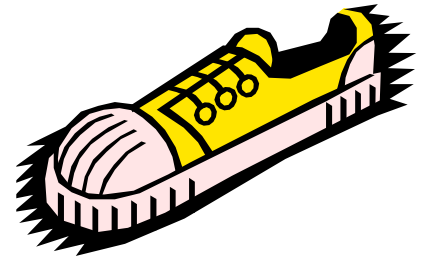


# Team Building Games On a Shoestring

How To Use Two Normal Shoestrings  
to Lead 8 Fun and Engaging  
Team Building Activities



By **Tom Heck**  
The Teach Me Teamwork COACH  
[www.teachmeteamwork.com](http://www.teachmeteamwork.com)

**This is your team building kit**



One package containing two shoestrings  
measuring 54 inches each.

Total Cost: \$0.99 at Kmart



## Introduction

If you work with groups and wear shoes then you're in luck! This activity guide will show you how to lead 8 fun and engaging activities that promote team skills, develop community and enhance connection.

Lead all of the activities found in this activity guide in such a manner that the participants understand they have choice as to whether they participate or not. Encourage each person to communicate their comfort level with the activity and to join in at the level they choose (full, partial, none) rather than be coerced into participation.

These activities are wonderful and they can help create a positive shift for your group. And yet, the most important thing to remember is this – what you will end up teaching your group is WHO YOU ARE. In other words, if an un-centered person whose primary operating emotion is fear (rather than love), it won't make any difference how cool or unique the activity is because the primary message communicated to the group will be: "I am a fearful person".

You must develop who you are as a leader because who you are will be the first message you send to your group (and there's no way of avoiding this). To be a highly effective leader and team facilitator you must dedicate yourself to personal development. A practical place to start on your path of personal development is the Personal Foundation For Leaders Program offered through [www.teachmeteamwork.com](http://www.teachmeteamwork.com)

The activities at TeachMeTeamwork.com can be done just for fun without going into a discussion about what was learned. However, it's my hope that you will use the activities to create opportunities for dialogue. Suggestions for starting a conversation (a "debrief") are offered in each description. The key to learning through experiential teambuilding exercises is the combination of activity PLUS discussion. You can learn to be an effective leader of teambuilding activities at [www.teachmeteamwork.com](http://www.teachmeteamwork.com)

Challenge and adventure activities can present elements of physical and emotional risk. The information presented in this activity guide is for your reference, and you are ultimately responsible for judging the suitability of an activity and safely supervising the activity.

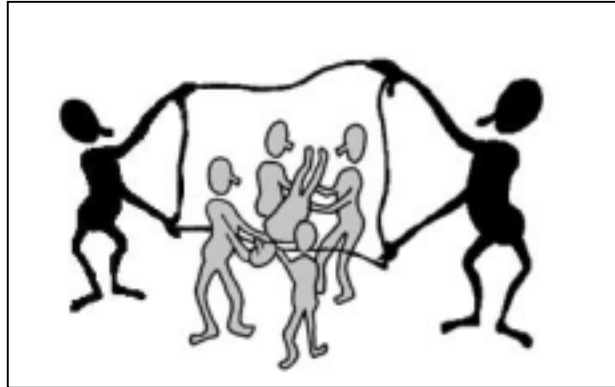
The publisher of this document assumes no responsibility or liability for the use of the information presented in this guide. This includes errors due to misprinting or omission of detail.

No single source of adventure based experiential education can substitute for practical experience and education. While this activity guide serves as an introduction to the use of adventure based experiential learning, it is only an introduction. Studying the material in this activity guide is no substitute for professional training. You can find professional facilitator training at [www.teachmeteamwork.com](http://www.teachmeteamwork.com)

## Hole in Space

### Challenge

Each group member must pass through a hole in space.



### Safety

It's important to teach proper spotting techniques prior to giving the group this challenge. Do not allow participants to hit their head or spine on the ground. This is very important. If your group is not strong enough (physically), mature enough and/or calm enough, do not attempt this activity. Consider attempting this challenge over a soft grassy area; if indoors, over carpet with padding under it.

### Description

This is an activity for 10 to 20 people. Tie two shoestrings together to form a circle. Two people hold the circle to create a square that is vertical to the ground. The square's bottom edge should be approximately 3 to 4 feet off the ground.

Divide the group in half, sending one half to one side of the hole in space and the other half to the other side of the hole in space. Have the group pass each person through the hole in space in such a way that each small group ends up on the opposite side of the hole. (refer to the figure)

### Rules

- No one may touch the shoestrings other than the two people holding the shoestrings. If someone touches the shoestrings apply an appropriate penalty (only that person goes back, everyone goes back, two go back, etc.)
- No other equipment or tools may be used to help in the process (no tables, chairs, etc.)
- Jumping through or launching someone through the hole is forbidden.

### Variations

To make things more difficult, allow verbal communication only during the planning phase but not during the execution phase.

### Teachable Moments

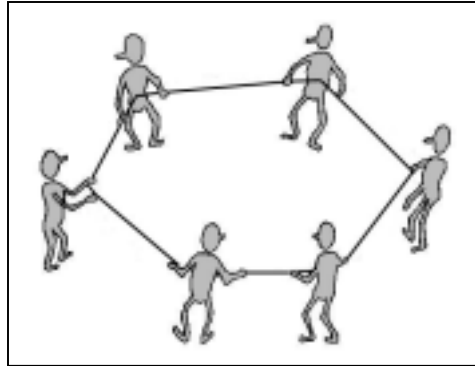
Who in your life lifts you up and helps you out during difficult and challenging times? Which did you prefer, to lift people or be lifted?

<p><b>Top 5 Reasons to Join</b> <b><a href="http://www.teachmeteamwork.com">teachmeteamwork.com</a></b> <b>TODAY!</b></p>	<p><b>Reason # 1</b> TeachMeTeamwork.com is your one stop shop on the internet for all your team building games, activities, exercises, ideas and resources.</p>
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## Geometry

### Challenge

The group must create assigned geometric shapes.



### Description

This is an activity for 6 to 10 people. Tie 2 shoestrings together to form a circle. All group members hold onto the circle with their right hand. The group is then asked to form a particular geometric shape (example: equilateral triangle).

### Rules

- No one may use verbal communication during this activity.
- Everyone must hold onto the shoestring circle with both hands for the entire activity. Letting go of the shoestring circle, even for a moment is not permitted.

### Variations

- After the group has completed the initial geometric shape, have the group complete the second shape (square) with their eyes closed (verbal communication is allowed this time).
- Have the group close their eyes and not use verbal communication and then create a shape (pentagon).

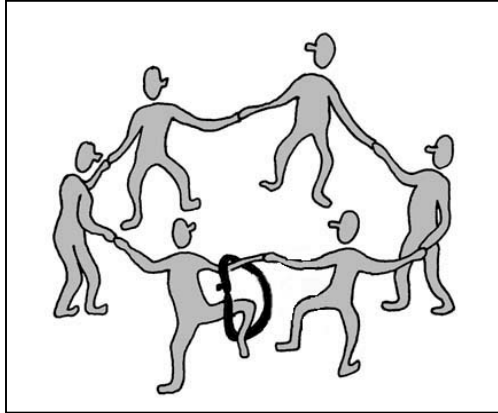
### Teachable Moments

I use this activity to discuss effective communication skills. Younger people (under age 10) will likely have a challenging time making a triangle with no verbal communication and their eyes open.

## Pass The Circle

### Challenge

Pass the shoestring circle around the circle of people, getting the shoestring circle back to the starting spot as quickly as possible.



### Description

This is an activity for 6 to 15 people. Tie two shoestrings together to form a circle. Have the group stand in a circle and hold hands. Then have one pair of people release hands reach through the shoestring circle and then re-connect hands.

### Rules

- The shoestring circle must travel in a clockwise direction and return to the initial starting position.
- No letting go of hands.
- Team members must stay in one location while the shoestring circle moves around the circle.

### Variations

Time the group as they pass the shoestring circle to see how long it takes them to get it all the way around. Allow another attempt to break that record.

### Teachable Moments

What hoops do you find yourself jumping through in real life that are challenging for you? Who do you ask to help you in real life?

## All Aboard

### Challenge

The entire group must fit inside the shoestring circle.



### Safety

This activity will require the group to be calm, responsible and mature. Do not allow the group to fall over in such a way as to injure a group member. If your group is not ready for this activity, don't do it.

### Description

This is an activity for 6 to 15 people. Tie two shoestrings together to form a circle. Lay the shoestring circle on the ground and ask the group to stand inside the circle.

### Rules

- Everyone must be touching the ground inside the shoestring circle in some way.
- The group must stay inside the shoestring circle for the length of time it takes them to sing one round of the song "Row, Row, Row Your Boat".
- During the song, no one can touch the ground outside the shoestring circle.
- Should anyone violate these rules, the group must try again.

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### Variations

- For a small group size (ex. 6 people) this activity may be too easy. If this is the case, re-tie the shoestring circle so it's smaller and then have the group retry.
- While the group is "in" the shoestring circle, provide them with a snack to eat that requires some preparation (example: crackers with peanut butter and jelly).

### Teachable Moments

I like this activity to lead into a discussion about what's "impossible". When something is viewed as impossible, it's usually because of the limiting beliefs someone holds. An example of this might include beliefs from several centuries ago that held the world is flat. Another might include the old belief that the earth is the center of the universe. If you were to tell someone during the early 1800's that people would be able to communicate with each other around the world instantaneously (telephone or internet) or that we would fly to the moon and come back, you would have been laughed at. Often times, the only thing that limits us is our beliefs. If a person believes something is possible, they will take different action than if they believe it's impossible. What did the group have to believe in order to be successful?

This is a great activity to discuss the concept of failure. If the group has quick success with this challenge I will oftentimes re-tie the shoestring circle so it's smaller and I will keep doing so until they have great difficulty solving this (especially if I give them a 5 minute time limit!). The point here is that the group will get to a stage where the challenge is greater than their ability to solve it in the given amount of time. I will ask them if their inability to solve it means they're a failure. You will find that some people in the group have rules for themselves that make failure easy to achieve ("In order for me to fail, all I have to know is that I didn't complete a task."). Others in the group will have rules that make failure hard to achieve ("In order for me to fail, I must not learn anything. As long as I learn something, I have succeeded.") Which rules around failure serve you best?

Interesting fact: Baby Ruth, the famous baseball home run hitter and hall of famer also held a record for having the most strike outs in a season.

## Crossover

### Challenge

Individuals must move from one side of the circle to the other.



### Description

This is an activity for 16 to 30 people. Have your group stand in a circle holding hands and then ask them to back up to the point where they can no longer hold hands, then have them drop hands and stand in place. Tie two shoestrings together to form a circle then place the shoestring circle on the ground in the center of the group.

### Rules

- You must change places with the person directly across from you in the circle.
- You and your crossing partner must both step into the shoestring circle at the same time as you cross to the other side.
- You may not touch anyone at any time during this activity (includes clothing).
- Group members may not reposition themselves once the activity has begun.
- If you have an odd number in your group, then 3 people must work as a team while changing places.

### Variations

Time the attempts, set a record and break it.

Teachable Moments

I like this activity because it's simple to set up and yet very challenging. Potential questions to pose to the group might be: Who would you like to trade places with for a day? If someone traded places with you and experienced your life for a day, what would it be like for them?

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## Bus Stop

### Challenge

Group members express their opinions in front of other people.



### Description

This is an activity for 4 to 20 people. Lay the two shoestrings on the ground in a parallel fashion with the shoestrings 15 feet from each other (the two shoestrings mark the imaginary sides of a long rectangular bus). Ask the group to stand in between the two shoestrings (on the bus). You will be the bus driver and will be standing facing the group at one end of the bus (rectangle).

You will now read out a word pair to the bus riders (refer to list) and as you do you will point to one side of the bus (one shoestring) and then the other (example: "Daytime" – you point right..."Nighttime" – you point left).

The individuals within the group are then give the opportunity to choose which word they most associate with at that point in time.

They then show their choice by walking over to and then stepping across a shoestring. You may end up with half on one side of the bus and half on the other. Ask the group to simply notice who is on their side and who is on the other side.

Then ask the group to start again by getting back on the bus (stepping inside the shoestrings).

The next word pair is given and the passengers make their selections as before. The process is repeated several times.

### Rules

Passengers must get off the bus (must make a choice) after the word pair is announced.

### Variations

Have participants think of word pairs that would challenge the group and then take over as the bus driver.

### Teachable Moments

I use this activity to lead into a discussion about the power of making a real choice. I believe that great teams do not achieve success (consistently) through luck. Long-term success is achieved through the choices we make both as individuals and as a team. Sometimes we make choices consciously and sometimes we make choices without much thought at all. The choices we make on a daily basis create what is known as destiny. By becoming aware of our choices, we can decide whether they serve us or not. Each choice we make leads us either closer to or further from living our life's purpose.

### Suggested Word Pairs

Day Time	Night Time
Spend Money	Save Money
Shark	Dolphin
Chocolate Cake	Chocolate Ice cream
Run	Walk
One Friend	Many Friends
Triangle	Circle
Deep Sea Diving	Sky Diving
Something New	Something Old
Art Class	Math Class
Little Kid	Big Kid
Read	Watch

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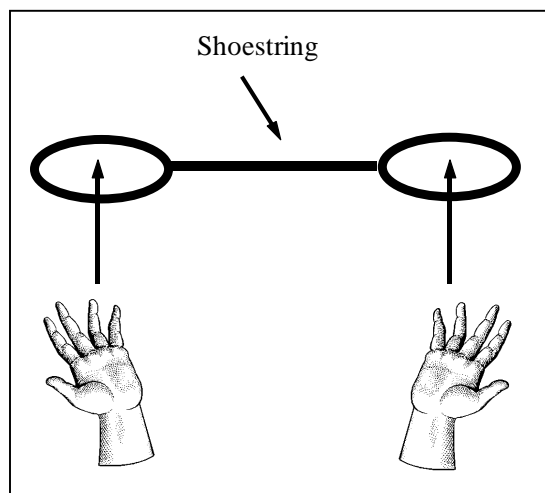
## Infinite Loops

### Challenge

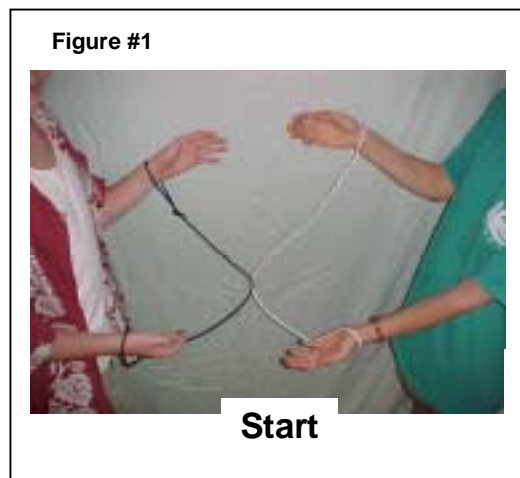
Separate yourself from your partner.

### Description

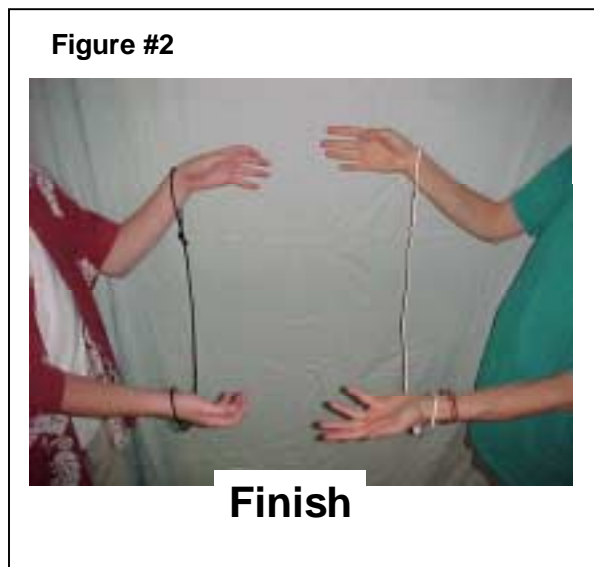
This is an activity for two people (if you have more shoestrings you can involve more people). First you must tie each shoestring so that it has a loop at each end large enough to comfortably insert a hand into (see diagram below). Each person gets one of these.



Next, have the two participants face each other with their hands in the loops of their own shoestring. One person then takes one hand out of a loop and proceeds to “drop” the end of the shoestring in the “circle” made by their partners arms, chest and shoestring. Once completed, the hand is reinserted into their own loop. See photo below.



Become disconnected from your partner. See photo below.



### Rules

- Your shoestrings must stay on your wrists throughout the entire activity.
- The shoestrings may not be cut (in any manner).
- The knots may not be untied.

### Variations

- Instead of placing your hands through the loops, place your feet through the loops.
- Each person is supplied with 2 sets of Infinite Loops – placing one on their hands and the other on their feet.

### Teachable Moments

I remember using this activity with a group of gang-involved kids in San Francisco. They were involved in a program designed to help get them out of the gang. For many of the kids they didn't see a way out of their problems. To them, it was an unsolvable problem. I used the Infinite Loops activity to demonstrate that just because a problem appears unsolvable doesn't necessarily mean that is the case. After the kids solved the Infinite Loops activity we talked about how the solution to the activity might hold some truths for them in regards to their desire to exit the gang life. This proved a very effective metaphor for the kids.

# Infinite Loops SOLUTION

Figure #1



Figure #2



Figure #3



Figure #4



Figure #5



## Hidden Numbers

### Challenge

Participants must solve the puzzle by discovering the hidden numbers.



### Description

This is an activity for 1 to 20 people. Begin by kneeling down on the ground with the group in a semi-circle facing you. Announce to the group that you are about to show them a number between zero and 10. Then place one shoestring on the ground in any shape at all.

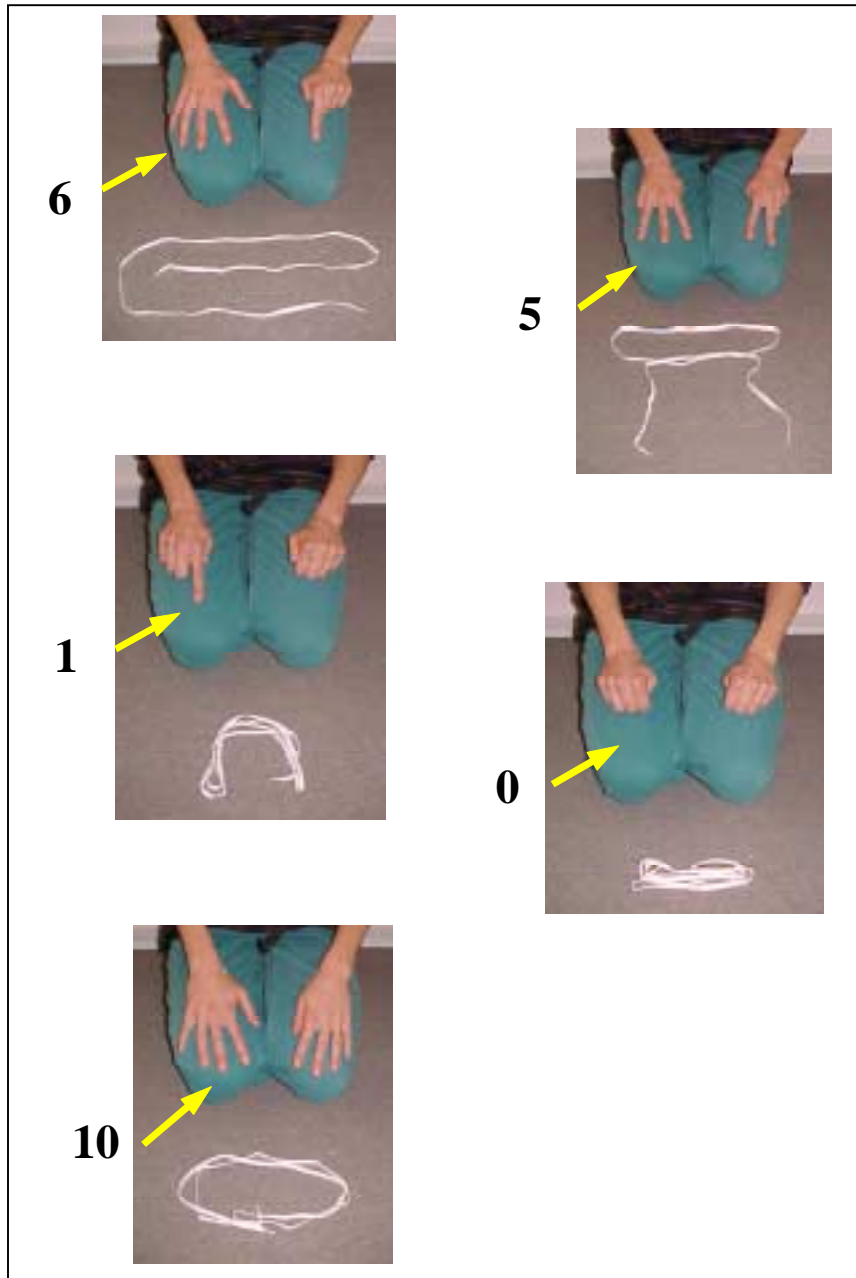
You should use some theatrics here by acting like you are trying to make a particular shape (in reality the shape makes no difference to what you're really doing but the group begins to think it does).

After you've arranged the shoestring on the ground, place your hands on your thighs then ask "What number is this?" The group will look at the shape you've created with the shoestring and make a guess. Ask for a couple of answers, then tell them the answer.

**HERE'S THE TRICK:** You must show the "number" with your fingers, which are on your thighs. If the number is 10, then you keep 10 fingers out. If the number is zero then you keep two fists on your thighs. If the number is 7, then you would have five fingers on one hand and 2 on the other hand with the "extras" folded under.

After the first guess by the group, make another design with the shoestring on the floor. You can even act like you are making a pattern if you want. This only serves to distract people further. When done with the design, place your hands on your thighs again and ask "What number is this?" If the group is slow to pick up on it, confirm that the "number is right in front of you."

If the group has a very difficult time solving this puzzle, tell them you will make it more obvious as to what the number is. After fiddling around with the shoestring, REALLY emphasize putting your fingers on your thighs (being somewhat theatrical). You may even wiggle your fingers so that people will notice them. If they still don't get it, take the shoestring away and ask the group "what number is this?" while emphasizing your fingers.



## Rules

There are no real rules for this game. The setup is the important thing (see above).

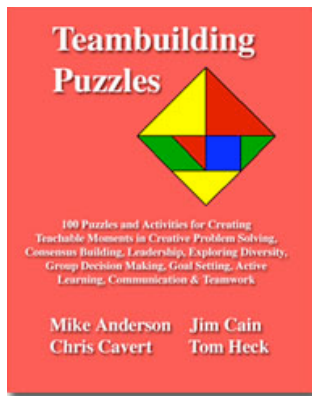
## Teachable Moments

Oftentimes in life the solution to a problem is right in front of us but we don't see it because we allow ourselves to become distracted by extraneous information. In this case, the shoestring acts as a distraction. People tend to focus so intently on the webbing that they block out all other useful information. Some people will even argue that you were not showing the numbers with your fingers the entire time (when you really were). Are there any problems you're faced with right now that have an easy solution that you're not allowing yourself to see?

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**New Book from Tom Heck!**

# Teambuilding Puzzles



**100 Puzzles and Activities for Creating Teachable Moments in Creative Problem Solving, Consensus Building, Leadership, Exploring Diversity, Group Decision Making, Goal Setting, Active Learning, Communication & Teamwork**  
**(300 pages)**



Hi! I'm Tom Heck, author of the free e-book "Teambuilding Games on a Shoestring". If you like this free e-book I'm guessing you'll like my latest book entitled "Teambuilding Puzzles" in which I share how to turn puzzle solving from an individual cerebral experience to a kinesthetic group activity.

I'm joined in this book by three of my friends, some of the most prolific and talented adventure-based educators. Together we've created a teambuilding resource that will change the way you conduct your next group experience. These puzzles, activities and challenges teach valuable life skills from the classroom to the boardroom, and will be remembered long after the puzzles have been solved.

This extensive resource guide will show you how to use puzzles and challenges to building unity and connection in your group. The book also includes a resource and reference section, solutions to each challenge, and information on The Great Puzzle Quest. With over 300 pages of great ideas, you'll have enough activities and ideas for the next school year, or the next corporate fiscal year.

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Note: This book is also available at [www.teambuildingpuzzles.com](http://www.teambuildingpuzzles.com) but you can only get the free e-books at the special website.

I've included a sample activity from the book below.

## Just Passing Through

Making the most of minimal resources



This is a great activity to present first to individuals, and then to teams. Synergy, collaboration and ultimately a successful team effort are only an index card and a pair of scissors away.

The challenge of Just Passing Through is to create an opening in an index card big enough for any person to pass completely through, without further damage to the card. You can begin this puzzle as an individual challenge and then encourage participants to collaborate and work together to create the best concepts possible (sharing best practices).

**Supplies** You will need an index card and a pair of school scissors for each person or team.

**Teachable Moments** Even small things can be made bigger, if you just know how. When the average person reads this challenge and then looks at the index card, their reaction is often “No way!” Activities that look impossible, but are not, are excellent methods for expanding our horizons. This is also a useful activity for teaching the concept of making do with what you have or making a little go a

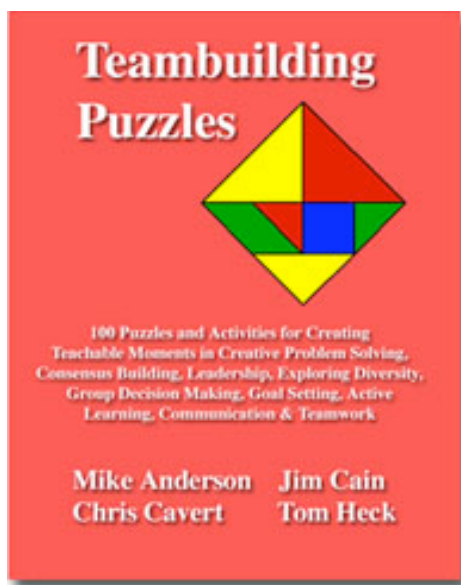
Sample activity from the book **Teambuilding Puzzles**  
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long way. Another teachable moment could be that in order to solve some challenges, we have to expand our thinking, just as the index card needed to expand.

**Variations** You can try this same activity with a letter size piece of paper and nothing else. Invite participants to use their hands to tear the paper as necessary. Or consider using a standard piece of writing paper and challenging the group to create an opening big enough to drive a car through!

**Hints and Clues** Think about geodesic spheres (Hoberman spheres) and toys that expand and contract. How could you create a similar function in a piece of paper?

**Solution on next page**



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**Solution** There are at least two different cutting techniques that greatly enlarge an opening in an index card (shown here). Each pattern turns the index card into a giant circle.

