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**How Much Fun is Too Much Fun? 5-18-05**  
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Have you ever played the game Chutes & Ladders?

Since it is one of the most popular board games for children, one that has been around for what seems like hundreds of years, I'm betting that you have.

And so you will understand the concept I'm going to try to explain.

A few years back a former Jackson resident who now lives in Chicago came into the store to pick our brain. You see, he was with an investment group who had a plan for a new concept of a toy store to be located in Chicago.

The premise for this new store was, you guessed it, Chutes & Ladders. Each section of the store would be at a slightly different elevation than the next section and there would be ladders for kids to go up to one section and slides to go down to the next.

It would be the ultimate interactive toy store. Sounds like a lot of fun, right?

And, yes, it would be fun for the kids. But our advice to him was more in the form of some questions.

How would the parents (and grandparents) shop?

Would there be room for shopping carts?

Who is your real target market – the kids or the parents?

Would you charge an entry fee for those who were just coming to play?

No matter how much fun a store might be, there still is that issue of selling enough products to pay the bills. And my guess is that the bills in Chicago are a little higher than they are here in Jackson.

But that does bring up a dilemma. How do you make a toy store fun and still be able to sell toys? How do you make it entertaining for children and shopper-friendly for those who decide where the money is spent?

The simple answer is to make sure you have toys out for play. But, as is often the case, some answers that seem simple on the surface really are not as simple upon further inspection.

Just a few weeks ago, while my wife and I were shopping for our son's birthday, my wife kept pointing out great toys saying, "This should be on display so people can see how cool it is."

Aisle after aisle I kept hearing the same refrain... "This should be out of the box. People should see this. This is really cool."

And she was absolutely right. Every single item that she mentioned would definitely sell better if it was out of the box where you could see it, touch it, play with it.

Then again, you could say the same about almost every one of our thirty thousand different toys.

So, which toys do we put out for play? Where do we draw the line on playing and shopping? At what point do we cross over from being a toy store to being an entertainment venue? When do we reach the threshold of having so many toys out that parents no longer want to bring their kids in because they know they'll never be able to leave?

Believe it or not, but some times I don't have all the answers. So instead, I started asking different questions.

Such as...

How can we make our store more fun without just turning it into a playground? How can we make the store fun for people of all ages, not just the kids? How can we make sure that our staff is having fun helping you have fun while you shop?

In other words, how can we make Toy House more fun for everyone and still be a great place to shop?

There's an old saying that says, "If you're not getting the right answers, maybe you're not asking the right questions."

I think this was one of those moments.

As soon as I started asking the latter group of questions the answers started rushing in.

How do we make it more fun for everyone and still be a great place to shop? Make the shopping part fun. Keep the entertainment parts such as our play tables, product demonstrations and Friday at Four events for the kids, but also focus on making it more fun for the parents and grandparents by making the shopping more fun.

Give the parents & grandparents wider aisles to make their searching easier. Have a staff that is available to answer questions and help customers find what they need. Help our customers make good choices on all the products by being knowledgeable about our products so that we can give them the information they need. Make the shopping experience easier by having quick checkouts, fast giftwrapping, and assistance loading your packages in the car. And be sure to have a few toys out for the older "kids" among us. Hey, even adults need to play, too.

That's the plan to keep it fun here at the Toy House. So when you see us playing with toys and having fun, we're not goofing off, we're doing research. And if you aren't having fun in our store, ask us for help. We've got ways to make your toy shopping fun.

Best of all, you won't have to climb any ladders or slide down any chutes to do it.

And that, my friends, is the Toy House Way!

Happy Shopping!

-Phil Wrzesinski