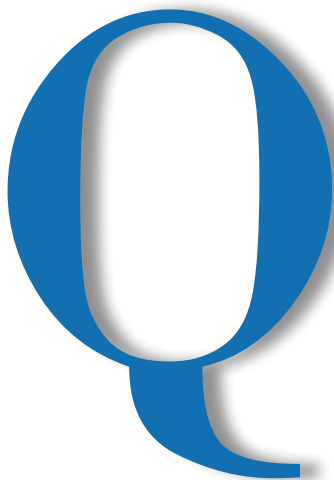




Roundtable Member, **Jen Parks, Director of Programs and Club Operations at CAA Club Group (CCG)**, shares strategies for building team bonds when everyone is stretched for time.

## Mentoring **MATTERS**



*My team is always stretched for time. We've had a lot of changes recently and our team meetings tend to focus on immediate priorities and dealing with whatever fire is burning. I don't feel like we're building bonds as a group – which I know is important – and yet, I don't want to add another meeting into our already time-crunched calendars. What advice can you give me?*

## Jen's Point of View

Finding time for team bonding can be difficult, not only due to packed calendars, but also due to potentially hybrid work locations, different time zones, competing work and family priorities. Do we meet for a team building activity? Do we have a virtual coffee together? Is social connection with the team as important as meeting our deadlines and hitting our targets? The challenges are endless.

In my experience, there isn't just one answer, as one size definitely does not fit all when it comes to building connections as a team. I would recommend implementing a variety of tactics, to take into consideration all of the factors at play -- even things like social styles or simply personal preferences and personality styles.

Here are my **top 5 tips** when it comes to building team bonds:

### *1. Make It a Priority*

The first thing I would suggest is to decide that this is a priority for you and your team. Put it on your list as a to-do. Let the team know that this is important to you and that you'll be looking for opportunities. Ask the team to share their ideas with you. Treat it just as you would any other deliverable — as it is truly that important.

### *2. Start Small*

Even something as simple as a five-minute introductory icebreaker at team meetings or project updates can help build camaraderie and ease stress. Ask each person to share how they're feeling today in one word; go around the room and have each person say one thing they're grateful for; pose a question to the group. For example, "If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?" These small connections can add up and create jumping off points for future conversations between colleagues.

## *3. Embrace Technology*

When we think of team bonding, we often think of in-person events — challenging team-building activities or long social events with small talk. But bonding can happen virtually too. Leveraging technology such as chat rooms, photo sharing sites, or other collaboration tools can provide a simple means of connection throughout the day.

## *4. Flip the Script*

In my former life in educational publishing, there was this concept of the flipped classroom, where students would do their reading and studying before class, and then instead of a lecture during class, they would use the time more actively with hands-on work or group discussion or collaboration. Try the same at work. Use other methods (e.g., email, chat) to discuss projects, put out fires, or get updates. Then, when you're together, use it to collaborate on a shared challenge or take some time for personal connections.

## *5. Eat the Frog*

This concept typically applies to productivity — identify your most pressing or important task for the day, also known as your “frog,” and do it first thing in the morning. Just get it over with. The same could apply here. While it may be challenging to actually schedule time with the team and take away from other important tasks, just do it. Book the recurring Monday morning coffee chats, schedule the half-day offsite, set up the team chat room.

Once you implement some of these tactics, as with anything, stop periodically and evaluate how things are going. Is it working? Is the team seeming more cohesive? Do you see bonds forming? And don't be afraid to ask for feedback about how things are going or, even better, feedforward, which focuses on the future and what can be done differently moving forward to continually support and find space for team connection.



**Jen Parks** is the **Director of Programs and Club Operations at CAA Club Group (CCG)**. Celebrating her 10-year anniversary at CCG in 2023, Jen has had the opportunity to create bonds on a variety of teams at the organization, including Learning & Development, Human Resources, and now Operations. Jen lives in Milton with her husband and daughter and is working on meeting the current five-pet-limit by-law with her three cats and Labradoodle Lincoln, with hopefully another puppy to join the family in the new year.



**Glain Roberts-McCabe** is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.