



FACILITATION GUIDE

The So That Chain

Following one task down until you reach the person at the end of it

An Every Piece Matters exercise

Yours to run with your own team.

People by Design

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Before you run it

PRACTICE	Showing people they are needed
TEACHING OBJECTIVE	Prove that each person's work reaches somebody, and that most of us have never pictured who.
TIME	14 minutes. 8 activity, 6 debrief.
SHORTENED VERSION	In a packed workshop agenda, 12 minutes: 7 activity, 5 debrief. Pair read down to eighty seconds each, or cut it entirely and go straight to the debrief.
GROUP SIZE	6 to 200
ROOM	Runs identically in every room, including on video.
MATERIALS	Worksheet, one per person. Pens.
MUSIC	None during the writing. Silence is the point. Low instrumental during the pair read is optional.
SETUP	Participants seated wherever they are. Worksheets face down until called.
SOURCE	People by Design original. The "so that" construction draws on Zach Mercurio's published work on purpose and mattering. The chain structure, the three-link rule, and the facilitation are People by Design.

The action, step by step

0:00 to 0:45	Write the task
0:45 to 1:30	First so that
1:30 to 2:30	Second so that
2:30 to 3:30	Third so that
3:30 to 4:15	Identify the person, answer the name question
4:15 to 8:00	Pairs. Each reads their chain aloud, start to finish. The listener says back who they heard at the end.
8:00 to 14:00	Full group debrief

What participants write on

Reproduce this on a single side. One per person. Face down until you call it.

SOMETHING YOU DID AT WORK LAST WEEK

SO THAT

SO THAT

SO THAT

WHO IS THE PERSON AT THE END OF THAT CHAIN?

Do you know their name? Yes / No / There isn't one

Facilitator script

Everything in the ruled blocks is said aloud and is meant to be rewritten in your own words. Everything in a copper block is a stage direction. The timings and the silences are the parts that should not change, because those are load-bearing.

"I want to try something. It takes about eight minutes and most of it is quiet.

Turn your worksheet over. At the top, write down one thing you actually did last week. Not your job title. Not your role. One task. Something small is better than something big."

Pause 45 seconds. Do not fill the silence.

"Now the first line. So that what? Why did that task need doing? Write it."

Pause 45 seconds.

"Take what you just wrote and do it again. That thing you wrote, so that what? Keep going down the chain."

Pause 60 seconds.

"One more time. Third link."

Pause 60 seconds.

"Now look at the bottom of your chain. There should be a person there. Somebody who is better off because you did that thing last week.

Write down who they are. And then answer the last question honestly, because nobody is going to see this. Do you know their name?"

HOLD. Pause 45 seconds. Watch the room. This is where it lands.

"Turn to one person. About ninety seconds each. Read your chain aloud, start to finish. Listener, your only job is to say back who you heard at the end of it. That is all."

Seated and standing

There is no separate seated path. This exercise is seated by default and it loses nothing on a video call.

The standing escalation, if you have room. After the pair read, ask people to stand if their chain ended on a person whose name they know. The visual of a half-standing room is powerful and it costs nothing.

Make standing optional out loud, and never comment on who stayed seated. In most rooms the people who stay seated are the finding.

Debrief questions, in order

Ask these three, in this sequence. The order is doing work. Do not add a fourth.

1. How many links did it take before you reached a person?

Hands. Three links, four, more. Some will say they never got there. Acknowledge that without rescuing it.

2. Who found out that their chain ends on somebody they have never actually pictured?

This is the moment. Let it be quiet. Do not fill it.

3. What would be different about Monday if that person's face was in your head while you did the work?

The tie-in

"People do not stay because of what they earn. They stay when they know they are needed, and they know they are needed when somebody shows them exactly where their work lands.

Most of us have never been shown that. Most of us have never shown it to anybody else either. Not because we do not care. Because nobody ever handed us the chain and asked us to follow it down.

Everybody in an organization is holding a piece. Almost everyone can see their own piece perfectly well. Almost nobody has been shown the picture it goes into."

Every piece matters is not a nice sentiment. It is an operational claim, and it is falsifiable. If a piece genuinely did not matter, you could remove it and nothing would change. Try that. Remove the person nobody thinks is essential and watch what happens in three weeks.

Behavior named

Name one person whose chain I will trace, and then go tell them what I found. Not ask them. Tell them. For leader audiences this is the highest-return homework in the catalogue.

Fails when

- You fill the silence. The pauses are the exercise. If you talk through them, people write role descriptions instead of thinking.
- The group is all individual contributors with no line of sight to a customer or beneficiary. In back-office and compliance functions the chain often stalls at an abstraction. Fix it by pre-seeding one example from their world in the transition script.
- Someone's chain honestly ends nowhere. It happens, and it is real information rather than a failure. Do not rescue them. Say "that is worth knowing, and it is a fixable thing, and it is not your fault." Then move on.
- You ask people to read their chain to the full room. Pairs only. Full-room reading turns a private realization into a performance.
- You use four links because three felt short. Three is usually enough to reach a person and short enough to hold attention. Only go to four if you are working with a back-office group and you have seen three stall.



Everything from Every Piece Matters is free and online.

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*The three-practice framework is Dr. Zach Mercurio's, from *The Power of Mattering: How Leaders Can Create a Culture of Significance* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2025). The Puzzle Philosophy, the Mattering Deficit Diagnostic, and the exercises are People by Design originals.*

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