

Toys carry a message all their own

By Pat Bordman
Special writer

Teething rings. In the great scheme of things, a teething ring would seem to be rather insignificant. The presence or absence of one in a child's life probably has little or no importance.

But there are playthings given to children that may not be so innocuous. These kinds of toys demand of us a closer look and require us to think about our attitudes, for they carry not only the excitement of play but a message all their own.

Cap pistols, air rifles, six-shooters and dart guns are some of the pretend weaponry of the young. However, they make a very real statement — aggression solves problems, violence is acceptable, anger cannot be controlled, terror rules.

By providing our children with these sidearms of mock war, we are tacitly approving and encouraging this frightening approach to life.

CHILDREN OFTEN let off steam by running, yelling, chasing, and challenging each other. Sometimes they will pretend to shoot at one another with their finger, or a stick found on the ground. But there is a world of difference between these imaginary and spontaneous expressions of hostility, and the parental supply of weaponry.

The imagination of the child is self-limiting. The very finger which formed a gun one moment will later be used to dig in the ground, color a picture, or steer a bicycle. When we supply the props, we may be enlarging the child's concepts, defining his daydreams, altering his concepts, making real what is just pretend. We may be fueling his tendencies toward negative interrelationships and expanding his repertoire of aggression. Worse yet, we may actually be glorifying violence.

It is through our choice of playthings that we clue our children in on our values. We indicate a lifestyle choice through our purchases. We can set a peaceful standard of behavior and a controlled tone for playtime by resisting the pull toward toys of destruction.

HERE'S A homemade toy that can be used at those times when your children spontaneously desire a little action. You will need two round clothespins and a thick rubber band.

Place a slipknot around one of the clothespins and tighten it. Put the second clothespin through the loop of the rubber band left hanging from the slipknot. Now twist the clothespins until they are tightly wound around the rubber band.

Release the twisted clothespins onto the floor and watch them spin and turn as the rubber band unwinds. If you make two sets of these twisties, a challenge race can be set up. Or mark one clothespin of the set and see which lands on top of the heap most often.



gerontology

A. Jolayne Farrell

New business challenge: workforce growing older

An aging population and the economics of retirement will make older workers increasingly important to American business and industry, two specialists on aging predict in a University of Michigan publication.

Lois Farrer Copperman and Fred D. Keast of the Institute on Aging at Portland State University in Oregon, say that firms which will be expanding their employment of older workers should begin now to develop appropriate policies.

Writing in Human Resource Management, a quarterly publication of the U-M Graduate School of Business Administration, Copperman and Keast say that "we are entering a period of transition in the population which will gradually but surely change the face of American labor."

"One of the most fundamental and unrecognized challenges facing managers today involves preparing for the worker of tomorrow. This worker will be older than today's applicant and may require employment and remunerative policies which are considered experimental today."

The article says that today's college graduates are the last of the baby boom generation to enter the labor market.

"Throughout the 1980s the number of new, young entrants will drop sharply to levels well below among the United States has experienced in the recent past. By the year 2,000, slightly more than half of the working-age population will be concentrated between the ages of 20 and 34, who now comprise 45 percent of the labor force, will account for less than 35 percent. Because the participation rate of women in the labor force is already high, the labor supply available to employers will be increasingly comprised of individuals with previous work experience.

"IN SHORT, demographic, social and economic changes in the United States are converging in a

manner which will accord the older worker a role of increasing importance in the labor market. For these reasons, managers in the next decades will face the need to improve their firm's attractiveness to older employees."

The economics of retirement also will help keep older workers in the active labor market, the authors explain.

"It is reasonable to anticipate that inflation's impact on fixed income flows will promote the lengthened worklife of older labor force participants. Since one of the most important predictors of attitude toward retirement is the anticipated standard of living in retirement, employees contemplating retirement in a period of double-digit inflation may well decide to continue on the job."

More than at any time in the recent past, the authors add, "continued work now constitutes not just an alternative to retirement but also the most readily manipulable means by which most workers can improve the potential quality of their later years."

Copperman and Keast conclude that "it is well within the realms of probability that both the demand for and the supply of older workers will expand through the years to come."

"In this context, two fundamental questions face employers today: 'How can I best take advantage of these changes?' and 'How can I make them pay?'"

"One answer is to recruit labor from those individuals who would otherwise retire. Make the job more attractive than retirement and keep the employee who would otherwise need replacing the key to success in this endeavor lies in creating or modifying employment and remunerative policies so as to enhance their specific appeal to older workers."

volunteers

The Oakland County Volunteer Bureau has weekly listings of volunteer opportunities. Further information about these and other volunteer needs for more than 200 agencies may be obtained by calling the bureau at 642-7272. Any non-profit organization needing volunteer assistance also may call the bureau.

If you have time to spare now that the holidays are over, volunteer work may be the answer.

There are many rewarding opportunities. These include work in recreation, helping arts and crafts, doing

clerical work, helping in schools, hospitals and nursing homes and giving guidance and counseling. Other possibilities are driving and visiting.

You can sharpen your working skills and make potential paid employment contacts while helping support important community services. Flexible hours and short-term commitments are available, and those interested may find positions near home.

"For a free copy of the bureau's "Volunteer Opportunities Guide," call 642-7272.

Before you go, call your utility

If you're planning an extended vacation away from wintry weather, Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. has several reminders for you.

First, turn your thermostat down. Most home thermostats go as low as 50 or 55 degrees, which will keep your house warm enough to prevent water pipes from freezing and breaking while saving fuel and keeping bills lower.

Turn your water heater down to the lowest setting so the heater will use the least amount of fuel, but the pilot light will remain on. Or turn the pilot light off, and make sure no gas is leaking.

If you're going to be gone for an extended period of time — say a few months — and you have natural gas heating, call your gas utility and let them know you'll be on vacation.

This way, a meter reader will not

leave a card on your door as a signal to thieves or other unwelcome visitors.

Finally, if you will be on vacation more than a month, call your gas and electric utilities and tell them where you want your regular monthly bills mailed.

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