

~~~~~

## Phil's Forum – Saving Money Part 3 – Time & Money

~~~~~

(This is Part 3 in a three-part series on how to save money while shopping for toys.)

So far, in our discussion about saving money, we have talked about the **True Cost** of toys measured as the *cost per hour of use*. Remember...

The most affordable toy is the one your child plays with the longest.

We also discussed how to evaluate toys using the criteria of **Interactive**, **Open-Ended**, and **Creative** to find toys that have long lasting play value and low **True Costs**.

Last week's forum showed how the **Expandability** of a toy – the ability to buy add-ons and associated products that make the child play with the original toy longer – can also be a big money saver.

Today we talk about that most expensive commodity in parent's lives – Time.

As parents, we are constantly aware of time. We have schedules to follow to get our kids to school, to sports, to music lessons, to doctor's appointments, to bed. We have to allow time for eating, homework, practice, playtime, and naps. We have our own agendas to follow including work, laundry, housekeeping, grocery shopping, gift shopping, and meal preparation. And none of that includes our own white space, our own playtime.

Yes, time is the most valuable, and thus most expensive, commodity in parents' lives.

But how can toys save us time?

Some of the answers are obvious. Toys keep kids occupied so that we have time to do what we need to do around the house. Of course, that is only true if we have the right toys that hold our kids' interests. If we have given our kids toys that *are* Interactive, Open-Ended and Creative (what I like to call Great Toys), they will play longer with those toys and give us more time for our projects.

Then again, the opposite is true. If we buy cheap toys that break easily, or buy toys that don't hold our child's interest, not only will our child be bugging us more (taking up more of our time), but we'll also have to spend *more time* shopping for new toys to replace the toys that didn't last.

So, being more diligent in our research and selection of toys will save us time spent entertaining our children and time spent shopping *again* for more toys.

In a more subtle way, buying the right toys also saves our children time. Great Toys do something wonderful to our children. These toys make our kids think. That's right; Great Toys get our kids to use their brains. As I stated in a previous forum, toys are the great teachers of youth. (Read Phil's Forum Archives "Seriously Fun Learning")

When children think and use their imagination, they become smarter. You know the old adage how "practice makes perfect." When kids think, they are "practicing" using their

brains. Studies show that children who are read to at early ages (remember, story books are on my top ten list) and children who are encouraged to read a lot on their own perform better in school. They accomplish more in less time.

The same holds true for toys that require children to think and use their brain. Kids who play with Great Toys use their brains, become smarter, and are able to accomplish more in less time. In other words, they save time.

So, the right toys *can and do* save time.

But, and I can already hear your protests, *shopping for toys*, especially the way I present it, must take a lot of time. My response? Not as much as you think.

Remember last week's lesson – observe your child at play. You're already doing that (or at least I hope you are). You also already understand the concept of the Great Toy and the Expandable Toy and know what toys you want. All you need now is a toy store that carries a large selection of Great Toys and offers timesaving services and conveniences.

Yes, that would be Toy House.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret. Our store is not setup the way it is by accident. Nor is it setup by what other retailers consider to be the "tried and true ways to retail". Our merchandising, our services, and the training our staff goes through is all carefully designed and crafted for one purpose – to make your shopping experience as smooth and easy and efficient as possible.

Many stores make winding, maze-like layouts that get you lost and keep you circling for hours. Other stores use tricks like putting the most desirable products, the most common products, or the most affordable products as far back in the store as possible to make you walk past all the other merchandise to get to that stuff. Some stores even believe that having three or more people in a checkout line is *good* for their business because they might sell more of the stuff found in the checkout line. Worst of all, when you do get lost or confused, these same stores "hide" all the sales associates so that you can never find one when you need one.

Not Toy House.

Our layout is simple and easy to navigate. Our sale/seasonal stuff is located right up front. Our hands-on displays are centrally located so that you can see as much merchandise as possible while still keeping an eye on the little ones.

Speaking of the little ones, we even give away free helium balloons to the kids to help you get the little ones out of our store easier.

As for checkout lines, none are faster. With the exception of the third Thursday in July and a couple of Saturdays in December, you will rarely ever be anything more than next in line at Toy House. All of our register lines are open all of the time. We even have batteries at every register so that you never have to look far to find the right size to keep your electronic toys ticking.

Our staff is easily recognizable in our blue denim shirts with the Toy House logo. And every one of us can lead you directly to the toy of your choice.

In fact, we have about as many employees on our sales floor (16,000 sq ft) at any given time as a former manager at K-Mart told me they have to cover their 100,000 sq ft! And each and every staff member knows the Top Ten Toys and has their own personal favorites of our *many* Great Toys that they can recommend.

Here's another timesaver. Our *farthest* parking space is closer to the toys than the *nearest* parking space you might find in our competitors' lots.

Yet another time and money saver is our UPS Shipping service.

Buy your toys somewhere else and you'll have to first bring them home, then giftwrap them, then find a box big enough to pack them into, then fill that box with packing material, then seal it shut with packing tape, then load it into your car, then take it to the nearest shipping facility, and finally pay them to ship it. Whew!

Buy your toys at Toy House and we'll wrap your gifts, we'll box them up carefully, and we'll ship them out for you. All you do is pay the actual shipping costs plus a one-dollar handling fee. One dollar for us to find the right sized box, the packing materials, and the packing tape, for us to fill out all the paper work, and for us to put it on the UPS truck. Heck of a deal!

And the biggest time *and money* saver of all? FREE GIFTWRAPPING!

Consider this. A basic roll of paper costs anywhere from \$2 to \$4 and has about 12 square feet of giftwrap. It will cover about 4 or 5 medium sized gifts. Each gift will take about 4-5 minutes of your time to size, cut the paper, and wrap. Add in the extra time setting up and taking down your "wrapping station". Then factor in that the time in question is time when the children are NOT around (one of the most valuable blocks of time in your hectic life).

Here's the math. Twelve Gifts = Two to Three rolls of paper and over One Hour of your most precious Time.

Our staff, however, can wrap those same twelve gifts in less than ten minutes (often in less than five). And our staff can wrap those really large gifts that take two whole rolls of paper and a good fifteen minutes on your living room floor in less than one-third the time!

Yes, we can save you a lot of time and money this holiday season and all year long. Just follow these seven easy steps.

1. Observe your children at play.
2. Come to the Toy House.
3. Buy Great Expandable Toys.
4. Get them giftwrapped for Free.
5. Save Time.
6. Save Money.
7. Have Fun!

That is the Toy House Way!

Happy Shopping!

-Phil Wrzesinski

PS Nothing is better than when statements I have made are validated by others, especially when they come from recognized “experts”. Playthings Magazine invited a number of children to test a variety of new toys. They also asked the kids, “What makes a good toy?” Here are the top four answers given by the *true* experts of toys, the children, in the November 2005 issue of Playthings Magazine.

Kids say a good toy:

1. Makes me use my imagination
2. Has many different ways to play
3. Makes me want to invent a toy myself
4. Does not break easily

Creative, Open-Ended, Interactive, Quality. From the mouths of babes comes the toy wisdom of the ages. Enough said!