



OUTSIDE
THE VINES

INSPIRATION FROM BEYOND THE POTTING BENCH

Deliver the Little Bit More

By Abby Kleckler

Toy House and Baby Too! has been a toy store staple in Jackson, Michigan, since 1949. With more than 30,000 square feet of space, it boasts the largest selection of toys under one roof anywhere in the country.

Third-generation owner, Phil Wrzesinski, not only sees the toy store buzzing on a daily basis but also helps other independent businesses succeed as an author and speaker.

Some of his best advice, however, came from someone else, author Roy H. Williams.

"One of the best things he taught me was to be who I am but to be it more openly and to align the store's values with my own values, and make sure they're obvious in everything we do," Wrzesinski says. "For this reason, I have a diamond that I built that's always right next to me."

The four points on the diamond read, "Having fun, educational, nostalgic and helpful."

Have Fun

For a toy store, having fun should be the easiest of goals, but this mantra goes beyond the products.

Toy House and Baby Too! is known for its memorable 30-second radio ads in which Wrzesinski crafts a quick story. The toys are brought to life and listeners are left asking questions that can only be answered by visiting the store (listen to the ads at www.toyhouseonline.com).

Once inside the store, customers are encouraged to have fun.

"We provide lots of opportunity to play," Wrzesinski says. "We have probably at any given

time 30 to 40 toy demonstration stations around the store."

There's also a full aisle of board games out on display, ride-on toys ready for use, a shooting gallery for Nerf guns and a stage."

Educate

Wrzesinski says he and his team spend a lot of time on education from going out and talking to moms groups to making sure the staff is well trained.

"We spend a lot of time talking about how kids play with toys and how toys bring value to a child, how toys teach and how toys help children grow," Wrzesinski says. We talk about the different ways children play such as directorial versus participatory, and knowing the difference between the types of toys for those kids."

Employees learn a few easy questions to ask about a kid to get an idea of what they need.

"We have to make sure that people realize that toys are not a convenience," Wrzesinski says. "Just because there's a dump bin of toys in the middle of a Dollar General, that doesn't mean those are the kinds of toys they're looking for."

At Toy House and Baby Too! customers can get expert advice from someone ready to help them.

The store also partners with local schools and has a loaner program where teachers can borrow educational toys for free in their classrooms.

Embrace Nostalgia

"Nostalgia is easy," Wrzesinski says. "We have new baby products, we have birthdays, we have Christmas. That's three of four most nostalgic

moments in most people's lives, marriage being the other one."

Aligning the store's values with his own personal values, Wrzesinski also teaches classes at the hospital and wrote a book for new and expectant dads.

Be Helpful

Toy House and Baby Too! offers a variety of free services such as gift wrapping, installing a car seat or taking a product out to a customer's car. Shoppers have come to expect these perks, so the store must continually raise the bar.

"When people ask me what's my secret to success, it's truly learning what my customers want and giving them that and a little bit more," Wrzesinski says. "You can't give them more if you don't know what they want in the first place."

Now that people expect gift-wrapping, the little bit more is offering pre-wrapping so things are done before the customer even walks in the door.

The little bit more is giving gift certificates or coupons to other local businesses, so when people are downtown they can visit other places.

It's going above and beyond to help a customer find something for everyone on his or her list or something that might be just a bit better.

It's giving a parent a helium balloon so they can get their crying child out of the store when they're ready to leave.

"It's the little bit more that creates loyalty," Wrzesinski says. "It's the little bit more that gets them to talk positively about us. It's the little bit more that keeps them coming back."

What's your little bit more? **LGR**

