

It's Upside Down!

The Surprising Business Wisdom Hidden in Jigsaw Puzzles

Ever find wisdom where you least expect it? That happened to me one weekend when I just needed to turn my brain off. Work had me worn down, and the weather was doing its best to keep me indoors. So, I found myself reaching for a jigsaw puzzle. Why a jigsaw puzzle, you might ask? Aren't those reserved for the elderly or the eternally bored? But there I was, scoffing at the cliché, yet intrigued by the challenge.

As I pieced together each fragment, something remarkable happened. The puzzle, which I had dismissed as trivial, began to mirror the complexities of business strategy and management. Piece by piece, I was not just reconstructing a scattered image, but also patching together fragmented parts of my professional knowledge. Surprisingly, I found myself humbled, enlightened, and profoundly educated by, of all things, a simple jigsaw puzzle.

Lesson One: Piecing it Together: The Power of Planning

Opening a new jigsaw puzzle box reveals a jumbled chaos of pieces. It is overwhelming, much like facing a slew of new projects at work. Instead of diving in headfirst, the first crucial step is to get organized.

In this chapter, we will compare sorting puzzle pieces to strategizing for work projects. You will learn effective ways to prioritize, categorize and plan your tasks. We will discuss how setting up a clear strategy not only makes daunting tasks manageable but can also make them enjoyable. Like a puzzle, every task is part of a bigger picture, and knowing where each piece fits is your first win.

I initially thought working on a jigsaw puzzle would be the perfect way to "turn the brain OFF!" But the moment I dumped those chaotic pieces onto the table, my business brain switched to auto-pilot mode—whether I liked it or not.

"Holy cow, that's a lot of pieces! Who in their right mind chooses this for fun?"

"What's the best strategy here?"

"What's my plan of attack?"

The moment I shifted from panic to planning, things started to click—figuratively, then literally. Step one: Sort and organize! In no time, pieces were grouped into borders and bodies. Then they got more personal: sorted by color, images, words, and yes—even body parts and the ever-mysterious "weird" or "no clue" categories.

Great, I made even more of a mess! Nice job, self!

It was time for a project check-in. What was missing? Ah, a key tool: some way to store these sorted pieces. I eventually splurged on a puzzle table with drawers (yes, that's a real thing), but for now, plain old, labeled boxes would do the trick.

Cool. Everything was organized. Now, the real fun began!

Why didn't I just dive into the puzzle? Why plan? Why organize?

Some projects, like a 1,000-piece jigsaw, look overwhelming at first. Planning is a lifesaver. It smooths out the process, reduces stress, and prevents your staff (or family) from starting a mutiny. Without a plan, you are just flailing in a sea of puzzle pieces.

Lessons Learned:

- **Planning.and.Organization:** Absolutely crucial.
- **Evaluating.Tools:** You need the right tools to succeed—figure out what is missing.
- **Quick.Action:** Once you know what you need, get it.

- Patience: Remember, Rome was not built in a day, and a puzzle isn't completed in an hour.

Business Message:

Take.a.Moment.Before.You.Leap;The.Art.of.Thoughtful.Leadership

As leaders, whether new to the role or seasoned veterans, there is a compelling urge to dive headfirst into projects. The pressure is real—we are often measured by how quickly we can show results. However, it is crucial to pause and remember that what's truly valued is successful execution, not just speedy progress.

A rushed approach might tick boxes quickly, but a chaotic outcome will catch the eye of everyone—from your team to the top brass—and not in a good way. Instead, take a moment to collect your thoughts and strategize. This does not mean delaying decisions for lengthy periods but taking enough time to outline a clear and effective plan.

Here is how you can make this practical in a business setting:

Break.It.Down: Start by sorting your projects into distinct elements. What are the key components, and what objectives do they each serve?

Assign.the.Right.People: Identify which members of your staff are best suited for each element of the project. Who has the skills and experience to drive success in each area?

Gather.Your.Tools: Before you jump in, make sure you have the necessary tools at hand. This preparation prevents delays once the project kicks off.

Budget.and.Resources: Evaluate the financial costs and resources required. Are the allocations adequate to meet your goals without overextending your team?

Approvals.and.Permissions: Ensure you have all necessary approvals in place. This is crucial to avoid roadblocks that could derail your timelines.

Realistic.Timelines: Compare the assigned deadlines against realistic expectations. If there is a mismatch, understand why and adjust plans accordingly.

By taking these steps, you not only prepare your team for success but also position yourself as a thoughtful leader who values both efficiency and effectiveness. Remember, a little planning goes a long way in preventing a lot of cleanups later on.