

Kathleen Kremer, PhD — Research Psychologist

TOY STORY

Remember the film “Big” in which Tom Hanks — while living out a 10-year-old boy’s dream of overnight adulthood — scores a VP of marketing position at a major toy company in Manhattan?

For research psychologist Kathleen Kremer, that movie script isn’t too far from reality. Her road to a profession among toys began with a degree in psychology.

“When people hear that I work at a toy company, they immediately think my job is all fun and games,” says Kremer, who works as a senior manager of user experience at Fisher-Price Inc. “That certainly is a large part of what I do; however, toys are much more than just entertainment.”

People develop a strong emotional connection to — even fall in love with — their favorite toys, Kremer says. Her job is to use her background in psychology and research to develop toys and digital experiences that children will love.

LEARNING DISGUISED AS PLAY

Much of Kremer’s job revolves around designing and implementing research studies with the end users of Fisher-Price’s products: young children and their families.

“Working with young children is very rewarding, but there are challenges due to limitations in what they can do and know,” says Kremer. “Many traditional methods used in user experience (such as think aloud and interviews) do not work with this population, so a lot of creativity and flexibility are required.”

And it helps to have a strong intuition about what this age group considers fun — the characters they respond to, the kinds of activities they want to play over and over, and the unexpected touches that elicit surprise and delight.

The “user experience” portion of Kremer’s job title refers to research conducted to understand a person’s behaviors, attitudes and emotions about using a particular product, system or service. Unlike academic psychological research, user experience research is aimed at answering design questions, rather than answering universal questions about human behavior.

“At its core, user experience involves understanding people,” adds Kremer. “You need to know their wants, needs, abilities, constraints and behaviors. You then use this information to figure out what to make and how to make it.”

TOUGH CROWD

Kremer points out that there is a bottom-line implication to her job because as enjoyable as it can be, toy-making is still a business. A prerequisite for success is researching/testing early in product development, and repeatedly in order to make or confirm design decisions in a timely and cost-effective manner.

It’s a job Kremer loves — but it comes with a special responsibility.

“When we’re creating things, we’re focused on bringing joy to children’s lives,” she says.



“My job is to use psychology and research to help develop toys and digital experiences that children will love.”

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