



Get Together. Get Away. *Get a Clue.*

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Dr. Clue: Solving the Puzzles of Teamwork

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Dr. Clue Central

Welcome again to the Dr. Clue Teambuilding Newsletter!

Here we are at the beginning of 2007, the fifth year for the Dr. Clue Teambuilding Newsletter!

My own biggest news this year, by far, is that I became engaged to my wonderful partner, Jennifer, in January. We're planning an October wedding, with clues and puzzles announcing each aspect of the day. (Our friends would expect nothing less!) ☺ If you're interested in reading more about the "engagement moment", check out my latest [blog](#) entry.

In this month's issue, we hope you'll find something in common with our icebreaker; discover the joys of conflict resolution in our feature article; and think laterally with our latest puzzle challenge. Enjoy!

Dave Blum
Editor, the Dr. Clue Teambuilding Newsletter

Teambuilding Icebreaker

Commonalities

Set Up:

A room or open space, large enough for all participants to move around a bit.

Process:

Ask participants to find a partner.

- In stage one, each duo has *three* minutes to come up with at least three things they have in common. When the two minutes have elapsed, everyone comes into a circle, with the duos standing next to each other. Each pair then shares one of their commonalities. As each pair speaks, people in the circle who also share that commonality must immediately throw their hands up in the air and say, “Me too!”
- In stage two, people find a new partner. This new pairing has *two* minutes to come up with at least three things they agree about concerning teams and teamwork. After two minutes, everyone again comes into a circle and the pairs take turns sharing their commonalities. Again, as each pair shares their information, people in the circle who also share that commonality (about teams and teamwork) immediately throw their hands up in the air and say, “Me too!”
- Finally in stage three, people again find a new partner. As in stage one, they must discover three general commonalities (in one particular topic area). The new pairing, however, has only *one* minute to do this, and they must *act everything out without talking*, using only gestures and body language. The process afterwards is the same as in stages one and two, with everyone coming to the circle, sharing their commonalities, and saying “Me too!” The commonalities, however, must be acted out non-verbally, with the people in the circle trying to guess what’s being mimed.

Debrief: How did it feel in the first stage, finding generic commonalities? What did you focus the most on: personal appearance, hobbies, tastes in food, preferences in travel...? What was surprising about your discoveries? How did you feel about your partner before, during and after this stage? What was different about the second stage? Did it feel more or less comfortable to discuss a business issue, like teamwork, rather than personal issues? Was the time limit a factor, and how? What was different about the third stage? How did it feel communicating non-verbally? What were the most successful strategies for getting your point across? How did you feel about your partner before, during and after this stage? What emotions arose for you in all three stages when you were in the circle and other people demonstrated that they shared (or didn’t share) your commonalities?

The Point: We tend to feel closer to people when we understand the similarities we share with them. Discovering our differences, in a safe environment, can be quite fascinating as well. In this game, each participant gets to know at least three new people, on both a personal and a business level. As the time limit decreases, they must become more and more efficient in their commonality-seeking, until finally they must find similarities without even speaking. Somehow it feels especially good to realize not only that a few people (in pairs) have much in common with you, but also that many others (in the circle) might also be like you. Teams need diversity to achieve a variety of tasks, but discovering commonalities goes a long way towards increasing everyone’s comfort level and building trust.

Dr. Clue is the premier designer of corporate teambuilding treasure hunts, worldwide. We begin with the cool museum or neighborhood of your choice, convenient to your office or conference locale. We then bring the area alive by scouting out its hidden treasures; its statues, plaques, murals, and monuments. To reach each secret location, you and your team will need to solve our challenging puzzles, codes and ciphers. Along the trail, we’ll coach you on the steps successful business teams take in working towards high-performance levels.

To read more about our hunt packages, [click here](#). To see a list of our 78 current treasure hunt locations, including New York, London, Chicago, Paris, New Orleans, Barcelona, Denver, Geneva, Las Vegas, Madrid, Vienna and San Francisco, [click here](#).

Feature Article

I Know What You Must Be Feeling...

By Dave Blum

One of my favorite reads of 2006 was [Gary Harper's](#) wonderful "[The Joy of Conflict Resolution](#)" (New Society Publishers, 2004). In this marvelously concise and entertaining book, filled with numerous stories and sample dialogues, Harper takes us through the various steps of conflict resolution and introduces his elegant "Drama Triangle". His model is deceptively simple: Harper suggests that, when caught up in a conflict, we all take on one of three archetypal roles, each of which he places on a corner of a triangle. As we enter into a fight or argument, we tend to play out one of these roles:

- The Victim, who sees himself as the prey of the evil, uncaring villain and seeks either a sympathetic shoulder to cry on or else an advocate to "sally forth" against the nefarious villain and "right the wrong" (Harper, pg. 4)
- The Hero, who sees himself as the noble and courageous warrior, going into battle against the villain, either for his own benefit or as the champion of a victim (or victims).
- The Villain, who also sees himself as either a victim or a "misunderstood hero" (Harper, pg. 6), but who is, nevertheless, perceived by the other two role types as controlling, uncaring and/or malicious.

Surely you can recall a situation when you were angry at someone and found yourself thinking either:

- "I've been wronged; he/she is making my life miserable and there's nothing I can do about it." (VICTIM) ...or...
- "I'm not going to take it anymore; he/she will pay for this!" (HERO) ...or...
- "I'm just trying to make sure things are getting done right and everyone's angry at me. Sheesh!" (VILLAIN or self-perceived victim)

Once you fall into one of the drama triangle roles, the situation tends to escalate. Victims see someone as a villain and start complaining about him behind the scenes, hoping to attract attention and maybe an advocate; heroes see someone as a villain, go on the offensive and occasionally cross the line into angry self-righteousness; villains see someone else as the villain and try either to take charge of the situation and be the hero or to seek out sympathy, feeling themselves victimized and misunderstood. All three types feel sure that their intentions are positive and their motives pure in the face of an uncaring villain.

We see people acting out the drama triangle all the time, in all manner of circumstances – but perhaps nowhere do we see this more "dramatically" than in business work teams, where jobs are on the line and tight deadlines often raise stress levels to a fever pitch. The question is, how do we get off the drama triangle?

Consider, for example, the following scenario, based on Harper's model: You're having a quiet lunch with a co-worker and friend, Tom, and you mention (strictly in confidence, of course) that you haven't yet started a report that's due this Friday. You're not proud of your procrastination, but hey, it's only Tuesday. You *should* still be able to finish the job on time. Nevertheless, you don't want it to get around that you're so far behind; it might make your whole team nervous, when really, you've got it handled – more or less.

The next day, your team leader, Janine, comes storming into your office, wringing her hands and spouting smoke. "I hear you haven't started the report yet! How is that possible! What have you been doing these last two weeks?!" Evidently your co-worker has ratted you out. So off you tromp to Tom's office, in full hero mode, ready to tear his villainous arms off.

Tom, of course, is taken aback. “Hey, back off!” he begins. “*You’re* the one who’s late on the report, not me!” Then, to make matters worse, he tries this classic line:

“Listen, *I know what you must be feeling...*”

Now I ask you, are there any seven words in the English language *less* likely to defuse a confrontational situation?! Quite naturally you respond, indignantly, “You most certainly do *not* know what I’m feeling, you dirty slug! How dare you even presume to know what I’m feeling?!”

And so the interaction tears along, with you feeling entirely justified in your anger in the face of a clear villain, and Tom feeling defensive and victimized. The recriminations and accusations continue, escalating out of control.

As one point of entry on the drama triangle, it’s worth looking more closely at the frequently-used expression, “*I know what you must be feeling...*” Why does this phrase set our teeth on edge? On the face of it, the expression is fairly innocuous. The speaker seems to be attempting to acknowledge the other person’s emotions. But this phrase backfires almost every time! So what’s going on here?

To begin with, there is an obvious disconnect between the words and the action. By all appearances, Tom has run off and blabbed about your report to the boss – something most of us would call an uncaring and, yes, villainous act. For him to now present himself as a sympathetic and compassionate friend seems the height of hypocrisy.

But it’s more than simply the disconnect, I think. As so often happens, word-choice really matters. In this case, the critical “trigger” words are “I know”. Tom, in essence, is saying, “I can read you like a book. Your emotions are pretty simple to discern, so simple that I can sum them up without much trouble.” But that is *not* how you feel when you’re angry! When you’re really steamed, you do not believe that your emotions are so easily named and categorized. Just the contrary! Your feelings are unique, complicated and multi-faceted. You’ve been wronged in so many ways, on so many levels; your enemy has no right to presume he knows *all* the ways that he’s hurt you. Only you can say how you’re feeling! For Tom, in this case, to say that he *knows* the full dimensions of your pain and suffering seems both ludicrous and insulting; it only further demonstrates how shallow and arrogant he really is. In your mind, Tom is a sneaky, hypocritical “villain,” trying to manipulate you, while in Tom’s mind, he’s the victim, being blasted for simply trying to be sympathetic. This is how the drama triangle works; once we’ve cast ourselves and others into roles – despite the best of intentions – everyone winds up feeling wronged or misunderstood.

So, if “*I know what you must be feeling...*” only escalates the conflict, then what would be a better approach? If sympathy doesn’t work, then how do we navigate our way out of the situation?

Harper suggests that the key is stepping off the Drama Triangle entirely. And the primary way to do this is through the development of curiosity. Rather than jumping reflexively into the roles of victim/hero/villain, we should instead ask ourselves, “What’s going on here?” “Why is this person (whom I’m labeling a “villain”) so upset?” “What are their intentions?” “What’s their story?”

To get these answers, I propose an alternate expression, similar to “*I know what you must be feeling...*”, but with a very different effect, namely:

“*Am I correct that...?*”

To see how it works, let’s revisit the earlier scenario and see how things might have gone differently with this one little change in semantics. As you recall, your team leader, Janine, is furious with you about your incomplete report. The only person you’ve told about the report is Tom, your co-worker. All evidence thus points to Tom as the stool pigeon. So off you storm to his office, where you proceed to rip into him with great intensity. This time, however, rather than getting defensive or playing the know-it-all, Tom inquires with curiosity, “You sound really angry. Am I correct that you blame me for your situation?”

You: “You better believe I do! I trusted you!”

Tom: “Okay, I acknowledge that I let you down and betrayed your confidence. And am I correct that you’re also afraid Janine’s going fire you?”

You: “You’ve got that right. You’ve gotten me into a ton of trouble!”

Tom: "All right. I understand that I've put you in a really bad predicament. And am I also correct that you're convinced I did this out of spite or maliciousness?"

You: "Well, I don't know about spite, exactly. I just think you didn't think about how shooting off your big mouth would affect me."

Tom: "Okay, got it. I hear what you're saying about my carelessness. So listen – yes, I told Janine about the report. My *intention*, however, was never to get you busted. I admit that I do have a big mouth sometimes and in this case, I really blew it. Janine was yelling at me about a project I was late on, and I was feeling cornered. So I told her, 'Hey, I'm not the only one late around here.' And she bullied me into telling her about you and your report. I understand the impact that this has had on you and I'm really sorry about that. My intentions were never spiteful. I was simply backed up against a wall and Janine weasled it out of me. I messed up and I'm sorry."

You: "Hmm, I *guess* I understand, although I still don't like it. Janine does have one heck of a temper – we've sure seen that. But you did screw up and I'm angry, though I guess, in your shoes, with Janine breathing down my neck, I might have made the same mistake myself. I'm sorry I blasted you without hearing the whole story."

Would this conversation really happen, in exactly this manner? Of course not! As human beings, our default habit of behavior in confrontations is either backpedaling (flight) or attacking (fight). Defensiveness is the rule, not the exception – especially in the workplace, where "touchy-feely" discussions about emotions are generally discouraged. In the alternate conversation above, Tom almost magically defuses the conflict by keeping his temper and asking personal questions in return. He avoids getting defensive and stepping onto the Drama Triangle. Admittedly, this dialog is idealized to the extreme; but I believe something like it is possible if we shift from an attitude of defensiveness to one of sincere curiosity.

"*Am I correct that...?*" is a useful phrase because it comes in the form of a question, rather than a declaration or assumption. Questions imply a certain degree of interest and curiosity. By asking questions, Tom demonstrates that he wants to know more about how *you* are feeling, and he's not going to put words in your mouth. This is, in itself, a disarming approach. "Villains" don't usually ask questions of their "victims" – they generally accuse and attack, or they tell you what you're thinking and feeling as a way of controlling or dismissing you.

In a sense, "*Am I correct that...?*" allows one to direct the conversation, but in a gentle way, through a series of empathetic guesses. Tom puts himself in your shoes and imagines some of the feelings you might be feeling: betrayal, fear, etc. He puts his guesses out there, but because he asks, "Am I correct?" you have the option of agreeing with his conjectures, disagreeing or refining the guesses with something more accurate, like, "I wouldn't say 'spite'; it's more like 'thoughtlessness'." YOU have the choice in describing what you're actually feeling. Tom has simply prompted you, with his guesses, to start talking about the hurts. Moreover, he has provided you with a shortcut for moving from your external feelings of anger and rage to the deeper, internal feelings of hurt and fear that tend to underlie such anger. As you saw in the conversation above, it's difficult for you to remain upset with someone when that person is earnestly and *sincerely* trying to hear and sympathize with your deepest emotions. And in the end, you might even be open to hearing their side of the story.

Like most expressions, "*Am I correct...?*" can be mis-applied. It's like when a communication coach says, "Don't use 'you' sentences, use 'I feel' sentences." So instead of saying "You're a jerk", you say "I feel that you're a jerk." So, too, with "*Am I correct...?*"; it can easily be mis-applied as "*Am I correct that you're being a big baby?*" or "*Am I correct that you need to calm down now?*" – neither of which are exactly demonstrations of sympathetic inquiry. The keys, then, to skillfully using this expression, are:

- Resisting the urge to become defensive.
- Being honestly curious about what the other person is feeling.
- Making guesses about the other person's deeper hurts, rather than responding to the surface anger.
- Letting the other person talk, and listening carefully to their responses.
- If possible, sharing some of your own feelings.

Offices can be tension-filled environments, especially when urgent team deadlines are around the corner; good communication, especially for teams, is essential for maintaining group harmony and for defusing the conflicts that inevitably arise.

The next time you find yourself in a confrontation at work, try to stop and ask yourself:

- “Have I cast this person as the uncaring, controlling villain?”
- “Am I acting like a victim, backing down, sacrificing my power and looking for a champion?”
- “Am I seeing myself as a hero, sure of my righteousness against the ‘evil’ villain?”

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, see if you can take a deep breath, put your anger/defensiveness on hold for a second, and start asking some questions. Stepping off the Drama Triangle allows you to avoid being swept up in the rush of charged emotions. By continuing to access your rational mind, you stand a much better chance of moving towards a solution to the problem – which is the point, after all.

Am I correct that you found this article helpful? Honestly, I do not know what you must be feeling! But I’m certainly hopeful!

(Again, many thanks to [Gary Harper](#) and his wonderful book, “[The Joy of Conflict Resolution](#)”.)

**What does a teambuilding treasure hunt look, feel and sound like?
Watch our [2-minute video](#) to find out.**

Puzzle

Answer to Last Issue’s Puzzle

In our last issue, we challenged you to solve a keyboard puzzle called, appropriately, “Just My Type”. You needed to convert numbers to letters to read the secret message, a somewhat nonsensical [but well-intentioned] quote from basketball player, Jason Kidd:

“We’re going to turn this team around three hundred and sixty degrees.”

DR. CLUE HONOR ROLL

The lucky winners of the drawing were:

- **Janet Usher**
- **Stacie L. Whiting**
- **Debbie Farthing**

Congratulations to all of you!

Today’s Puzzle Challenge: “Lateral Thinking”

Each of the following mini-puzzles gives you a common English expression. For example, in the following puzzle:

man

board

The answer is "Man overboard".
Get it?

Let's see how many you can figure out!

1. stand

i

2. /r/e/a/d/i/n/g/

3. r
road
a
d

4. cycle
cycle
cycle

5. 0

M.D.
Ph.D.

6. knee

light

7. ground

feet
feet
feet
feet
feet
feet

8. he's / himself

9. ecnalg
10. death life
11. THINK
12. ababaaabbbbbaaaabbbb ababaabbaabbbb

As always, we'll put the names of all clue solvers in a hat and draw three for a choice of Dr. Clue-brand items (hats, shirts, and Etch-a-Sketches)! Email your answers to drclue@drclue.com to take part in the drawing. Our three winners will appear in next issue's Dr. Clue Honor Roll.

Wondering how a typical treasure hunt CLUE works? We've got TWO sample clues up on our website! [Click here](#) to give them a try.

Dr. Clue's News

- Along with our classic treasure hunt program ("[TEAMBUILDING 101](#)"), Dr. Clue is proud to announce two fantastic new follow-up programs for groups interested in taking teamwork to the next level:

--[MASTER'S Program](#): More sophisticated puzzles and clues, performed *at your workplace*, along with one of six possible assessment tools.

--[DOCTORAL Program](#): Even more advanced puzzles and clues, combined with an introduction to the fascinating field of Social Network Analysis, as applied to teamwork.

- As January and February tend to be slower months here at Dr. Clue, we've been taking something of a breather while we concoct new "schemes". ☺ Nevertheless, we did enjoy leading some terrific winter hunts these last two months, including:

USA

--**Northeast**: The Make-up Designatory in the *Baltimore Inner Harbor* and Astellas Pharmaceuticals at the *American Museum of Natural History* in NYC.

--**Southwest**: ConocoPhillips in *Moody Gardens, Galveston, TX*.

--**Northern California**: Cisco Systems in *South Lake Tahoe* and also in the *San Jose Tech Museum*; The Law Office of Martin Guardado in *North Beach*, San Francisco; and Kaiser Permanente in *Napa City*.

- Our "[set](#)" hunt offerings rose to **78 locations worldwide** this year, with the addition of three exciting new hunts:

- [South Lake Tahoe Casinos](#): A touch of Las Vegas glitz in the Sierras.
- [Napa, CA](#): The heart of the California wine country.
- [Moody Gardens, Galveston, TX](#): Explore a rainforest, an aquarium and more in historic, seaside Galveston.

AND COMING IN MARCH: New hunts in [Atlanta, GA](#) and [San Juan, Puerto Rico!](#)

[Our clients](#), from Oracle to Yahoo, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Apple, and Wells Fargo, agree that Dr. Clue is cutting-edge teambuilding with a twist.

"If you liked The DaVinci Code, this would be the teambuilding for you!"

-Lincoln Smith, Siebel Systems

"For my money, David Blum, the hunt designer/facilitator, is the best in the country at combining the intrigue of a treasure hunt with the team development needs of our clients."

-Pete Grazier, President, Teambuilding Inc.

Reader Contributions

Please let us know how we can improve this newsletter!! We welcome puzzles, icebreakers, real-life teambuilding success stories—anything you'd like to contribute.

Dr. Clue's E-BOOK, "Solving the Puzzles of Teamwork," is ready for download...and it's free! A compilation of past newsletter articles, it offers great essays about teamwork, roles & relationships, communication, motivation, leadership, and much more. Download it right to your screen by [clicking here](#) and choosing the e-book option. Enjoy!

And remember: If you liked this newsletter, please forward it to a friend or a colleague. Information is meant to be shared!

Watch for the next edition of the Dr. Clue Teambuilding Newsletter in May 2007.

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Dr. Clue: Solving the Puzzles of Teamwork.

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