



BUILDING YOUR TEAM

A MEETING ICEBREAKER GUIDE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

BACK-TO-BACK DRAWING GAME

A Team Meeting Icebreaker

Two chairs, one shared picture, and no one allowed to look — a fast, funny stress test of how clearly your team actually communicates.

Building Your Team
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What You Say Isn't Always What Gets Heard

The Back-to-Back Drawing Game pairs teammates back-to-back and asks one to describe a simple image while the other draws it — no gestures, no peeking, words only.

In under 10 minutes, the activity exposes exactly where verbal instructions break down and assumptions creep in. It scales from a single pair to a room of 60 or more, needs almost no budget, and works equally well over video in breakout rooms. This paper walks a facilitator through materials, setup, the full six-step run, and the debrief questions that turn a fun sketch exercise into a real conversation about communication habits.

<10 min

total time for the basic activity

6–60+

participants the format scales to

6

steps from pairing to role swap

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Materials and Setup



Everything needed fits in a supply closet, and the room setup takes less time than the activity itself.

- **Two chairs per pair**, positioned back to back so partners can't see each other.
- **Blank paper and a pen** for each artist.
- **Six to eight simple line drawings** — a house, a stick figure on a bike, a cat on a fence, and similar images.
- **A one-minute timer.**

Group size scales easily, from a single pair up through groups of 60 or more running simultaneously. Cost is minimal — just paper, pens, and chairs. A standard conference room works fine, and the activity translates well to video calls using breakout rooms for each pair.

Run the Icebreaker



Six steps take a pair from silent setup to comparing a drawing against the original.

1 Pair up and turn away

Pair participants and position chairs back-to-back so partners cannot see each other or each other's paper.

2 Assign roles

One person becomes the describer and receives the image; the other becomes the artist and gets blank paper.

3 Set the ground rules

The describer may use only words — no gestures, no sound effects, and no naming geometric shapes directly.

4 Start the timer

Run 60 to 90 seconds while the describer verbally guides the artist through the image, piece by piece.

5 Reveal and compare

Show the finished drawing next to the original image and let the pair see how closely it matches.

6 Swap roles and repeat

Trade roles and run a second round with a fresh image, so both partners experience describing and drawing.

Debrief Questions



The article is direct about this: “the real value shows up in the conversation right after” the drawing is revealed.

- What made describing using only words difficult?
- How did drawing without asking questions feel?
- Which instructions proved most useful, and why?
- Did assumptions about partner understanding cause errors?
- What would you do differently on a second attempt?

What the Activity Reveals



The mismatch between the finished sketch and the original image is rarely about artistic skill.

CORE LEARNING OUTCOME

Most teams discover the same thing. They assume they are being clear, and they rarely check for understanding until it is too late.

That gap is the point of the exercise: it turns an abstract idea — "communicate more clearly" — into a concrete, shared experience the whole team just lived through together, which makes the debrief conversation land.

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Building Your Team is a division of The Leaders Institute®, the company that pioneered the Build-A-Bike® charity team-building activity in 2005. Building Your Team publishes practical, field-tested team-building activities and facilitation guides for corporate meeting planners, HR leaders, and event professionals.

Want us to facilitate this activity for your group?

Talk with our team about running the Back-to-Back Drawing Game, or another meeting icebreaker, for your group.

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