

A Puzzling Way to Energize Training

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Jigsaw puzzles are excellent vehicles for accomplishing a variety of training objectives. To add a little creative twist to training, in which there are fewer than twenty-five attendees, I like to use puzzles in opening activities. To do so, I create two identical jigsaw puzzles from a printed sheet containing program objectives, a quote, or startling fact related to the session content. Each puzzle has enough pieces so that each participant will receive one piece.

I enlarge the puzzle to a poster size so that it is as big as a standard flipchart page (24X36 inches). This can be done with the poster machines that many organizations or print shops have. On the back of one of the posters, I draw random jigsaw puzzle style shapes that equal the number of planned attendees. Next, I put the two posters together and cut out the large individual jigsaw-type puzzle shapes. I then write one number (same on corresponding pieces from the two puzzles) starting with one and running through the number of pieces in the puzzle on both copies. This allows me to later identify missing pieces in case someone does not show up for the session or forgets to bring his or her piece. In such instances, I can then replace the missing numbered piece from my duplicate puzzle. Finally, I separate like pieces so that I end up with two stacks with each containing a complete set of numbered pieces (two separate puzzles).

Before the session, each participant is sent a piece from one puzzle, along with a program announcement, registration form or other information that will be forwarded to them. In the information I tell participants that there will be a drawing (another use for the numbers if you desire) and that the number on the back of their piece qualifies them. I also mention that the piece will be used for an activity so they should bring their piece to the session. When I use the numbers on the pieces for a prize drawing, I generally randomly select a number and write it on a flip chart before learners arrive. After they arrive, I announce the winning number and award a prize prior to the assembly to the puzzle. As an alternative to mailing, you can pass the pieces out as participants arrive.

Following the drawing, I have participants approach a flip chart starting with whoever has piece number 1 and mount their part of the puzzle starting in the upper left corner. To facilitate this, I spray the flip chart with repositionable artists adhesive or photo mount (available at most craft stores) in advance so that the pieces will stick without the use of tape, yet can be repositioned as needed to form the complete puzzle. The remaining participants, in numerical order, place his or her piece of the jigsaw puzzle on the page then returns to be seated. Ultimately, the entire puzzle is assembled to reveal the program objectives, quote or whatever I used as content for the puzzle. I then ask the last person placing a piece read what the puzzle says to the group and then reward that reader with a small prize. Thus, I have engaged participants early in the program, added a bit of pizzazz, revealed program objectives or otherwise introduced pertinent information, and set the expectation that the session will be different, fun and that they can earn rewards for active involvement.

Should everyone not show up for the session, you may have to use your duplicate puzzle pieces to place the ones that they would have brought as the puzzle is assembled

Here's how to make your own puzzles:

- Select and put the text you will use (e.g. session objectives, quote, or other information) on a standard 8 ½ X 11 inch piece of paper.
- Have two large poster-size images made of the text.
- Create your puzzle pieces on the reverse side of one the sheets by randomly drawing lines in various sizes so that you end up with enough pieces for everyone (based on number of attendees).
- Place the two poster sheets one behind the other with the lined pieces visible.
- Use scissors to cut out the pieces.
- Numerically label identical puzzle pieces by placing like numbers on each piece of both puzzles.

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