



Who Owns the Ice House?

Eight Life Lessons From An Unlikely Entrepreneur

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Pulitzer Nominated Author
Clifton Taulbert
and Gary Schoeniger



“Long before the word ‘entrepreneur’ became popular, the concept still existed.”

In the late 1950s, Glen Allan, Mississippi was a poor cotton community. For many, it was a time and place where opportunities were limited by social and legal constraints that were beyond their control. It was a time and place where few dared to dream.

For most, the work was in the fields where the sun was hot, the days were long and the wages were low. It was an accepted way of life that had been passed down for generations and, from the time young Clifton Taulbert could walk, he too was expected to climb aboard Mr. Walter's field truck and find his place among his peers.

Yet one man made a difference - an unlikely entrepreneur who defied convention and dared to dream. That man was Clifton's Uncle Cleve.

Based on his own life experience, Pulitzer nominee Clifton Taulbert has teamed up with entrepreneurial thought leader Gary Schoeniger to create *Who Owns the Icehouse?* - a powerful and compelling story that captures the essence of an entrepreneurial mindset and the unlimited opportunities it can provide.

Drawing on the entrepreneurial life lessons he gained from his Uncle Cleve, *Who Owns the Icehouse?* chronicles Taulbert's journey from his life in the Mississippi Delta at the height of legal segregation to being recognized by *Time Magazine* as “one of our nation's most outstanding emerging entrepreneurs.” While Taulbert describes the life-changing influence of his Uncle Cleve, Schoeniger captures the entrepreneurial life lessons, their timeless application and the unlimited opportunities they can provide.

Who Owns The IceHouse? delivers an important message, one that reaches into the past to remind us of the timeless and universal principles that can empower anyone to succeed.

TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

WHO OWNS THE ICE HOUSE?

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by Clifton L. Taulbert and Gary Schoeniger

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*For Jason,
who inspired this journey.*

*For Uncle Cleve,
whose life told us it was possible.*

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?’

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of the universe; your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are born to make manifest the glory of all that’s within us. It’s not just in some of us, it’s in everyone.

And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others”

— MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

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FOREWARD

As an entrepreneur, mentor and life-long advocate for entrepreneurship, I have long searched for meaningful education programs for entrepreneurs. Specifically, I sought something that could convey the essence of an entrepreneurial mindset and the limitless opportunities it could provide. More importantly, I wanted to know—from successful entrepreneurs—the beliefs behind the behavior that led them to achieve the success they now enjoyed.

In my capacity as director of entrepreneurship at the Kauffman Foundation, I have the good fortune to travel the world; being exposed to every manner of entrepreneur support groups and the programs they offer. From Brazil to Bangladesh, I have seen first hand, that entrepreneurship has become quite popular and the “secret” of our American entrepreneurial spirit is not so secret anymore as countries around the world are awakening to the benefits of an entrepreneurial driven economy.

Yet, while entrepreneurship programs have begun to emerge on college campuses and in small business development centers across the country and around the world, the

traditional academic, institutional approach has met with limited success. Many rely on a textbook-classroom format that tends to focus on the mechanical aspects of entrepreneurship such as business planning, cash flow projections and market research while overlooking the underlying beliefs and assumptions that enable entrepreneurs to succeed. Others are limited by the lack of relevant curricula or experienced instructors who understand and are able to articulate the true essence of entrepreneurship and what it really takes to start and grow a successful business. Moreover, there is no formulaic approach to entrepreneurship and attempts to do so have repeatedly proven to fail. While many programs provide basic technical information, they often lack the real-world insight and practical skills that only experienced entrepreneurs can provide.

Therein was my motivation to find and fund an education program that was derived from first-hand experience, extracted from the tacit knowledge of those who have overcome hardship and adversity through entrepreneurship. I was searching for a program that could not only inform but one that could inspire the next generation of individuals pursuing their dream of building a better life for themselves and others. And so it was that I discovered the Entrepreneurial Learning Initiative. Little did I know, they happened to be in my own backyard.

“Don’t you live in Mentor, Ohio?” began a conversation with the Kauffman Foundation’s VP of Communications, Wendy Guillies.

“I sure do, why do you ask?” I replied.

Wendy went on to explain that one of our news-feed clipping services had picked up a short article about an entrepreneurship training program being offered by a company called the Entrepreneurial Learning Initiative—ELI for

short—and they were based in, of all places, Mentor, Ohio, my hometown.

Turns out, ELI had been founded and was operating less than 3 miles from my home, a slight embarrassment for me to admit as I had never heard of them.

ELI founder and co-author of this book, Gary Schoeniger, enjoys retelling the story of my first call to him as rather suspicious. “Who are you and what are you doing in my backyard?” he likes to credit me as saying—with a smile. Whereas I know that he has an embellished recollection of that first exchange, I have to concede that I was more than a bit curious about their activities in the community I had been entrepreneurially serving for many years.

Gary was polite, if not forthcoming with details of their activity, so naturally I asked for a meeting to learn more about what they were all about. It was at our first meeting that I was relieved to find out that I didn’t know about them because they were, for all practical purposes, a start-up themselves, having recently released their first public course; *Mindset: Tapping Your Entrepreneurial IQ*.

The course is an online video curriculum featuring entrepreneurs from a diverse background of ethnicity, gender, age, and means. From a woman who transformed her hobby into a thriving business after losing her job, to serial inventors and some of the most successful entrepreneurs of our time, *Mindset* was like no other entrepreneurship education program I had ever evaluated. What made it unique was the unfiltered sharing of experiences from actual entrepreneurs that, in their own words, describe what they went through and what they endured or overcame to get to their current station in life. They share with the student all the things I wish someone had told me before I took that first journey down the entrepreneurial rabbit hole.

For the first time, I could see someone taking THIS course and being better prepared for all the things they don't teach you in the nuts-and-bolts courses. Beyond the mere sharing of the experiences, Gary and his partner Mike Sutyak had extracted, in consumable bites, the tacit knowledge that drove these successful entrepreneurs—*the beliefs and assumptions behind their behavior*.

As my own entrepreneurial endeavors were colored by many good and difficult experiences, I was confident that they had decoded the entrepreneurial DNA in a way that anyone, from diverse backgrounds, could learn and, more importantly, launch more confidently knowing that challenges lay ahead but nothing was insurmountable.

It was in my own taking of the Mindset Course that I was first introduced to co-author, Clifton Taulbert. In the course, Clifton refers to the inspiration he received from his Uncle Cleve; “He was different in his community because he actually took money to the bank.”

Why did that make him different? What was so special about this man that made him a standout in his community? And perhaps most importantly, how did this man's life influence young Clifton Taulbert to become an award-winning author and a successful entrepreneur?

The answers to these questions became the foundation of this powerful book and companion course. Taulbert and Schoeniger do a masterful job at identifying the eight life lessons from an unlikely entrepreneur, Clifton's Uncle Cleve, while providing high-impact context these lessons have to empower this generation to overcome adversity through entrepreneurship, while leading the economic recovery the world is waiting for.

We feel privileged to have had a small role in bringing this powerful program to our nation's greatest natural resource, our entrepreneurs. It is my hope that others will be inspired by this story and empowered to take control of their destiny and to create a brighter future for themselves and others.

THOM RUHE

Director of Entrepreneurship

Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

P R E F A C E

Entrepreneurship is a mindset that can empower ordinary people to accomplish the extraordinary. Entrepreneurial success does not require a revolutionary new idea, a Harvard-approved business plan, or millions of dollars from a venture capital firm. The same life lessons that fueled blue-collar working class Sam Walton of Wal*Mart, college dropout Steve Jobs of Apple, public housing resident Howard Schultz of Starbucks, and countless other powerful and successful entrepreneurs are within reach of every single one of you reading this book. As entrepreneur and author Chris Gardner said, “You gotta dream. . . . You want something? Go get it.” Gardner wrote the book, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, and was portrayed by Will Smith in the movie of the same name, which told the story of how Gardner overcame homelessness and adversity through entrepreneurship.

Opportunities do not always come with identifying signs screaming: “I AM AN OPPORTUNITY. COME GET ME!” Sometimes they are more subtle.

The meeting of the two entrepreneurs who wrote this book was one of those more subtle moments, one that almost did not happen. Gary Schoeniger and Clifton Taulbert met

on a very busy day in the spring of 2008. Gary Schoeniger, an entrepreneur, was in the process of conducting video interviews with entrepreneurs throughout the United States as part of a project sponsored by the Cisco Entrepreneur Institute, in which Gary was supposed to gather as many in-depth stories of as many successful entrepreneurs as possible. But Gary wasn't looking for any old entrepreneur, he was focusing on those who had started out behind the eight ball, pushed themselves beyond what they thought was possible—and certainly beyond what anyone expected of them—to the kind of success that all entrepreneurs strive for. Gary was looking for the Outliers.

Gary himself had not come from promising beginnings. He was a miserable student who barely graduated high school, taking odd jobs here and there to survive. Good with his hands, he often landed at construction sites where he found he had a facility for carpentry. But he never made a steady or reliable living. One day out of sheer desperation, he strapped his carpenter's ladder onto his beat-up truck and started driving around the neighborhood, offering his services to those who needed their gutters cleaned. Within months, the gutter cleaning service evolved into a handyman business that he ultimately transformed into a successful construction and development company. Gary Schoeniger knew what it was to start from nothing, to push himself, to strive to be the best in a niche where he could succeed, and he ultimately became a successful entrepreneur.

Having made his mark, Gary became interested in helping others. He adopted a foster child, Jason, caring for and mentoring him and ultimately launching Jason into the world where he went from being a kid with a bleak future to becoming an entrepreneur himself. Jason got Gary to thinking: If I could do it and if Jason could do it, what about other kids? Gary first began to teach entrepreneurship to high school kids, in the

process culling together yet more stories of entrepreneurial success—this time from kids who had not yet even reached voting age! Then he began lecturing to adults at entrepreneurs conferences, taking what he had learned and sharing it with educators and others. That soon evolved into Cisco Systems approaching Gary and asking him to prepare an online course in which he related many of the success stories he had gathered over the years. That eventually led Gary to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

One of the people interviewed was Clifton Taulbert.

Born to a teenage mother in the 1940s, Clifton lived with various caring relatives while growing up. His childhood in the Mississippi Delta coincided with the age of Jim Crow – the system of legal segregation that created few opportunities for success, much less gainful employment. When he was 13 years old, Clifton was hired by his uncle, Cleve Mormon, to help out at his uncle's Ice House, the only one for miles around. Everyone needed ice, and everyone came to Uncle Cleve's Ice House. So Clifton met everyone. Black, white, Chinese, Jewish—everyone was treated the same by Uncle Cleve; they were all customers, all welcome. Clifton watched his uncle very carefully. The lessons he learned from his Uncle Cleve ultimately propelled Clifton into entrepreneurship himself, where over time, he became part of an investment group that started a successful bank in Tulsa. He was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and was even profiled by *Time* magazine as an outstanding emerging entrepreneur. From humble seedlings spring promising possibilities.

Clifton Taulbert, a black guy from Mississippi, and Gary Schoeniger, a white guy from Cleveland shared very similar stories. But neither of them knew it. Yet.

While interviewing in Tulsa, Gary kept hearing the name Clifton Taulbert. But he was already so booked, he had no time to hunt down another interviewee. Nonetheless,

someone managed to introduce Clifton to Gary. Soon, the camera was set up, the lights were adjusted, and two strangers found themselves sitting across from one another in a crowded conference room. Little did they know this meeting was the beginning of a mutual journey that would extend far beyond that room.

The journey started out with Gary's question, "Clifton, who influenced you to become an entrepreneur?" Clifton answered by telling Gary the story of his Uncle Cleve. This man had been a major influence in changing the trajectory of Clifton's life. Memories flooded in, and as Clifton, a natural-born storyteller, continued relating the real-life tales about his uncle, Gary listened with an intensity that could be seen all over his face. His eyes looked as if he had actually traveled back to that small community and had personally shaken hands with the man who had owned the Ice House. Such was the power of Clifton's storytelling.

The resulting interview was brief, but Gary was hooked by Clifton's stories about Uncle Cleve. If there ever was one of those more subtle opportunities that make themselves known over time, this meeting qualified.

With the interview over, the video equipment packed up, Gary and Clifton shook hands and said goodbye. As far as Clifton was concerned, that handshake signaled the appropriate ending to a completed project. Clifton had shared his story; Gary had recorded it. Both men returned to their respective responsibilities—Clifton in Tulsa and Gary in Cleveland—running their own small businesses. That afternoon, the interview did end, but the relationship had just begun.

Within weeks, Gary was on the phone with Clifton, keeping him abreast of his interviews around the country. Over the next couple of months, their phones continued to keep them in touch, and their conversations about Uncle Cleve and

his rather unique role as a business owner gathered more depth. The interview, now extended into cell phone conversations often late at night slowly made both men aware of just how significant the working life of this ordinary man had been. Through Gary's persistence and insight, an opportunity emerged that same year for Clifton to share Uncle Cleve's story at an international entrepreneurs conference in Austin, Texas. As Clifton recalls:

I'll never forget that afternoon speech in Austin. The place was packed. As I got ready to speak, I kept thinking about Uncle Cleve and wondering how his life would come across to this audience. He was no tycoon. No buildings were named after him. No one had written an article about him in the Wall Street Journal. He left no great wealth for distribution among his heirs. He was a simple man who chose to live differently.

I was a bit apprehensive. In my head Uncle Cleve occupied an honored place. He was respected. I wanted no less for him at this conference. His black and white picture—a period picture, no less, and my only picture of him—kept rolling through my head. This would be the picture the audience would see. I would be hurt if this photograph elicited laughter instead of respect.

I remembered his life and the many things about his life that I had once just taken for granted or assumed were personal gifts just for me. It was sobering to think that now those conversations and words of wisdom from a different century were being recalled for others. Fortunately, my fear was unfounded. As I finished my talk, Uncle Cleve was welcomed with a standing ovation. Gary was right. Uncle Cleve's message was universal.

At the conference in Austin, Uncle Cleve's story and his tenacity and commitment to personal success was recognized and embraced by the crowd as timeless. As attendees shook the two men's hands, Clifton and Gary were in awe at the reception of Cleve's story and its relevance to 21st century entrepreneurs and students exploring the possibilities of entrepreneurship. This ordinary man from a different time in history had awakened the spark of possibility within many of the conference participants.

Gary and Clifton left Austin feeling good that they had at least been able to bring Uncle Cleve to such an event. They shook hands once again to go their separate ways. But it soon became abundantly clear that their "goodbye" would be short lived. They continued to call each other, always talking more and digging deeper into the extraordinary life of this very ordinary man. No conversation ended without some reference to this unlikely entrepreneur. It was during one of those calls that they conceived the possibility of developing an online multimedia course for aspiring entrepreneurs and for anyone who wanted to unleash their potential and provide value for themselves and for others.

Who Owns the Ice House?—the question initially posed by Gary during that first interview—became the name of the project.

Who Owns the Ice House? today includes this book and a companion online course. In this book, the authors have tried to capture the impact Uncle Cleve's life had on a young boy, then thirteen, and on the working and mentoring relationship that exposed that boy to new possibilities for a future beyond the fields of the Mississippi Delta. This relationship became the perfect backdrop for probing into the universality of the entrepreneurial mindset that allowed Uncle Cleve to defy the odds and to bring young Clifton along on his journey. The mentoring

relationship and the long-range impact of Uncle Cleve's lessons are brought to life through the personal stories Clifton tells in this book. Clifton then proceeds to elucidate the impact the story held on his own entrepreneurial development.

This unusual framework then turns to Gary, who draws from his decades of personal entrepreneurial experience, to carefully and thoughtfully elucidate from each of those Ice House stories the key entrepreneurial points and their contemporary relevance, illustrating them with further accounts of entrepreneurship.

Who Owns the Ice House? is a collaborative effort in every sense of the word. Entrepreneurship does not always have to be a lonely, solitary journey. *Who Owns the Ice House?* is a tribute to the many ordinary men and women, boys and girls all over the world, who, like Uncle Cleve, are refusing to give up on their dreams and slip away into obscurity. It is dedicated to those who are determined to make their lives count. Years ago Uncle Cleve, a man who always drove the speed limit, showed us all what is possible today.

The eight life lessons Taulbert and Schoeniger describe are timeless examples of the power of entrepreneurship to overcome adversity and achieve independence, regardless of one's circumstances. Like the story of our founder, Ewing Marion Kauffman, Taulbert's Uncle Cleve started with very little, yet he refused to follow the prescribed path and instead, he chose to follow his dreams.

Cleve Mormon demonstrated entrepreneurial acumen to provide for his family while instilling in his nephew, Clifton Taulbert, the values that helped him become the successful entrepreneur and thought leader he is today. *Who Owns the Icehouse?* reaches into the past to convey the entrepreneurial life-lessons that can empower ordinary people to achieve uncommon outcomes in their own life.

– Carl J. Schramm, *President & CEO* Kauffman Foundation
CoAuthor *Good Capitalism, Bad Capitalism*

Get in where you fit in. *Who Owns the IceHouse?* is a powerful story that captures the basic principles of an entrepreneurial mindset in a way that anyone can apply. Uncle Cleve's message is clear: you can empower yourself through entrepreneurship.

– Dr. Fitz Hill, *President, Arkansas Baptist College*

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