

When my family gathers for holidays, playing games is one of the staples of our time together, everything from cards to board games. As you might expect, we are all very competitive and we take pleasure in winning whatever game we are playing. But we have a lot of fun as well. So much fun that several of our kids friends like to join us just for the entertainment value!

Over Thanksgiving this year we decided to play one of my wife's favorite games, Clue, Parker Brothers "classic" detective game. For those of you not familiar with Clue, here is a brief description from their web site: "Reclusive millionaire Samuel Black's been murdered in his mansion! Now, it's up to you to crack the case! Question everything to unravel the mystery. Who did it? Where? And with what weapon? Ransack the mansion for clues, ask cunning detective questions and leave no card unturned. Solve the murder first to win!"

You receive a series of cards depicting one of the elements which are not the correct answer. Then through a process of elimination by asking your opponents which cards they have, you are to deduce who done it.

In all the years that we have been playing Clue, I have never, ever won. As a matter of fact, I cannot recall a time when I was even close to winning. Normally I am pretty good at board and card games. I can figure out the strategies necessary to win, except for Clue. The detective notebook sheets provided with the game baffle me. They list every possible suspect, location and weapon, and next to the list are small squares. Everyone else in my family writes information in those squares that help them solve the mystery and win the game.

The squares are not nearly big enough for me. If it was up to me, I would have sheets of paper much bigger than the 3x5 size they provide. My wife tells me that I don't listen well enough, especially in this game. When someone makes a suggestion such as; Mr. Green, in the billiard room with the candlestick, and one of my family members shows one of those cards to the person making the suggestion, everyone else writes something down. I am not sure what to write. I re-read the instructions and the only help provided regarding filling out the detective notebook sheets are to put a checkmark by the card, although some players find it helpful to put the initials of the card holder on the sheet. No help.

In our businesses there are people who look like they know what they are doing, but don't. They have all the right tools, say the right things and are simply not very good at the job. The question we need to ask as small business owners and manager is does this person simply need better training, or are they in the wrong job? Telling the ineffective worker that they are ineffective and to do better is not the right answer. We need to talk with our people and ask them about how they do their job, how they like doing their job and about how much training they had to do the job.

Often sitting down and showing the worker how to properly do the work solves the problem. Sometimes we need to find a new job for them, if it is available, and if they are the kind of people we need and want in our company. Sometimes the people are not going to be a fit no matter what we do, they just don't get it, and we have to let them go. Not a lot of fun, but a necessary part of our job. Bottom line, we need to stay close with the people that work with us to understand what they need, and how they perform. It is essential to the profitability of our businesses.

I am not sure if I will ever be any good at Clue. Bring on Monopoly (I like being the banker), Yahtzee, Scattergories, Loaded Questions or any number of card games and I guarantee the game will be competitive. I will play Clue to be part of the family game night, but it is doubtful I will ever win.

*Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny.*