

Get Together, Get Away, Get a Clue!

DR CLUE
Treasure Hunts



Rockin' Teams Know How to "Role" With It By David Blum

Hobbling down a cobblestone street in New Orleans' French Quarter, her hand pressed firmly to her lower back, Catherine is clearly struggling with her Dr. Clue Treasure Hunt—and she's not at all happy about it! Her boss Steve-- far, far ahead-- is setting a breakneck pace, so intent is he on solving the next clue and leading his team to a morning victory. The lunch break arrives at last and, not surprisingly, all hell breaks loose! Catherine is furious with Steve for driving the team so hard and ignoring her recovery from recent back surgery. Steve is on the defensive, declaring he was only pushing everyone on for the sake of team motivation and performance.

What has gone wrong here, and how can it be resolved?

Fortunately for the team, there's Mona. Stepping into the fray, Mona suggests a compromise—Why not hire a horse and buggy carriage for the afternoon session, thereby allowing the group both to continue the hunt and to spare Catherine grievous injury? Steve and Catherine grudgingly accept the solution and the activity is salvaged (at some financial hardship to Steve!) Thank goodness for Mona, in her role as "**Harmonizer.**"

Over the 7 ½ years I've been facilitating teambuilding programs, I've become rather fascinated by the roles people play within teams. It's as if you can bring together all the talent in the world, but if you don't have the right "role" players on your team, things just don't seem to work.

So what are the key roles people must play in teams?

I posed this question to master trainer Pete Grazier of Teambuilding, Inc. (teambuildinginc.com) and he pointed to at least three main role categories:

- Group Task Roles
- Group Maintenance and Building Roles
- Individual Roles

Put another way, there are:

- 1) Roles that pertain to achieving the job task
- 2) Roles that relate to keeping the human relationships in order and
- 3) Roles that people take on in an effort to meet their own individual needs, often contrary to role or team needs.

Group Task Roles

In a Dr. Clue treasure hunt the semi-official "Job Titles" are Facilitator, Map Keeper, Time Keeper, and Photographer. (I also ask people to assign a Safety Monitor!) But assigning "duties" isn't quite enough. A number of "non-official" task roles must also emerge if the team is really going to achieve its *task*.

Some examples of Group Task Roles are:

- **THE INITIATOR:** Suggesting new ideas, solutions and proposals
- **THE INFORMATION SEEKER:** Checking the factual adequacy of information; picking up others' ideas and developing them
- **THE ANALYZER:** Judging the different factors, thinking things through thoroughly
- **THE SUMMARIZER:** Pulling together and summarizing the group's ideas
- **THE RECORDER:** Writing down the group's suggestions and decisions and acting as "group memory."
- **THE COORDINATOR:** Causing others to work together toward a common goal

I'm sure you all can come up with many more task roles as well.

Group Maintenance and Building Roles

A treasure hunt team will never solve its clues and reach all the clue locations unless it has at least a few team members who are focused on keeping people "group-centered." Some examples of Group Building and Maintenance Roles are:

- **THE ENCOURAGER:** Praising, agreeing with and accepting contributions of others
- **THE HARMONIZER:** Mediating differences between others and relieving tension
- **THE COMPROMISER:** Accepting compromise from within his/her own conflict situation in order to move the group along.
- **THE ENERGIZER:** Revving people up and providing humor and enthusiasm

The most successful teams possess a healthy balance of Group Task role players and Group Maintenance role players. Imagine, for a second, a team made up entirely of "Task-Masters"—people highly directed towards achieving their goal, at whatever cost. I've seen many of these teams over the years, so skilled and so driven, but lacking the ability to maintain group commitment and cohesiveness. Tempers always flare eventually, especially when people go off on their own hard-driving agendas. On the flip side, imagine now a team of "Maintenance-Mavens"—people content to move along happily, with ample good spirits and collegiality, but not really making much progress toward the group's goals. No doubt you've encountered this very harmonious group—at a nearby "happy hour".

Individual Roles

Both of the role categories above – Group Task Roles & Group Maintenance and Building Roles – when in balance, tend to support and sustain a well-functioning team. The Individual Roles, however, do just the opposite; they throw the team off track, interfering both with group harmony and task completion.

Some examples of Individual Roles are:

- **THE AGGRESSOR:** Deflating others' status, attacking the group, asserting that "The right answer is..."
- **THE BLOCKER:** Resisting, disagreeing, and consistently choosing a negative approach
- **THE RECOGNITION SEEKER:** Calling attention to himself, boasting, and reporting on personal achievements.
- **THE CLASS CLOWN:** Goofing around, engaging in horseplay, maintaining a consistently cynical and non-serious stance.
- **THE HELP SEEKER:** Expressing insecurity and personal confusion, attempting to call forth "sympathy"
- **THE RAMBLER:** Taking the conversation off on wild tangents, missing meetings, telling jokes that go on too long.

When your team is dominated by Individual Role players, mired in their own negative behavior patterns, you certainly have yourself a problem. Confrontation, mediation, and rewarding of positive behavior will all be in order, to varying degrees. In some cases, you may even need to ask certain people to leave the group. Individual needs cannot, of course, be discounted. They are part of the equation. But in order for a team to be fully effective, the needs of the team really do need to take precedence over the need of any one person.

**So who are you? Harmonizer or Aggressor? Energizer or Class Clown?
Encourager or Recognition Seeker?**

**Now here's your Assignment (if you choose to accept it):
Look at all the roles above, and ask yourself "What role(s) do I tend to play
when I'm part of a team?" Be brutally honest with yourself. And then, if
you're feeling even more courageous, ask a few of your current or former
teammates if they agree or disagree with your personal assessment. Good
luck!**

[For a different take on Team Roles, check out the fascinating and well-respected
Belbin Team Role Model: <http://www.belbin.info/>]

Dave Blum
Dr. Clue Treasure Hunts

www.drclue.com
drclue@drclue.com
415.566.3905