

Why Children Should be Encouraged to Build Things

Several years ago, a little boy I know set out to make and enter a project in the state fair. He gathered his supplies, came up with a design, and forged a hand-crafted knife – blade and all.

While his creation was quite impressive, the state fair was not amused and refused to let him enter his creation over fear about the type of message it would send.

Fortunately for this young boy, his parents continued to encourage his creativity and ingenuity even when the fair did not, and today he is in college about to graduate with a degree in mechanical engineering.

But what about all the other little boys (and girls) in the U.S. who don't receive encouragement to use their imaginations and invent or create something? Are we hindering something which could be of great help to our children and nation?

William Stout thought so. In 1916, Stout penned [*The Boy's Book of Mechanical Models*](#), a set of illustrated instructions for children to create everything from model cars to water wheels. But while Stout's book undoubtedly brought much joy to young boys, his true purpose in helping them create their own toys was to foster thinking and new ideas in young minds. Stout wrote:

"It's easy to make things if you just will think and take pains. There is hardly any kind of a toy that you cannot make out of odds and ends you pick up around the house, if you will just use some ingenuity in putting the parts together.

Ideas are what the world pays for. Learn to get up ideas, and those of you young fellows, and smaller boys too, who start

now to make things and to learn how to put parts together to get the result you want, are building the basis of business success.

...Give a boy a knife and some spools and a piece of tin, and he will make anything from a submarine to a flying machine, and the thing he makes will work when it is done. Many older men, by neglecting their mechanical instincts, have killed these possibilities in themselves.

Give the real boy some tools and a workshop, and half the problem of bringing up the next generation is solved."

In our eagerness to entertain children with gizmos and gadgets, or even keep them away from dangerous situations, are we squelching the little thoughts which could one day turn into big ideas and great inventions?

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