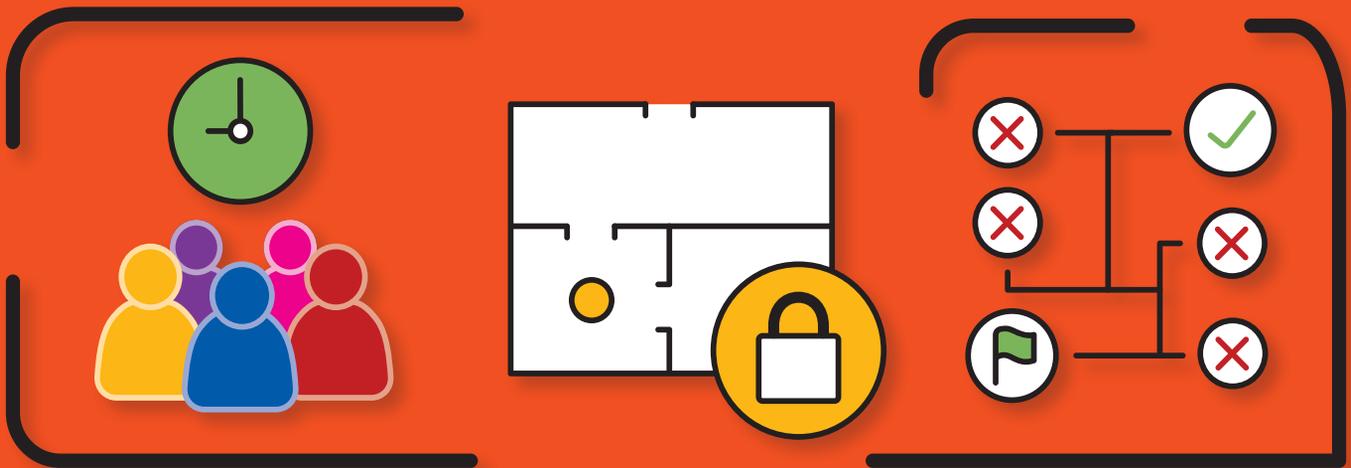


# Lock In Learning With Escape Rooms

Lisa Haberman



# LOCK IN LEARNING WITH ESCAPE ROOMS

Purpose .....	2
Design.....	2
Game Play.....	8
Recap the Event .....	8
Secure Buy-In and Generate Buzz .....	8
Measure Success .....	9
Conclusion .....	10
References & Resources .....	11

## JOB AIDS

Escape Room Planning Template.....	12
Escape Room Storytelling Development Questionnaire .....	14

Need a trainer's lifeline? Visit [td.org/TDatWork](http://td.org/TDatWork).

Printed in the United States of America.

For help or inquiries about your subscription, please contact Customer Care at 800.628.2783/703.683.8100 (international).

*TD at Work* (ISSN 2373-5570, Electronic ISSN 2373-5589, ISBN 978-1-95215-7-103, Electronic eISBN 978-1-95215-7-110) is published monthly by the Association for Talent Development, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. *TD at Work* is available for subscription in print or digitally. The subscription rate for the Monthly All-Access (12 print and digital issues, plus archive access) is \$119 (ATD national members) and \$159 (nonmembers). The monthly digital subscription rate for 12 issues is \$69 (ATD national members) and \$99 (nonmembers). Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, Virginia, and additional entries. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *TD at Work*, 1640 King Street Alexandria, VA 22314. Claims for replacement of subscription issues not received must be made within three months of the issue date. Copyright © December 2020 *TD at Work* and ATD. All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems—without the express written permission of the publisher. For permission requests, please go to [copyright.com](http://copyright.com), or contact Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923 (telephone: 978.750.8500, fax: 978.646.8600). ATD Press grants permission for the material on pages 12–15 to be reproduced for personal use.

## AUTHOR

### **Lisa Haberman**

Lisa Haberman is an experienced L&D professional with a passion for strengths development, customer service, and overall learner experience. Creating new strategies and processes to elevate organization development, along with sharing her knowledge, energizes her.

### **Content Manager, Instructional Design**

Eliza Blanchard, APTD

### **Editor, TD at Work**

Patty Gaul

### **Managing Editor**

Joy Metcalf

### **Senior Graphic Designer**

Shirley E.M. Raybuck

**Y**ou and several colleagues have just entered a room. You look around and observe what appears to be someone's office—there's a desk, filing cabinet, and bookshelf. But you also see other items, which look askew. There are weird letters on the wall. There's a crooked picture. There are random keys. The door shuts behind you, you receive a scenario and question to read, and your one-hour timer starts.

You and your colleagues are in an escape room. Your mission is to read the scenario and solve clues to uncover the mystery and unlock the door to the room and get out. All the while, you must learn how to work together.

Escape rooms have been growing in popularity since they first appeared in Japan in 2007. *The Economist* estimates that in 2019 there were more than 10,000 around the world, including over 2,300 in the US. They aren't just for fun or team building. They could be your answer to creating a gamified learning journey for

a group within your organization—one that balances learning objectives with creating a fun environment.

Turning the escape room game concept into a learning environment can be easy to design and organize, a breeze to facilitate, and fun for all involved—both the creator and guide and those playing. By combining old-school design techniques and pairing them with games people know and love, you can accomplish your gamification goal—as long as you connect it to your learning goals and objectives.

In this issue of *TD at Work*, I will detail:

- Why you should consider an escape room experience for your organization
- Practical steps for designing your game
- Ways to communicate and market the escape room learning event
- The return on investment for staging this gamified learning experience

## Purpose

Traditionally, an escape room is a game where a team of players cooperatively discover clues, solve puzzles, and accomplish tasks in one or more rooms to progress and reach a specific goal in a limited amount of time. Most

### The Beginning of Escape Rooms

The concept of escape rooms comes from video games, where players move their characters around a room to solve mysteries and level up. In 2004, Toshimitsu Takagi created *Crimson Room*, the first escape room video game. From there, a Japanese event production company brought the first live escape room to realization in Asia in 2007. The idea was to have players fully immersed in a themed room, where they had to solve mysteries in an allotted time to escape.

In 2011, escape rooms started opening in Europe and the US, before expanding to other parts of Europe and Canada two years later. As of 2019, there were more than 2,300 in the US, according to a Room Escape Artist survey, and almost 1,500 in the UK, according to the *Guardian*.

people think it is a fun way to work together and do something different. Beating an escape room requires creativity, teamwork, patience, and speed. Players can be complete strangers at the beginning of the game and come out as teammates at the end. Escape rooms can also be an entirely new way to experience storytelling (an effective means of learning) by tackling challenging puzzles and interactive adventures.

Now, consider your role in your company. How often have you had to dig deeply into problems or numbers to determine the ideal option for addressing an issue, deploying the best training program, or deciding on the optimal path to move forward? Most employees have some element of that decision-making process in their daily tasks. That is one reason an escape room can align well with the skills and attributes your organization is working on or has mastered and continues to culturally cultivate in employees. Working together to solve puzzles improves communication, offers the possibility of trial and error, and engages people's creativity.

In a world where we are constantly driven to grow personally and professionally, escape rooms are an effective way to introduce a concept or solidify that your training session has stuck with learners—in an enjoyable way. Learners will be able to come together—whether in person or virtually—to use their different strengths and knowledge to work through the puzzles together.

## Design

Escape rooms are a means of active learning and a way to exemplify learning transfer as participants put their skills or knowledge to use. The steps to build your escape room experience are broken down into six key elements:

1. Determine your learning objectives.
2. Decide the number of players and time allotment.
3. Select a theme for your room and the activities.
4. Develop a captivating story line.
5. Plan your puzzles and games.
6. Build your room.

The idea of an escape room and being locked in a small space may generate stressful feelings for you or other employees. However, it doesn't need to be that way. You don't have to create a stressful environment to pull off this

type of activity at your organization. Further, you can adapt the escape room experience into a virtual, remote option.

## Learning Objectives

Determining your learning objectives is the first step in the process of developing any learning initiative. What do learners need to know or be able to do by the time they finish? The objectives are key to determining which types of games or puzzles you use—and you will want one activity per objective.

You could use the entire game experience as an introduction to the learning objectives; to establish a baseline of learners' skills and knowledge, setting the stage for an upcoming training event; or at the conclusion of a training event to grasp the stickiness of your objective. Where you place your game will depend on the overall design of the training initiative.

Conversely, your escape room could be a stand-alone experience. It works well for team and trust building. Introducing individuals who may have never had to work together will facilitate collaboration and teamwork quickly via the game, whereas those skills could take more time to develop in normal day-to-day interactions. The group will quickly realize each other's attributes: who will take the lead in conversations, who is competitive, who is analytic or strategic. Those attributes will naturally arise among the learners within the escape room environment.

## Number of Players

Before you're able to sketch your story line, determine approximately how many players will be participating in the game. The escape room concept works best for groups of three to 10 individuals, because that group size enhances collaboration and out-of-the-box thinking.

With larger groups, you may need to get creative with how you set up the game to ensure everyone is engaged and able to play. That may look like setting up multiple rooms if you have the physical space or, for virtual games, using the breakout room functionality with video-conferencing. Use the space—physical or virtual—to your advantage and as a key component to how you design.

The number of puzzles you use and their difficulty, based on your learning objectives, will determine the

**Escape rooms are a means of active learning and a way to exemplify learning transfer.**

length of your escape room experience, as will how much time you have for the overarching training event. A typical escape room experience is one hour. However, if the game is part of a larger conference or training event, you may need to shorten that. I delve into timing further below when discussing your escape room design.

## Choose a Theme

Two important elements often overlooked when developing an organizational escape room event are the theme and story behind the game.

Choosing a theme can make the event fun and unify the various elements. In commercial escape rooms, the scenario is often based on a mystery, such as escaping a room before a bomb explodes or solving who stole a famous piece of art. Some are based on classic fictional characters such as Sherlock Holmes. The room and props then reflect the scenario. If participants are tracking down an art thief, the room may have various paintings and sculptures within which there are clues to the mystery.

If you are running the escape room as part of a larger event or training program, you may want to tie your learning event in to the theme of the larger program. Another idea is to relate the escape room experience with the participants' discipline and industry—for example, if the training program is for healthcare administrators, the theme could be saving a patient in a hospital.

## Storytelling

Tied to your theme, a captivating, full story for learners enables them to connect to the event and get into character. That immersion also will bring your game to a new level of interactivity, along with the stickiness you want