

This box contains a LEGO set. On the front, you can see a picture of the end product and what the model is supposed to look like. Let's take a look inside. Here we have some bags with several different bricks and parts. This booklet contains step-by-step instructions for building your LEGO model. Amazingly, the LEGO base has only one platform: construction. At a glance, every piece has its place, but oddly enough you usually have pieces left over. When you follow these specific instructions, you learn discipline and building skills. LEGO play also allows room for endless creativity and constant discovery. When I was younger, I was obsessed with all things LEGO. I built with LEGO bricks and constructed many sets in my spare time. My fascination ranged from trains and cars to spaceships and sets from Star Wars. I enjoyed playing out scenarios with the character figurines and created my own little LEGO world.

I worked hard to start each LEGO set and challenged myself to finish the same day. As a child, I dreamt of one day moving to Denmark, the birthplace and home of LEGO, and becoming a LEGO designer or Master Builder. Building with LEGO is still one of my passions today. I currently have a few ongoing LEGO projects to complete, like my 4,000-piece Death Star that is only half built. I hope to always carry this passion with me because it is a part of who I am. The world of LEGO showed me much more than creativity and building skills. It also taught me lessons or "instructions" that anyone can apply to his or her own life.

**Life instruction #1: Play well with others**

In 1932, the LEGO Group was born in the workshop of a humble carpenter from Billund, Denmark, named Ole Kirk Christiansen. The company is still owned by the same family after all these years. The name LEGO is an abbreviation of the two Danish words "*leg godt*" which translates to "play well." As a child, I built sets with my dad; we took turns reading the colorful, vivid instructions and placing the blocks one by one. I enjoyed that quality time with my dad while doing something I loved. I also built a LEGO train with my brother. He worked on the tracks while I assembled the train. Instead of fighting with my brother, we became a dynamic building duo. Playing by myself was awesome, but building with others was more productive and fun. We built faster and for longer periods of time. In middle school, I noticed many of my peers were into video games. Although I initially hesitated, I eventually moved from playing by myself to discovering a new world of imagination, technology, and camaraderie in the form of gaming. The video games involved puzzles, adventures, and role-playing scenarios. I found a new group of friends who shared the same interest. I learned to take turns, collaborate, and be part of a team. Sometimes, I played the latest game, such as Halo 5 in its multiplayer mode, and a custom game mode builder called Forge. These were no longer straightforward games but were more complex and interactive with other players. Playing well with others and teamwork is relevant in every aspect of life. This is true on the field, in the classroom, at home, with friends, and in the workplace. A baseball team relies on every player being quick to catch and throw the ball in play to make an out. A basketball player relies on other team members to position themselves free and near the basket for a score. Group projects are often required in the classroom and in the workplace, so "play nice," be a team player, and do your part! In addition to playing well with others, LEGO taught me to be open to new worlds and ideas.

**Life instruction #2: Be open to new worlds and ideas**

LEGO offers so many options to build and create. Kids and adults alike can escape everyday life and build something amazing from theme sets like LEGO Art and Architecture, to licensed sets like Star Wars, Harry Potter, and Minecraft. These sets offer entirely different, new, and exciting adventures to those who are willing to step out of their worlds and comfort zones. When I was younger, the LEGO Atlantis series came out. It caught my attention by setting up a mystery of the ancient mythical city of Atlantis, a legendary island first mentioned by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. Constructing each model was exciting, and this sparked my curiosity about the sunken city, as well as Greek and Roman Mythology in general. LEGO Atlantis and other LEGO series opened my eyes to other worlds, both ancient and modern. I realized how much I enjoyed stories with great plots and interesting characters. During my junior year, I tried something completely foreign to me: Enter the world of Dungeons and Dragons, a fantasy role-playing game that involves creating your own characters that embark on different adventures. Dungeons and Dragons, or “DnD”( as it is called in gaming circles), was fun and exciting. Like a nervous and eager student on his first day of school, I did not know what to expect; I relied on my friends for support and direction. This type of character-driven, role-playing world was unlike any video game or board game I had ever played before. It required imagination, problem-solving, logic, exploration, teamwork, acting, and much more. In front of my friends, I often found it difficult to express my imagination, so on my own time, I worked hard to prepare my characters to engage in this new and dramatic endeavor. Playing DnD with my friends was a very valuable experience. My friends introduced me into many new ideas and different views of life. Opening up to a new world can happen right in front of you. It can be as easy as starting a new book, sampling different cuisines, playing a new instrument, talking to someone new in your math class, joining a club, or learning about other cultures. You

will not know what you're missing unless you step out of your comfort zone. Whatever new endeavors we choose to take on, we must also learn to manage our time and find balance.

### **Life instruction #3: Learn to manage your time and find balance**

It is important to manage your time wisely when you are building with LEGO. Depending on the size, details, parts, and difficulty level, constructing a LEGO set can take minutes, hours, days, or even months to complete. One year, between my birthday and Christmas, I received several LEGO sets as gifts. Some were easy and age-appropriate, but others were not. I was overzealous and opened several sets at the same time. I was so overwhelmed. I became angry and frustrated because I could not finish them. One day, my mom sat down with me and helped me complete a single LEGO set. I slowly picked up the next one, and one by one, I was able to finish them. I learned the hard way to manage my playing time while constructing with LEGO. When I started high school, I found more friends with the same passion I had for video games. Together, playing video games felt like assembling an easy set of LEGO pieces. During my sophomore year, I was inspired to start a video game club while joking around with my friends. I filled out the forms, pleaded my case to my advisor, and got approval. I decided to name it the Nintendo Club because we were excited about the newest game created by the Nintendo company. I organized tournaments and played with students of all grades that I had never met before. The club became an outlet for me and other gamers as well. It built my confidence, especially when other club members listened to my thoughts and ideas. The TMI Gaming Club (as it is now called) still exists today. But soon I found my time for club playing dwindling... Classes became more demanding, varsity swimming took more time, and I had to learn how to drive! I thought starting a club would be my only challenge. In reality, learning to manage the time it took to run the club was a real challenge. My grades dropped a bit. I could not participate in all the clubs I was a part of. My sleep took a toll. I neglected my close friends and family. Also, I received a few taps on my shoulder during class for nodding off. With the help of my friends, I

Implemented new club roles and delegated club duties to help with some of these time constraints. I used my free time and sometimes part of lunch to catch up with homework and assignments. I went to bed earlier and stopped watching Netflix (as much). Some of you may have a part-time job, several challenging AP Classes, or club sports that you need to balance. Using your spare time more efficiently (like working part of your lunch break) will give you a chance to catch up with assignments. Make a list of priorities and steps you need to take to accomplish them, but don't forget to include friends and family time as well. My time management is still a work in progress, but I know that balance is just as important now as it will be in the future.

Life doesn't come with instructions, but our own unique experiences can teach us lessons we can carry through our journey. According to the LEGO Group, their mission is to "inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow through innovative learning-through-play." LEGO taught me to play well with others, be open to new worlds and ideas as well as to manage my time and find balance. I didn't realize it then, but as a child, I learned lifelong skills and developed new ways of thinking about myself and about the world through play. As I venture into the real world, I understand the importance of these simple "life instructions" as fundamental building blocks. Now, I am ready to build my future block by block... Are you?