



*Blue Planet Foundation:
A Sustainable Legacy of Blue Innovation*

**Henk Rogers
Hawaii**

One day Henk Rogers was in the hospital recovery room, flipping through a newspaper. Just before he got to the last page, a tiny snippet alerted him that all of the coral in the world would be dead by the end of the century, from ocean acidification, which is caused, among other things, by the burning of fossil fuels. “This should be front-page news in Hawaii, not jammed in the back,” Henk thought. That’s when he realized that there were a lot of important things going on with climate change that people are just not aware of. “And if we don’t do something, these things are going to happen.”

Up until then, Henk had been best known as being the man who brought Tetris to the world. As a successful entrepreneur, he had spun off many profitable companies, including Blue Lava, which he sold for \$137 million in 2005. But he almost didn’t have the chance to enjoy the fruits of his labor. A month later, the excitement of this life-changing business deal came to a screeching halt.

On that fateful day, Henk woke up to find himself lying in the back of an ambulance, with a 100 percent blockage of the “widow-maker,” the largest artery in the heart. “I’m not going, I still have stuff to do,” he said.

Over the next couple of weeks, he came up with a “bucket list” of sorts that asked the question, What are my missions in life? “Up to that point in my life, all I’d done was get people to play games and make some money,” he says. “In the ambulance that day, I realized I hadn’t really done anything to justify my existence. When I do leave this planet, I want my legacy to be as someone who made the world a better place. I didn’t know exactly how to do that in the moment. But I decided to dedicate the rest of my days to doing just that.”

And after reading that brief article about coral in the recovery room, Henk says, “I understood what my mission #1 was. And the rest is history.”

Henk started the Blue Planet Foundation to drive change, empower youth, and inspire action to help power the transition to 100 percent clean energy in Hawaii. He believes that a future entirely free from fossil fuels is possible, and he hopes to act as a model for global change. Perhaps what makes Henk’s contributions doubly important is the fact that he has the technical know-how to take longstanding inefficiencies in the energy sector that are contributing to climate change, and innovate green solutions to this problem.

When Blue Planet was first starting out, Henk sat on a panel to discuss the future of energy in Hawaii. “I announced that Blue Planet’s plan was to achieve 100% renewable energy in Hawaii by 2045. An expert from the university sitting next to me said that it was impossible and gave some reasons. I said ‘Well, I’m not as smart as this researcher, so I’m going to do it anyway.’”

We started with some simple local outreach efforts. We organized elementary school children who went door to door to exchange 300,000 old light bulbs with residents, for new, energy-efficient bulbs. We even had junior high school students draw pictures on sidewalk to show where high tide would reach in a one-meter rise in sea level.

Soon, Henk's work gained wide-ranging support from the Hawaiian community at large, and even gained attention at the state level. His work was integral in implementing Hawaii's mandate of achieving 100 percent renewable energy by 2045 - which has made Hawaii the first state to do so.

Now came the tricky part, Henk says: How do we do it? "I knew I had to clean my own room before I could ask that of other people. And Hawaii is my 'room.'"

Henk worked to pass a bill that incentivizes the solar industry and gives rebates for rooftop solar installations. It was estimated that this would produce about 30 megawatts of renewable power. But within a few years, the program had actually led to the production of 300 megawatts, which created another problem: the grid couldn't handle that much intermittent power.

"So, at my Energy Lab on my Pu'u Wa'awa'a Ranch, we got to work on how to become energy independent. Part of the solution was to make hydrogen using the excess energy our solar panels produce on sunny days," Henk says. "Hawaii spends \$5 billion a year on oil for only 1.5 million people. If we can implement the energy independence strategies we have developed at my ranch, just think of how much money Hawaii could save by switching to renewable energy." Henk's associates are even working on building five hydrogen fuel stations in Hawaii, to further boost the state's energy independence.

Henk's journey to becoming a leader in Hawaiian sustainability can't be told without mentioning his daughters, Maya and Julie, who not only inspired him, but have taken up his legacy as their own. "Maya has always been the business-minded one, even before she got involved with Blue Planet Software, which is the company I set up," Henk says. He recalls going to Pepperdine, where he was invited to speak to Maya's business class. "I got there ten minutes early, listened to a presentation, and told the class I had learned more just then than I'd learned in my whole career. I knew nothing when I started. And it was then I realized just how far ahead of us the youth are today."

Being the oldest child, Maya had always shown that instinct to lead. "When I realized that she could handle it better than I ever could, I let her take the reins of the company," Henk says. What he didn't anticipate was Maya being able to take their shared passion for sustainability and spin off yet another profitable business. She now runs the incredibly successful Blue Startups, which is an incubator for blue technology companies. To date, it has launched more than 90 companies, including their first "unicorn" in Volta, which operates electric charging stations in shopping centers. It is set to go public with a valuation of over \$1 billion.

Julie took a less traditional path. She spent a year in Bhutan working at the Gross National Happiness Centre, and in Bali at the Green School. A number of her experiences at these forward-thinking institutions led her to believe that she could help change the whole way we approach sustainability. "Climate change is important," she says. "But it's just one of the things that needs to be fixed."

Now, at the Akahiao Nature Institute, Julie is educating the next generation of environmental leaders how to inspire others to have passion, understanding, and appreciation of the natural world around us. The Institute has had great success with its immersion programs, which allow kids who don't have a connection to nature to come and see what it's like to live sustainably. "Julie's been years ahead of the curve with her back-to-nature approach," Henk says. "What she's doing to change our outlook on climate change and sustainable living is as important as anything we are doing technologically. If the kids don't have a connection to nature, why would it matter to them to try and preserve it?"

Henk's message of encouragement for youth is as empowering and hopeful as he always is. "You may not realize it, but you have the power to change things in a huge way," he says. "Today, the battle is climate change—and you can stop climate change. You can fix anything in the world if you put your mind to it. Don't let us adults stop you!" He is working now on an app that deals with energy, waste, nature, and intervention, designed to help bridge the gap between older and younger people, and get them working together on issues of sustainability.

With their intergenerational approach to combating climate change, Henk, Maya, and Julie are working to shape Hawaii's and America's blue future. "Our target 2045 Sustainable Development goals are already set at the UN," Henk says. "But we believe that in 2030-2045 we have to focus on the Regenerative Development goals. It can't just be about sustainable living. We need to fix the damage that we've done. And I think we can."

*Surely we have a responsibility to leave for future generations
a planet that is healthy and habitable by all species.*

Sir David Attenborough

Call to Action: To get involved with the Blue Planet Foundation and its many innovative projects shaping Hawaii's blue future, please visit <https://blueplanetfoundation.org>

Stone Soup Leadership Institute
www.stonesoupleadership.org
www.soup4youngworld.com