BUILDING YOUR TEAM

A TEAM-BUILDING ICEBREAKER GUIDE

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

THE MISSING PIECE JIGSAW

A Team-Building Icebreaker Game

Every table hits the same wall at the same moment: a piece is missing, and someone at another table has it — a puzzle designed to make cross-department asking feel normal.

Building Your Team
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Piece Is Missing. Someone Else Has It.

The Missing Piece Jigsaw takes a standard puzzle activity and strategically removes a few pieces from each table's box beforehand, seeding them into a different table's envelope.

Every group hits the same wall at roughly the same time, and the only way forward is to walk over and negotiate with a table they've barely spoken to. This paper walks a facilitator through materials, setup, group-size guidance, the full six-step facilitation process, and the debrief questions that connect a low-stakes puzzle to real cross-department collaboration.

20–25 min
total duration for the activity

3–10
tables; 6–8 is the optimal range

6
steps from setup to structured debrief

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SECTION 01

Materials and Setup

The setup takes about 15 minutes before the meeting and is what makes the whole activity work.

- **3 to 4 jigsaw puzzles**, 100 to 300 pieces each.
- **Small envelopes or baggies** for the piece swaps.
- **Table numbers or labels.**
- **A visible timer or clock.**

Before the meeting, remove 3 to 5 puzzle pieces from edge sections of each puzzle and place them into a *different* table's envelope — this is what creates the negotiation dynamic. Seed tables with mixed departments rather than existing work groups. The activity works with 3 to 10 tables, with 6 to 8 tables optimal, and a virtual adaptation is available using digital tools and breakout rooms.

SECTION 02

Run the Icebreaker

Six steps take the room from quiet independent puzzling to cross-table negotiation.

1. **Assign mixed tables**

   Seat groups of four to six people and distribute puzzles without revealing the twist.

2. **Start the timer**

   Allow 8 to 10 minutes of independent work before anything else happens.

3. **Let the frustration surface**

   Permit the moment when tables realize pieces are missing — don't rush to explain it away.

4. **Announce the twist**

   Reveal what's happening and invite cross-table negotiation and introductions.

5. **Call time**

   End the round once multiple puzzles are complete.

6. **Transition into debrief**

   Move directly into a structured debrief while the trading details are still fresh.

SECTION 03

Debrief Questions

The debrief is where the puzzle mechanic connects to how the team actually works.

- What motivated requesting help rather than working solo?
- How did negotiating with unfamiliar colleagues feel?
- Which tables traded without hesitation, and why?
- What real projects recently required another department's resources?
- How might cross-department requests become easier?

SECTION 04

The Key Learning Outcome

The puzzle is a stand-in for a much more common workplace problem: not knowing who already has what you need.

> **KEY INSIGHT**
>
> *Teams rarely realize how often they already have what another department needs. Once people practice asking for a small missing piece in a low-stakes puzzle, asking for help on a real project tends to feel a little less awkward.*

That's the design logic behind the activity: it's best suited for orientations, department off-sites, all-hands kickoffs, and cross-functional workshops — anywhere people "sit in silos and rarely mix."

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ABOUT



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 Missing Piece Jigsaw, or another team-building icebreaker, for your group.

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