



# Creating a Better World for Children

An Interview with Alan Hassenfeld,  
 Founder, Hassenfeld Family Initiatives

I was also brought up with a moral and ethical compass and was taught that if I ever saw the business heading in an unethical way, I would have to walk away. If I was to join the business, I wanted to create my own path. I was very fortunate because when I came into the business, Hasbro was not doing very much in the Far East as far as supply chain so I had the chance of setting up a logistics and supply chain in the Far East.

I also had the chance to create relationships with people throughout Europe and Asia and South America on licensing since we had very little business internationally at that time.

**Even as Hasbro grew in size and scale, it never lost its family feel and culture. How critical was it to maintain that culture?**

First of all, the tradition which was handed down from my grandfather and his brothers to my father and his brother and to Steve and I was understanding that our most important asset is our people. As much as we're known for our toys, toys don't come without great ideation and innovation and that comes from your people. We needed to make sure that we kept a culture where our people were honored, respected and given a chance to innovate.

I came into the company when we were probably doing \$30 or \$40 million and today, we're doing \$5 billion. When someone joins Hasbro today, they're coming into a \$5-billion company. They have no idea that my grandfather landed at Ellis Island at age 14, that he couldn't scrape two nickels together, and that he and his brother sold rags. Part of the reason I agreed to do a book was that I wanted them to understand and appreciate that there were other people that set the table for them. The book was meant to tell for posterity the history of Hasbro up until today.

**You commit your time and resources to philanthropy. Do the same skills and traits that you need to run a business translate to being effective in philanthropy?**

I think it is easier for us since our success is because of children and families. We know that market and this is where we focus our philanthropy. We built Hasbro Children's Hospital in Rhode Island because of the environment full of children that we knew from our business and we saw the needs. Our mission is to try and create a better world for children.

I think it was Danny Thomas that once said our greatest natural resource is our children. I think that when we become adults – not that I ever became one – but when we become adults, we sometimes forget what it was like to be a child. I constantly say not to forget about the time when you used to chase the wind flying a kite. It is important to remember as we bring up our own children what it was like for us to be a child.

**Was part of the mission of the book to inform new people joining Hasbro about its history and how important is it to understand and respect that history in today's challenging times?**

We really don't teach history the way we used to teach history when I was at school. We don't teach civics either. I wish we would also focus on geography because many of our kids don't know anything outside of the United States and probably don't even know things outside their own state. I think it's critical that we honor the past and we understand it and we learn from it. Many of the things that we see happening today have happened in the past. I think that, more and more today, we're living around the world in tribal societies.

But, at the same point in time, 90 percent of the American population worries about putting roofs over the heads of their families and having clothes for their children. They want good medical care and a good education system.

**Did working on the book provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your life and appreciate what you have accomplished?**

Absolutely. Could I have done what my grandfather did? I don't know. Could I have done what my father did? I don't know. When my dad died, we were about a \$70-million company losing a fair bit of money, but nobody set a better table than my dad because of his humanity and the respect that people had for him. Even though we might have been in the mud, people were willing to give us a hand to get out of the mud because we were considered honorable people. As I reflect on the book, I told the story that I wanted to be told about Hasbro, where it came from, where it is, and where it's going. The most important thing for me is that I want to continue to be a catalyst to visioning the future because today is the first day of the future and we create the future, we don't walk into it. ●

**EDITORS' NOTE** Alan Hassenfeld is also currently the Chairman of the Executive Committee 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 Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania and is the recipient of Honorary Doctorates from Bryant University, Rhode Island College, Salve Regina University, Johnson & Wales University, Roger Williams University, and the Waterford Institute of Technology.

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** Hassenfeld Family Initiatives is a philanthropy whose goals are to globalize safety and human rights within the area of children's products, empower women in developing countries, and undertake initiatives to improve the economy, education, and business opportunities in Rhode Island.

**When you look back at your career, did you always know that you wanted to be a part of Hasbro?**

While my brother Steve always knew that he wanted to go into the business, I had played around with the concept of trying to be a great tennis player, but that didn't happen so Wimbledon was out. At one point I had been offered a fellowship in creative writing at Penn.

My dilemma about joining the business was that I had watched many family businesses where father and son didn't get along or two brothers didn't get along. I was brought up where family was the most important thing to me and if I came into the business and I saw that it was separating the family in any way, I would walk away.