

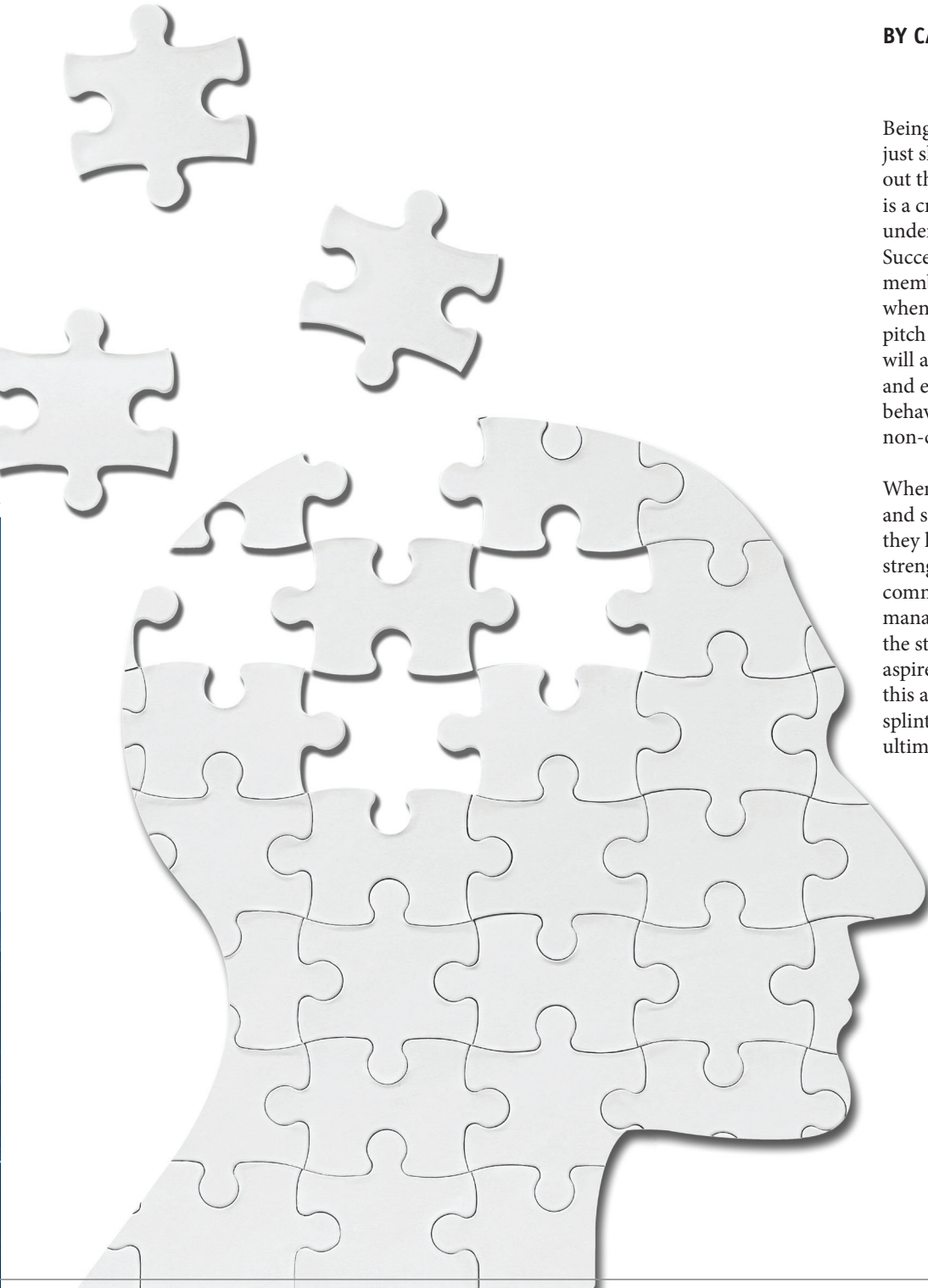
# Understanding YOUR **PUZZLE PIECE**

Important roles in high-functioning teams

BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

Being part of a team means much more than just showing up, giving a report, then dashing out the door at the end of the meeting. There is a critical component for team players to understand their best fit within the team. Successful teams recognize that like a puzzle, members are made up of unique strengths and when one member is missing, others should pitch in and help to fill the void. Team leaders will also identify and utilize team strengths and enable individuals to discuss their behavioral strengths in a productive, safe and non-confrontational way.

When members understand their personal and social roles within the team framework, they have a greater understanding of their strengths, which leads to more effective communication between colleagues and managers. And when individuals acknowledge the strengths of others, then that team can aspire to unimaginable results. Without this appreciation and recognition, the team splinters through jealousy and score-keeping, ultimately leading to their destruction.





## Discovering Your Role

Dr. Meredith Belbin of the Belbin Team has identified personal and social roles that contribute to the victory of a group. Like a puzzle, each position becomes a necessary piece to form high-functioning teams. Consider what position best describes your role:

- **Encourager** – *Affirms, supports and praises the efforts of fellow group members. Demonstrates warmth and provides a positive attitude in meetings.*

The Encourager possesses a keen gift to overlook weaknesses and hone in on the strengths of a person. This invaluable insight allows them to practice what they do best: affirm, support, praise and motivate the team to continue their climb to excellence. When the team faces unexpected challenges, such as deadlines appearing out of nowhere or budgets getting slashed, the team is able to persevere and continue for another day thanks to the finesse of the Encourager.

- **Harmonizer** – *Conciliates differences between individuals. Seeks ways to reduce tension and diffuse a situation by providing further explanations or using humor.*

Virtually every family has a Harmonizer. Think of a mother who cares for scrapes and makes sure all the children are tucked into bed. She is the Harmonizer who makes sure all her children play nice. Harmonizers function as a neutral person—leaning toward a bipartisan perspective—to mend weatherworn relationships.

- **Compromiser** – *Offers to change their position for the good of the group. Willing to meet others half way.*

The Compromiser is more concerned about the welfare of the greater good than their own needs, concerns and wants. They recognize that one must give a little to get a little and that in the end, everyone can get a fair slice of the pie. Compromisers are known for being open minded and thus flexible. They know when it's time to let go and to fall out of love with their position. They are the leaders of change because once they are brave enough to make a change, then others tend to follow.

- **Gatekeeper** – *Regulates the flow of communication. Makes sure all members have a chance to express themselves by encouraging the shy and quiet members to contribute their ideas.*

The Gatekeeper limits those who dominate the conversation and may suggest group rules or standards that ensure everyone gets a chance to speak up. Because the Gatekeeper's role is to include everyone, their approach is caring and understanding as they call upon the shy and quiet member, not wanting to embarrass or offend them.

- **Follower** – *Accepts what others say and decide even though they have not necessarily contributed to the decision or expressed their own thoughts.*

Followers are invaluable to a team because on those rare occasions when they have something to say, it is awe-inspiring. Followers do their

best work when listening and they are typically non-judgmental. They gather the facts and evaluate them in their quiet way, as though on the outside looking in. Listening is a powerful skill as a listener hears the entire story and fully comprehends the direction of the team. From this perspective, the follower can become the leader by sharing their insights and observations.

## Contributing to Success

Were you able to find yourself in one of these roles? Understanding your role will help you exercise your strengths in a way that promotes team effectiveness. Additionally, understanding the role of others allows you to fully acknowledge their importance and helps you determine how to best interact with them. You have the unique opportunity to promote their strengths by sharing these roles with your team. By doing so, they too will discover the importance of their role and their potential to enhance team effectiveness. When all of these roles are connected, then great teams can be put together—just like a puzzle without missing pieces. ✪



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