing it.

Over the years, I’ve learned to be aware of the energy level of my audience and transition from one activity to another, just as the energy in the room peaks and begins to decline. With practice, you too can learn to conclude an activity before it reaches the point of diminishing return.

*Which of your favorite activities would benefit from keeping it short and sweet?*

## Tip #3 – Practice, Practice, Practice

It’s like the old joke that asks, “*how do you get to Carnegie Hall?*” The answer (of course) is practice, practice, practice. So, “*how do you get to be a competent teacher, trainer, facilitator or group leader?*” Practice, practice, practice. In my opinion, people tend to get better at the things they practice. Practice long enough and hard enough, and you might even become an expert.

*Which of your current activities could use a little more practice?*

#### **Tip #4 – The Value of Co-Facilitation**

I love to read books, but I have learned more from co-facilitating with other talented teachers, trainers and facilitators than in all the books I've ever read. Facilitating with another person is an excellent way to improve your capabilities. You learn new activities and new ways to introduce these activities. You learn new debriefing and reviewing techniques. You discover different and occasionally unusual props that will engage your audiences in new ways. When you are presenting, your co-facilitator can be preparing the next activity or listening carefully to the audience to determine what needs to happen next. A co-facilitator provides an extra set of ears and eyes to hear and observe things that you may miss while facilitating a group.

My favorite reason for co-facilitating with another person comes at the conclusion of the program. A co-facilitator is uniquely qualified to give you feedback on your facilitation skills. I value the feedback given by my co-facilitators and that feedback has made me a better facilitator.

*Who could you invite to join you at a future program as your co-facilitator?*

#### **Tip #5 – Be All You Can Be, Read**

People often ask me how I create the activities that I use in my workshops. The answer is very simple, I read! I read everything I can find on subjects related to teambuilding, facilitation, teaching, training, organizational development, leadership, communication, building trust, decision making, outdoor adventure, puzzles, games, group dynamics, youth development, virtual facilitation, corporate training and education. When I visit a bookstore, I am drawn to these subjects and constantly look for books that I have yet to read. Books inspire me.

I also scan the internet for articles and publications of interest, including books and articles from foreign countries (which some search-engines can easily translate).

So, visit your local library or bookstore and see how many books you can find on your favorite subjects. Find an author you enjoy and read all their books. Ask your friends to buy you books for your birthday. Keep a wish list of books you want to read, and find time to read them. Start with the list of books found in this document.

*Take a trip to your local library or bookstore and seek out books that will help you improve your teaching, training, facilitation and group leadership skills.*

#### **Tip #6 – Offer Participants Choices**

One of the simplest ways to increase the engagement of any group is to offer them the opportunity to make choices. When preparing for an event, you might have two activities ready for the group. By asking them, “*which activity would you like to do next?*” you give them control over their own destiny.

Choice is such a simple concept, and when used well, it can dramatically increase the engagement of your audience. So, look for opportunities to give the members of your audience choices and decisions and invite them to join you in setting the course for your time together.

*What choices could you offer to your future audiences?*

## Tip #7 – The Ultimate Goal

*“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”*

Thomas A. Edison

I believe that the following statement is true. The goal of a facilitator is not necessarily to help a team succeed, but rather to help a team learn as much as they can from any experience, even when they fail. There are a unique set of skills that are valuable in life related to tenacity, perseverance, fortitude, grit, persistence, determination, diligence, endurance and drive. Learning how to recover from failure is as important as learning how to deal with success. The ability to try multiple times and to keep trying are valuable life skills. Thomas Edison didn’t stop the first time his incandescent light bulb concept failed.

It is not uncommon for a facilitator to want their group to succeed, but it can be even more valuable for a facilitator to help their group gain all the knowledge possible, even when they fail.

*Consider a recent experience where participants failed in the completion of their task. How could you have helped them still pull something of value from that experience?*

## Tip #8 – Take Your Time

Don’t be in a hurry to finish an activity and move on to the next if the one you are currently facilitating is producing valuable results with the group. A common error made by inexperienced group leaders is to rush through a pre-planned series of activities so that participants have the full range of experiences during the event, but minimizing the richness of any specific activity. If an activity has created a wonderful teachable moment with your group, let your participants fully experience this moment before moving on to the next activity. In my opinion, it is far more valuable to participate in a handful of activities to their full depth than to race through a dozen or more activities and never fully explore the teachable moments they create.

Some facilitators *stop just short of the promised land*. By that I mean concluding an activity before the group has achieved the ultimate insight or explored the teachable moments available to them. Don’t be afraid to let an activity run to completion. One simple question that a facilitator can ask their group is, *“are we done?”* This question does a powerfully simple thing. It empowers a group to make their own decision when to move on.

*Which of your current activities could be expanded to create even more teachable moments?*

## Tip #9 – Never Stop Learning

*“Ancora Imparo.”*

Michelangelo

On one wall of my office, there are a several inspirational quotes. The one shown above, from sculptor, painter, architect and poet Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni is one of my favorites. In Latin, the phrase translates as *still I am learning*. I think most people would agree that Michelangelo was one of the most influential artists of his time and for someone of his talents to admit in his advanced years that he was still learning new things is both uncommon and reassuring.



PBS, the public television channel has long claimed to be *the lifelong learning channel*, validating Michelangelo's decision to keep learning throughout his entire life. Many people consider teachers, trainers, facilitators and group leaders to be artists, with human interactions as their media of choice, but when was the last time you learned something new? To paraphrase the words of Winston Churchill, "*Never, never, never...stop learning.*"

*Ask yourself, where can I go to learn more about teaching, training, facilitation and group leadership?*

### **Tip #10 – Get Comfortable with Reviewing!**

*"Reviewing is not the thing you do at the end of an activity.  
It is the reason why you do the activity in the first place."*

Roger Greenaway

The final component of many group activities is known as the debrief or final review. This component of the learning cycle is often the most valuable part of the experience.

When I first began leading group activities, I have to admit, I was all about the activity itself. I loved activities, but in those early days I often raced from one activity to the next without ever pausing to review an activity after its completion.

Then I found some truly valuable reviewing techniques that I felt competent sharing in groups. As my list of reviewing activities increased, so did my confidence with this component of the program, and the more I practiced, the better I got.

So, get comfortable with reviewing. The debriefing process has dozens of valuable techniques that you can use with audiences of all kinds. Search for *teachable moments* in all of your activities and help your group discuss and learn from these moments.

For more reviewing activities, read: *A Teachable Moment – A Facilitator's Guide to Activities for Processing, Debriefing, Reviewing and Reflection* by Cummings, Cain and Stanchfield. You can find additional reviewing techniques in the book *Playback – A Guide to Reviewing Activities* by Roger Greenaway, and at Roger's website: [www.reviewing.co.uk](http://www.reviewing.co.uk).

*Seek out new techniques for reviewing and try these during your next program.*

### **Tip #11 – My Favorite Activity**

*"My magic bullet won't work in your gun."*

I discovered an unusual phenomenon in group facilitation. Most professionals have a favorite activity they like to include in their programs, but seldom do two group leaders have the same favorite activity. If you ask a master facilitator their three favorite activities in the hopes of replicating what they consider the very best, you may be disappointed because these are not the activities you find particularly valuable.

Over time, facilitators adjust the parameters of their activities, tweaking them until they yield the perfect outcome. They personalize activities, adapting them until these activities become an extension of their individual facilitation style.

Ask a musician to borrow their instrument, and you are unlikely to replicate their particular musical ability. It's not just the musical instrument, but the musician in concert with the instrument that creates beautiful music. And it's not just the activity that creates a powerful training experience, but the activity and the facilitator, working together to create something of beauty and value.

If you ask me my favorite icebreaker of all time, I'll tell you that *The Big Question* has always been my personal favorite. But as you read through the contents of other facilitation and activity books, you will no doubt discover other activities that peak your interest even more than my favorite activity.

*Which of the activities listed in this document are your new favorites?*

## Tip #12 – The Make-or-Break Factor

In the summary of his extensive research on training programs, Dr. Richard Wagner of the University of Wisconsin mentions that the facilitator *is the make-or-break factor in the success of any training program.*

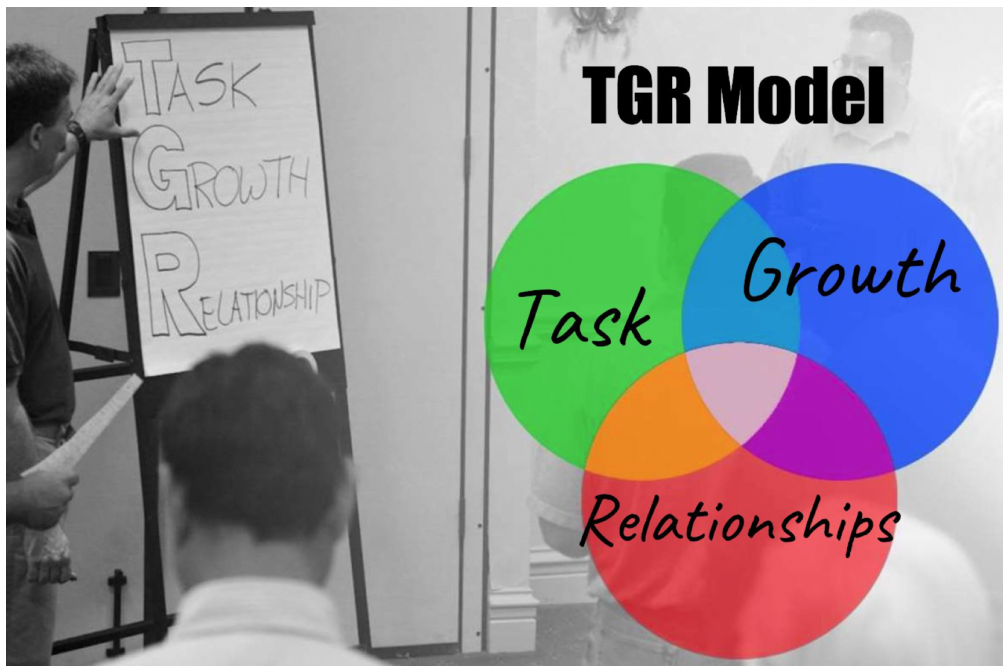
Simply stated, you could have the best learning facility on the planet and still fail unless your program invests not only in the facility, but also in the skills of those facilitating these programs. Both are necessary for success and, according to Wagner, the most significant factor is the skill of the group leader.

For more information on this subject, see *Do It and Understand – The Bottom Line on Corporate Experiential Learning* by Christopher Roland, Richard Wagner and Robert Weigand.

*What can you do to improve your ability as a teacher, trainer, facilitator and group leader?*

If you enjoyed this list of tips and want to further your education in the fine art of working and playing with groups, you can find 100 of these tips in the book *Extraordinary Facilitation* (ISBN 978-1-60679-507-1)..

My favorite model. The three essential elements of a high-performing group.



## Two Essential Teambuilding Props

Every time I prepare for a future event, there are several props that I always pack: a deck of Teamwork & Teamplay Training Cards and a collection of 1” wide tubular webbing segments known as Raccoon Circles.

The Teamwork & Teamplay Training Cards are an entire teambuilding program in a single deck of cards. From icebreakers and get-acquainted activities to puzzles, games and team challenges, to reviewing activities and more, this collection of 52 cards (plus another 13 instruction cards) is the most popular item in my kit. You can purchase these from ACABookstore.org, TrainersWarehouse.com and Training-Wheels.com.

If you are a do-it-yourself kind of facilitator, then you can make all the activities found on the T&T Training Cards, with a collection of index cards. For instructions on how to do this yourself, see the book *Teambuilding with Index Cards* (978-1-5249-6498-6).

The second item I highly recommend is a collection of Raccoon Circles. These colorful flat webbing straps can be used for hundreds of activities. You can download a free PDF file of Raccoon Circle activities from the T&T website at: [www.teamworkandteamplay.com/downloads](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com/downloads), and *The Revised and Expanded Book of Raccoon Circles* (ISBN 978-0-7575-3265-8) contains over 150 activities using this versatile tool.

You'll generally need one Raccoon Circle for every six people in your audience. You can purchase optimal lengths of webbing (15 feet for each Raccoon Circle) from hardware stores, marine supply stores, horse tack shops, mountain climbing shops, rope course vendors, and Training-Wheels.com.



# What Should I Be Reading?

*“There are two things that will make you the person you are going to be in the next ten years; the books you read and the friends you keep.”*

If you wander around in my office space, you’ll find more bookcases than you can probably imagine. I love books. I read them all the time. I hold the record for checking the most books out of my public library in a calendar year. Did I mention that I love books? One of the ways to get better at facilitation is to read. Below, I’ve listed a few of the more interesting books I found useful in my quest to improve my facilitation skills.

*Silver Bullets – Second Edition* by Karl Rohnke, ISBN 9789-0-7575-6532-8. A Guide to Initiative Problems, Adventure Games & Trust Activities. A classic text.

*Theories of Small Group Development* by Raye Kass, ISBN 978-0-9810500-0-3. Beyond the familiar work of Bruce Tuckman (forming, storming, norming, performing) comes this collection of other valuable theories of group formation.

*Telling Ain’t Training* by Harold D. Stolovitch and Erica. J. Keeps, ISBN 978-1-56286-701-0. An articulately presented book on successful training techniques.

*Activities That Teach, More Activities That Teach, and Still More Activities That Teach* by Tom Jackson, ISBN 978-0-916095-49-5, 978-0-916095-75-4 and 978-0-9664633-5-8. Tom shares hundreds of simple, easy-to-facilitate activities with teachable moments.

*Building Leaders One Hour at a Time* by Tom Matthews, ISBN 978-0-9831797-7-1. A guidebook for leadership development featuring resources for training themes of all kinds.

*The Pictorial Guide to Group Work Activities* by Geoff Sanders, Volumes I and II, ISBN 978-0-9517302-0-7 and 978-0-9517302-1-5. Imagine your favorite teambuilding activities presented in comic book style.

Over the years, I’ve collected more than my share of books related to teaching, training, facilitation and group leadership. If you would like to obtain some of these books for yourself, email me ([jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com](mailto:jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com)) to request a copy of my Experiential Garage Sale list (currently over 50 pages), filled with books, cards, props and other useful facilitation and teambuilding resources, cheap!

Becoming a World-Class Facilitator by Jim Cain of Teamwork & Teamplay

# Where Can I Go to Learn More?

One of the most valuable ways to improve your facilitation skills is to attend a conference or workshop where like-minded facilitators gather in numbers. Many training-oriented organizations hold annual meetings and conferences. There are lots to choose from.

In my experience, there are several unique training events that occur each year. Events run by grass-root organizations, that don't cost an arm and a leg to attend. I would categorize each of these as events where I can go and still learn new things.



**Buckeye Leadership Workshop** ([www.buckeyeleadership.com](http://www.buckeyeleadership.com)). An annual event, held in mid-March each year at the Recreation Unlimited site in Ashley, Ohio. A playful and enjoyable immersive event where you can learn a variety of techniques for sharing recreational activities in your community.

**The UnConference** ([www.leahy-inc.com](http://www.leahy-inc.com)). An annual event, held in late February each year near Boulder, Colorado. The brain-child of Tom Leahy and his wife Jen, this three-day event embraces open-space technology and does a masterful job of creating a wonderful experience for those attending. A great place for new facilitators to learn the ropes, and for experienced facilitators to share their knowledge.

**The Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) Conference** ([www.acctinfo.org](http://www.acctinfo.org)). An annual event, held in late January each year, in major cities around the United States (and occasionally overseas). The 2025 Conference is in Cleveland, Ohio. Workshops for facilitators, challenge course professionals and anyone interested in adventure-based learning.

**The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) Conference** ([www.aee.org](http://www.aee.org)). Hosts an annual conference in the fall of each year, and regional conferences each spring. Lots of opportunities to interact with other students and professionals in the vast field of experiential learning.

# Two Reviewing Activities

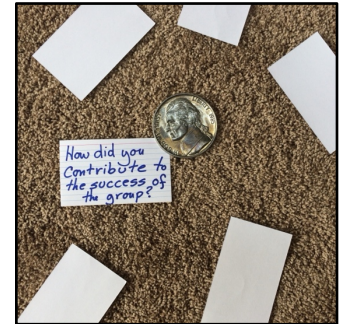
One of the tips mentioned earlier in this document is to become comfortable with the debriefing and reviewing elements of facilitation. To help you prepare, here are two simple reviewing activities that you can use with a future group.

## The Toss of a Coin

The set-up for this activity begins by scattering twelve index cards (with various reviewing questions) face down. Then, one by one, players toss a coin and select the index card closest to the coin's resting position. Next, they read the card aloud and either answer the question themselves, or invite other members of the group to answer the question.

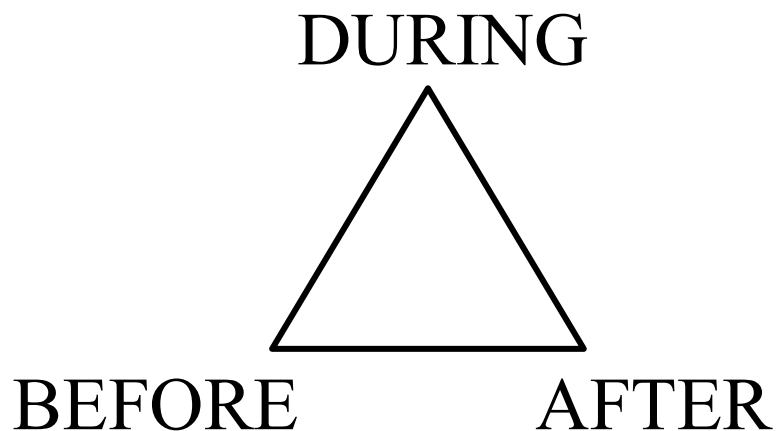
I recommend a dozen index card questions or at least the same number of index cards as participants in the group. I like to include at least one *wild card* where participants can ask any question that they like. Continue this activity until all of the index cards have been selected and answered or until the group has achieved the desired level of introspection.

You can prepare for this activity by creating a collection of generic reviewing questions (ones that could apply to any activity) on twelve index cards, one question per card. Suitable questions might include: Did a leader emerge during this activity and if so, what leadership role did they play? If your group were to perform this task again, what changes would you make? What roles did each member of the group take during this activity? What do you know now that you didn't know before this activity? What knowledge did you gain during the completion of this task? If you were to hire a new employee to complete this task, what skills would you want them to have?



## The Bermuda Triangle

The three-letter identification code for Bermuda's airport is BDA, but for this three-component reviewing technique the letters BDA refer to Before, During and After. The Bermuda Triangle encourages participants to analyze their thoughts, feelings, engagement and performance during each of three significant time periods: before the activity took place, during the activity and after the completion of the activity.



**Suitable questions for the before-stage include:** How did your group prepare for this activity? Was your initial impression of the task easier or more complicated than experienced during the activity?

**Suitable questions for the during-stage include:** Was there a breakthrough moment during the completion of the task? What percentage of your time was spent 'doing' vs. 'discussing' during this activity? How did your group handle the complexity of the activity?

**Suitable questions for the after-stage include:** What advice would you give to a future group tasked with completing this same challenge? What contribution did you make to the successful completion of this task? If you were to perform this activity again, what would you do differently the next time?

# World Class Facilitation and Artificial Intelligence

If you want to become a world-class facilitator, then, I believe, it is important to learn from multiple sources, including some of the newest tools on the planet. To this end, I went online to an artificial intelligence (AI) site, and asked the following question:

**Question:** I want to become a world-class facilitator. List ten things I should do to become one.

**ChatGPT said:** Becoming a world-class facilitator requires a mix of skills, knowledge, and personal growth. Here are ten steps to guide you:

- 1. Master Active Listening**  
Develop the ability to truly hear and understand others. Practice summarizing and reflecting on what participants say.
- 2. Learn Group Dynamics**  
Study how groups work, including communication styles, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution techniques.
- 3. Enhance Communication Skills**  
Practice clear and concise communication, ensuring your language is inclusive and accessible to all participants.
- 4. Design Effective Agendas**  
Learn how to create structured, outcome-oriented meeting agendas that balance flexibility and time management.
- 5. Foster Psychological Safety**  
Create an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing ideas and expressing themselves without fear of judgment.
- 6. Build a Toolbox of Facilitation Techniques**  
Familiarize yourself with various methods, such as brainstorming, mind mapping, experiential activities and game-based learning systems.
- 7. Practice Neutrality**  
Stay impartial, especially when facilitating discussions involving diverse perspectives or conflicting opinions.
- 8. Seek Feedback and Reflect**  
Continuously improve by asking for feedback from participants and reflecting on your facilitation experiences (from your participants and co-facilitators).
- 9. Develop Emotional Intelligence**  
Understand and manage your emotions while being attuned to the emotions and needs of others.
- 10. Stay Curious and Keep Learning**  
Attend workshops, read books on facilitation, and observe experienced facilitators in action to refine your craft.

**IF IT IS  
IMPORTANT  
TO YOU, IT IS  
IMPORTANT  
TO ME.**

**Jim Cain**



# How Can I Contact Jim Cain?

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[www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com)

Throughout this document, you'll find that I've included my contact information (email and website addresses) so that you can contact me, if you wish. This is intentional. I enjoy this field, and I enjoy helping teachers, trainers, facilitators and group leaders of all kinds become better at their craft.

I typically don't charge a fee for brief consultations, whether it is a simple answer to a simple question, or something more complex. If it is important to you, it truly is important to me. Just email me and we'll set up a time to chat.

For deeper coaching and mentoring, I simply ask that you purchase a copy of the book *Extraordinary Facilitation* (ISBN 978-1-60679-507-1), available at Amazon.com, ACABookstore.org and Training-Wheels.com. Read it, and I'll gladly discuss it with you.

# SQUEEZE THE LEMON

**A Guide to Getting More from the Games  
That You Play, the Activities That You Facilitate  
and the Teachable Moments That You Create**



**Jim Cain, Ph.D.**

*Author of *Teamwork & Teamplay* and *Extraordinary Facilitation**

# An Invitation from Jim Cain

Hello friends, colleagues, teachers, trainers, facilitators and group leaders of all kinds. Jim Cain here. I'm working on a new book project, which I've name *Squeeze the Lemon*.

I would be thrilled if you would consider contributing to this project. I've listed a few ways you can add to this project. You are welcome to submit content for any or all of these possibilities. *Squeeze the Lemon* is going to explore how to take the things you already know how to do and get more from them. I'm sure each of us has taken an activity and transformed it into something better. Or taken an ordinary object and turned it into an extraordinary teambuilding prop or facilitation tool.

I don't have a fixed timeline for the project, so anything you would like to send my way would be appreciated, and I'd be glad to include your name and contact info as well. When I have a critical mass of contributions, then I'll go to press.

Best wishes, and feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss any of this in more detail. Oh, and feel free to pass this invitation on to other teachers, trainers, facilitators and group leaders. The more the merrier.

Jim Cain  
Squeeze the Lemon Project

Potential Themes:

Taking an ordinary object and turning it into an extraordinary prop.

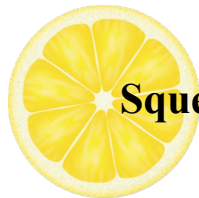
Taking a standard group activity and making it so much better.

The best \$20 I ever spent on a facilitation resource.

Here's a book you've probably never read, but should!

Advice I would give to a new person seeking this career.

Random Thoughts About the Nature of Teaching, Training and Group Facilitation.



**Squeeze the Lemon by Jim Cain**

Becoming a World-Class Facilitator by Jim Cain of Teamwork & Teamplay

The latest book from Jim Cain and Bob Ditter.  
Available now from the American Camp Association Bookstore  
[ACABookstore.org](http://ACABookstore.org) and [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

# **BUILDING CHARACTER AT CAMP**



**JIM CAIN**

**BOB DITTER**