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Gems In Sandbox Lessons



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Some of the best preparation for great leadership is rooted in everyday values we learned as children and the toys we played with.

"Lego blocks, Rubik's Cube and Green Army Men teach us about group dynamics," said Ron Hunter, co-author with Michael Waddell of "Toy Box Leadership: Leadership Lessons From the Toys You Loved as a Child."

Draw from these childhood experiences to become a better leader:

Teamwork. Building with Lego bricks is akin to forming relationships. "In business, if you do not connect -- with your customers, with your co-workers, with your vendors -- you are out of business," Hunter and Waddell wrote.

Patience. The Slinky Dog teaches you to pull in the right direction and take time to build a following. The tricky part for leaders is time. Waddell and Hunter point to a proverb to show the risk of being hasty: If you think you are leading and you look behind you and no one is following, you are just going for a walk.

Mentors. Like Play-Doh, if you are willing to be molded by the right influences, success may follow. "Life is not a game of solitaire; people depend on one another," Jon Huntsman wrote in "Winners Never Cheat: Everyday Values We Learned as Children (But May Have Forgotten)." "If you don't have knowledge of something, find people who do."

Communicate. How you talk is crucial. Think of Mr. Potato Head and the messages he sends depending on how you assemble his face. Without those facial features, he's a bland potato. That's how important it is to consider body language.

Integrity. Your reputation is how others see you, Huntsman says. Character is how you act when no one is watching. "Competition is an integral part of the entrepreneurial spirit and the free market," Huntsman wrote. "Cheating and lying are not."

The colors and complexity of the Rubik's Cube teaches you the importance of making the right turns when doing business, Hunter and Waddell note. "When you do things correctly, it creates order," they wrote. "When you do them wrong, it creates chaos."

Think ahead. Little Green Army Men teach you that good plans take careful thought, Hunter and Waddell write. Solid preparation boosts your odds for success.

Respect. Treating others in the sandbox the way you want to be treated is key to building friendships. In business, rivals, colleagues, employees and clients all deserve the same appreciation. "I know of no truly successful person who does not demonstrate a sense of decency," Huntsman wrote. He adds that to achieve respect, you must have compassion and a desire to make others happy.

Tenacity. "Leadership is not without failure," Hunter said. "Just like the Weebles fall down but pop back up, leaders get up every time."

Leadership is about taking risks, Huntsman says. "If your life is free of failure, you aren't much of a leader," he wrote. "To succeed, we must attempt new things."

Children take their first steps even if they might fall down. They expect to stumble in the process of learning to walk.

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