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CARMEL VALLEY — He calls it a hobby. Others might call it an inspiration, a passion, a fascination, fun. Bob Steinberg is intrigued by the way things work. The founder and president of an instrumentation company that manufactures gas mass-flow meters, he's both intent upon reducing energy costs, increasing efficiencies, and minimizing harmful emissions -- and intrigued by how to make that happen.

But outside of his work world, in his back shed, actually, he harbors a whole other interest: toys. Not the typical "hobby car" or epic collection of Hot Wheels model cars or action figures, but actual toys, mostly electric-powered, custom-made games. One is a baseball game, a hybrid of pinball-meets-foosball, using found objects at home, such as a deep drawer to house the structure, rubber door stops, the rubber handle from a hand tool, and the figure from a baseball trophy — plus his own engineered electronics to power the game.

Ever since he was a young child, Steinberg has been making electrical toys that came out of the spirit and intrigue of exploration and invention, without any awareness of how remarkable they were. His strategy was simple: figure it out as you go

He was 8 years old when he invented a little gadget that lit up, his ingenuity prompting his grandmother to ask if he might be able to figure out how to reduce the static interference in her radio. So, he opened up the box, studied the components, and turned a screw until her station became clear. Then he closed it up and presented it, good as new.

"My grandmother thought I was a genius," he said, "which was incredibly motivating. I loved what I did. It was the sort of thing where you're so immersed in it, you don't hear sounds or get hungry; it's all consuming."

In addition to his electronic baseball game, Steinberg's toys included an electronic animal-classification game, a slot machine-meets-pinball game, and a tactile challenge, employing lights and switches. Both primitive and ingenious, they were precursors to present-day electronics, created with the materials available to an 8-year-old. He still houses them in a shed outside his Carmel Valley home.

"My 'figure it out' approach is how I run my business today."

Up to bat

Born and raised in New Jersey, Steinberg attended school in New Brunswick before enrolling in Rutgers University, where he earned a dual degree in electrical engineering and liberal arts which, he says, pretty much sums up the breadth of his interests.

In 1978, Steinberg moved to Carmel Valley, where he lives with his wife of 49 years, art therapist Janet Steinberg. After a series of ventures and inventions that have met with various levels of success, nearly 20 years ago, Bob Steinberg established Sage Metering, Inc., a manufacturing business designed to increase process efficiency, conserve energy and improve the environment by reducing greenhouse emissions and energy usage.

In 2020, he decided to channel all his experiences, achievements, frustrations, failures, and successes into a book he titled, "The Triple Play of Business." Published by Dorrance Publishing Company, the first two pages of the book introduce a baseball analogy and how difficult, how rare it is to execute a triple play -- when all three outs in the inning are achieved on the same play -- in both baseball and, metaphorically, in business.

"Everything that happens in a triple play," Steinberg said, "is instantaneous. Instincts and training tell you to work hard, work together, trust, collaborate and have respect. You have to have experience in your field of endeavor, but you also need to trust your teammates, collaborate with them, and maintain respect for one other."

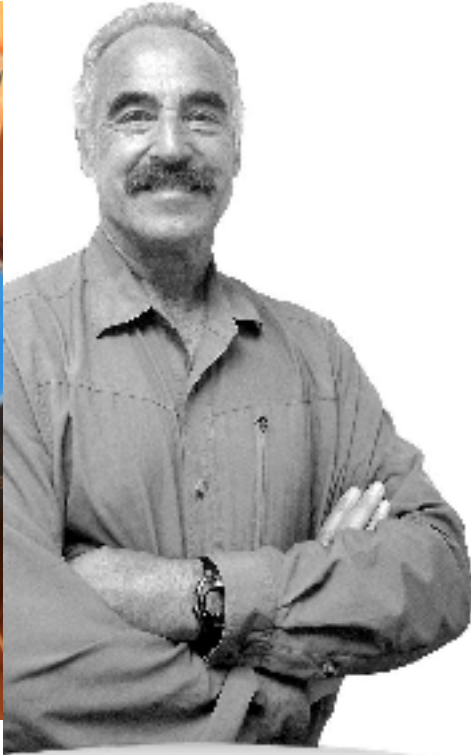
Steinberg wrote the first draft of his book spontaneously, not in terms of the experiences and perspectives that motivated the book, but in the moment when he realized it was time to write.

"The catalyst to begin my book," he said, "was realizing the difference between appreciating everything we'd done through my company and coming to understand that, nevertheless, it was on the verge of going out of business. The denouement, the point when all the pieces of the plot came together and our issues were resolved, was ultimately finding a way to survive, thrive, and prosper."

His book came out of his frustration with corporate America and some of the companies he's worked for. But, when it comes right down to it, Steinberg says, the thesis of his book is joy -- the joy that comes from figuring out how to make something happen, and then acting on it.

"Knowing what it takes to face the risks and handle the challenges of running a successful company," he said, "my book is about how the establishment of a positive culture, containing those three positive elements or the 'triple play of success,' creates a much healthier environment for employees."

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Since he was a young child, Carmel Valley's Bob Steinberg has been making electrical toys that came out of the spirit and intrigue of exploration and invention. (Courtesy photo)

