

Get Together, Get Away, Get a Clue!

DR CLUE
Treasure Hunts



Birth of a Clue

By David Blum

Over the years, a lot of people have been curious to know about how I got into the teambuilding/clue business. To which I answer, "What, being a Treasure Hunt Master is not a normal career!" As I've related my story, however, people have frequently told me that they found it inspiring and very much worth sharing.

So here, then, is my story: The Reluctant Entrepreneur

The year was 1995. I had just turned 31 and I was "temp"ing around in corporate offices all over San Francisco, wondering if and when my real career "light bulb" was ever going to go on. Everyone else around me seemed to know what they wanted to do with their lives (or so it seemed). So why not me? Why was I still stuck in "career idle"?

An unabashed extrovert, I knew one thing very clearly about myself: I process things best out loud, in conversation with others. Luckily, I had a friend from the neighborhood, Scott, who was willing to indulge me in a series of regular brainstorm sessions: The purpose—to help me get a clue about my career.

And so we began to meet at a nearby café, me and my "business buddy," every Monday night. Over the course of several weeks, we talked about a large variety of job titles, but nothing was clicking. Scott, an entrepreneur with his own environmental planning business, then made a radical suggestion that changed my life. He asked:

"Have you thought about starting your own business?"

The son of a journalist and a teacher-- as liberal and anti-business as you can get-- I burst out, "Are you kidding! I don't know the slightest thing about economics or marketing or bookkeeping. There is no way I can start a business!" Scott, bless his heart, was a persistent fellow. He kept on pushing and probing and eventually got me to agree to at least think about it. As I had recently been working in an employment agency, we both decided I should take a week to ponder a possible business as a professional interview and resume coach. So off I went.

Then the strangest thing happened.

The notion of life as a career coach wasn't sitting right with me. I could do it, certainly, but it just didn't sound fun, or fascinating, or riveting. And if I was to start a business, with all its challenges, then shouldn't I LOVE what I'm doing? Clearly I needed to look at this another way. So I ripped out a new page in my notebook and jotted down the title: What activities do I love doing? And next to it: What jobs have I loved doing? My thinking was, if I could figure out the jobs and activities that thrilled me over the years, then perhaps I could craft a business out of that. What I come up with were these three "touchstones":

- 1) **I love to travel.** That's what I did throughout my 20s, to more than 30 countries.
- 2) **I love working with groups** and watching them develop. I was a teacher for three years in Japan, I was a tour leader for a couple of years, and I was a Resident Advisor in college.
- 3) **I love games and wordplay.** Scrabble, Boggle, crosswords, cards, board games...there is nothing I look forward to more than a game night with my friends.

So Monday came around again and I explained to Scott that these three activities were what *really* turned me on. Couldn't we perhaps brainstorm a career that might incorporate my favorite touchstones? Needless to say, the ideas began to fly fast and thick. Scott soon reminded me that I had once attended a treasure hunt in San Francisco

--a big public-event fundraiser -- and come back quite jazzed about the experience. Perhaps, he suggested, I could start my own treasure hunt business. "Well sure, I could try it," I answered. But what would be really exciting for me, I realized, would be to create not just "social-event" treasure hunts, but corporate "teambuilding" treasure hunts, combining both puzzles and team process. Now that would be interesting!

And the rest, as they say, is clue history. Well, actually, it's been a lot of hard work, persistence and luck, as any entrepreneur can tell you. Not quitting my day job(s), I started creating treasure hunts on the weekends: for friends and family at first, then later for social groups, organizations and companies. The learning curve has been intense! But what continues to sustain me is the basis of the business. Rather than looking *outside myself* for something to excite me, I looked *inside* at my passions and then **brought something new into the world—teambuilding treasure hunts.** And now, almost every day, I find myself doing at least one of my "touchstones": traveling or leading programs or creating word puzzles, or even all three!

And you can do it too! For those of you in job transition and even those who aren't, consider performing this simple activity:

- 1) Make a list of all your favorite jobs and activities, the ones that made you pant with excitement to get up in the morning.

2) See if you can determine what features or values characterized those jobs or activities.

3) Try to narrow your list to down to three or four touchstones.

What you'll have before you is a powerful, personal list of your own unique touchstones, the characteristics you **deserve** to have at the heart of your career. Making the list will take as little as a weekend. What you do with it is the real challenge! Try it!

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