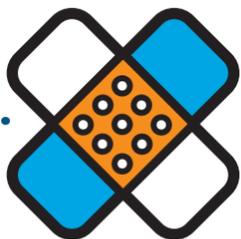


By Kate Klein, kklein@nrha.org

My favorite 2-year-old boy says “Wow!” more than anyone I’ve ever met. Ducks in the yard, beads the size of pinheads, electrical outlets and shadows mesmerize him. Take some cues from him and other tiny members of *Hardware Retailing* employees’ families (pictured here). Read this list to discover how you can better your operation by demonstrating the awe, kindness, curiosity and resilience that come more naturally to toddlers than adults. ➔



Learn from bumps and bruises.

Experimenting and trying to learn new skills can bruise a forehead or burn a tiny finger, but children learn important lessons from mishaps. Painful results don’t mean your time was wasted. You may need to give up and try another approach or scrap an expensive project. Learn from every mistake you make instead of trying to forget it or continuing to do what’s harmful to your business to save face.

Keep a short memory.

A toddler forgets a tantrum or lost opportunity quickly, and so can you. Don’t fret over disappointments or let arguments fester for days or years. Even without resolution, you can move on without bitterness. You won’t thrive if you’re focused unforgivingly or anxiously on the past.

Learn by imitating.

Mimicry is one of the fastest ways children learn. They watch adults and older kids, often modeling what they do and say after the people around them. You can learn by imitating, too. Other business owners have plenty to teach because they have more, better or different experiences. Visit peers’ stores, ask questions and mimic what they do well.



Always stop and pet the puppy.

Encountering a dog can turn a 2-minute walk across a sidewalk with a child into a 15-minute meet and greet. Slowing down to meet people and pets is important for customer service. Petting the puppy can help you move from, “How may I help you?” to “I’m really glad to know you.”

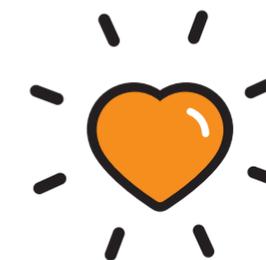
Be expressive.

Toddlers don’t care who knows when they’re excited, and genuine excitement is infectious. Be sure to show your enthusiasm about new products or promotions. The opposite is also true. Cynicism and discouragement can be as infectious.



Love your family best.

Toddlers know who they love most. So do you. Family dynamics can get complex and tense when you work together, but don’t ever let business be more important than love.



Be curious.

Children are fascinated when they notice changes in their environments, such as new board books or childproofing devices. Cultivate your curiosity about what’s new in retail so you and your business are adaptable. You’ll swiftly identify needed changes when you’re looking for them.

Say you’re sorry.

A child’s “I’m sorry” is cuter than your apologies, but your words can have the same impact. Be quick to apologize first if you’ve made a mistake. Take responsibility, make things right and you’ll earn respect from customers and employees.



Choose amazement.

Fluffy cats and glittering jewelry thrill small children, who help adults resee the world with awe. Sharing experiences that wow you, employees or customers will connect you deeply.

Notice people.

Tots often spot people who wouldn’t stand out to adults and can convert a shy person into a grinning peek-a-boo player. Everyone is valuable. Pay attention and you’ll see incredible inventiveness and kindness in normal people.

