

Putting a Smile Where There Are Tears

An Interview with Alan Hassenfeld, Founder, Hassenfeld Family Initiatives

EDITORS' NOTE Alan Hassenfeld is Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Hasbro, Inc., where he began his career in 1970. He was appointed Vice President of Marketing and Sales in 1978, became President of the company in 1984, and Chairman and Chief Executive Officer in 1989. He passed on the responsibilities of CEO in May 2003 in order to fully concentrate on his position as Chairman. He is the former Chairman of the Right Now! Coalition and Admiral of Rhode Island Commodores. Hassenfeld has a BA degree from the University of Pennsylvania and is the recipient of ten honorary doctorates and has been inducted in four Halls of Fame.



Alan Hassenfeld

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Hassenfeld Family Initiatives is a philanthropy whose goals are to globalize safety and human rights within the area of children's products, be a catalyst for positive change for the embetterment of society and especially children, and undertake initiatives to improve the economy, education, and business opportunities in Rhode Island, nationally, and globally.

Where did your passion for philanthropy develop?

It was definitely instilled early in my life. When I was growing up, our family always had dinner together – my mother, father, brother, sister, and myself. We talked about the news and current events, but we also talked about how fortunate we were and how we must give back. My parents would tell stories about their parents, and how my grandfather was engaged in the Rhode Island community. They also instilled in us the notion that you need to go out and see how other people live to understand their needs as you try to be helpful. I think the combination of the importance of giving back being passed down from generation to generation in our family, along with our involvement in after-school programs, poverty programs, food banks, among others, helped us to understand that we could be that person on the street or that person in need of food which really shaped my focus and commitment to philanthropy.

I learned early in my life that a leader has to lead by getting his or her hands dirty, and

if you are raising money for a certain program, it is critical to understand what other people are living through. You should only ask others to get involved once you have spent the time getting to know the people and fully understanding what is needed, and then you can be a catalyst to get others to do the same. Never ask others to do something you would not do.

How do you decide where to focus your philanthropic efforts?

We do not necessarily do things the way other foundations do. Many people want grant proposals and want to know metrics, but much of what I do is my gut feeling which comes from meeting with people and listening to them. I think the job of all of us living in the country today is that while money is clearly important, being a catalyst for trying to vision the future and making a difference is what is most important. An example is the Surgeon General's report about the rise in the number of teenage girls contemplating suicide. I looked at that in conjunction with the questions about the impact of social media on mental health,

and decided to have the School of Public Health at Brown University look at how we can be a convener to address this issue. There are many brilliant people working on this subject, and we want to bring everyone together to collaborate, rather than working in silos.

What was your vision for creating the Hasbro Game Park as part of The Strong National Museum of Play?

The most important part of this effort is The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York. I think that The Strong is the greatest repository in the world for toys, games, and libraries on play. The National Toy Hall of Fame is located there as well as the Toy Industry Hall of Fame. Hasbro is celebrating its 100-year anniversary this year, and I wanted to do something for Hasbro, not with Hasbro, as part of this milestone. I also wanted to identify a number of my family members – my grandfather and his brothers, my father and mother, my sister and her kids, my wife – as part of this effort. It is about honoring Hasbro as well as keeping the family tradition going, and my hope is that the Hasbro Game Park makes children smile and have fun when they visit.



Hasbro Children's Hospital's Spot the dog taxi statue by Donald Lipski

Your family made a major commitment to create Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone, and Hasbro Children's Hospital in Rhode Island. Will you discuss these projects?

As we look at all of the issues that we would like to make better in the world, all of the success of Hasbro and my family comes from children and their families. There is a saying that our greatest natural resource is our children, and I want to give back to what made us successful. The relationship with NYU Langone has been extra special, and I am proud of our niece, Susie, who is on the board, and Catherine Manno for her leadership at the hospital. It has been amazing to work with the talented people of Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone, and at Hasbro Children's Hospital in Rhode Island, who are making such a difference in the lives of children.

We also have the Hassenfeld Child Health Innovation Institute at Brown University that seeks to integrate research, clinical practice, public health efforts, and educational programs with the goal of improving child health and addressing child poverty.

You have also been very involved with the Bamboo School in Thailand. How did this project come about?

That school is a dream, and the Thai government, working with Mechai Viravaidya, who is world-renowned, is using it as a model for other schools not only in Thailand, but we recently signed an agreement for two schools in Cambodia. I got involved first because you cannot say "no" to Mechai, and second because of my deep belief in what they are doing. The school teaches from a very early age the importance of financial responsibility and giving back to the community. When I visit the Bamboo School, I see the kids teaching the villagers how to do hydroponics, how to grow

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things differently, how to tell which crops are most profitable – it is just a beautiful model where kids are not only learning the ABCs, but they are also learning how to help the community and the importance of giving back. I am very proud of this program.

While much of philanthropy is focused on writing checks, you give your time, energy, and ideas to the causes you support. How important is it for your philanthropic activities to be more than just about donating money?

The day you stop learning, you are no longer a human being. As I mentioned earlier, you need to get out and experience what other people are going through. You need to peel back the onion to understand what the people accessing your efforts need, and it makes such a difference in your ability to help these people in a meaningful way. If you are supporting a food bank, the only way to do this effectively is to know why the people are using the food bank, how the food bank is addressing today's rising

costs, what else the food bank may need – seeing is believing. I allocate a certain amount of time to visit the sites of the things I want to be a part of.

What do you see as the responsibility that companies have to be engaged in the communities they serve and to be a force for good in society?

Companies have a responsibility to all of their shareholders. I define shareholders as their employees, communities, the shareholders who own stock, and customers. If companies want to continue to be a force, both profitably in their business and as global citizens, they must plant the seeds of the future. Part of those seeds are having good relationships with your community, your shareholders, your customers, but most importantly, your people. The greatest asset any company has is its people – treat them well, and they will make you look like a genius.

What have been the keys to Hasbro's industry leadership and continued relevance for 100 years?

Hasbro has been successful because of its people, and we always tried to maintain the culture of being a family company as much as possible. It is about storytelling – I go to Hasbro a few times a year to meet with our newer people and explain to them about the people who came before them, like the pioneers who came to America who created the roads, bridges, and railroads. I love to tell stories and want people to understand that one of the most important parts of Hasbro's culture is caring about our people.

How do you define success?

One of the mantras I live by, and I think Hasbro lives by, is putting a smile where there are tears. Success for me is making a difference and being a catalyst for positive good. It is so important that we all try to envision the future, and to try and make it better than what we are faced with right now.

I so enjoy visiting a school and seeing a smile on a kid's face, and it is important to take the time to appreciate what you are doing. I am doing philanthropy because it is the right thing to do if you are fortunate enough to be able to help other people in need.

It is simple – for me, when my heart smiles, that is success. ●



Ribbon cutting for the Hasbro Game Park at The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York