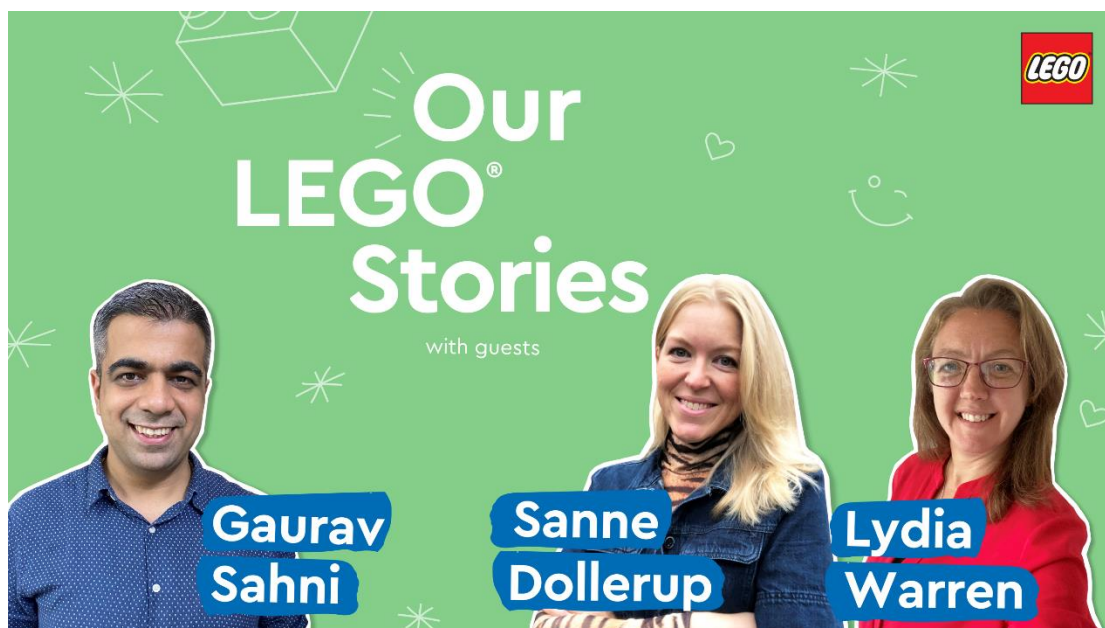


Our LEGO® Stories

Episode 6: Leadership for Everyone



Introduction: What we'll cover in today's episode (00:00)

Julie: Here at the LEGO Group, we believe leadership is for everyone, not just people leaders. That's because being a leader is not just a title; it's a mindset. But what does leadership for everyone look like for a brand like ours?

In our final episode of season 1, we discover how some of our awesome colleagues are embracing the leadership mindset and how a people leader inspires and develops her team to lead the way in this unique environment.

Lydia: I have to admit when I first heard this, I was a little bit sceptical. To hear that leadership is for everyone and not just those who have people leadership responsibilities.

Sanne: This is finally also embracing me as an informal leader. So yeah, I was super excited.

Gaurav: We have a very clear message in the LEGO Group, which says 'only the best is good enough'.

Julie: You're listening to Our LEGO® Stories. I'm Julie Foster and a proud member of the LEGO team.

Loren: And I'm Loren I. Shuster – another happy member of the LEGO team.

Julie: Take a peek into how we bring LEGO products to life and what we do to have a positive impact on the world in this new series brought to you by the LEGO Group.

Coming up in the show, Senior Project Manager Sanne Dollerup reveals what she's learned about what it means to demonstrate leadership qualities every day at the LEGO Group. And Gaurav Sahni, Senior Operations Manager in the India Market team, shares how his team put the Leadership Playground into action as part of our 'Keep the Fire Alive' competition.

First up, Loren speaks to UK and Ireland Operations Director Lydia Warren, who joined us in 2020 in the midst of the global pandemic. Here, she talks about meeting her own people leader on her first day and how she leads as a people leader in a context where leadership is for everyone.

Chapter 1: Leading as a people leader (01:56)

Lydia: The thing which really made the first day amazing for me is when I had that first meeting with my leader. 9 o'clock in the morning, and I logged on to see my leader there with his two kids around him, one on his lap and one who was asking for help. And the reason why that surprised me so much is because in previous companies there hadn't been that ability to take your whole self to work. And, actually, that was role-modelled for me from day one.

Loren: And, Lydia, when you joined the LEGO Group, as part of the onboarding and then over the last year-and-a-half, you've been exposed to the Leadership Playground, which is our leadership model and our leadership culture - which is anchored in this belief system that leadership is for everyone and not just for people leaders. Of course, people leaders, that's one particular dimension of leadership, but there are many other leadership qualities that we expect and encourage everyone to embody.

Did you have to realign your own thinking or assumptions about leadership when you heard about our approach? And can you share a little bit about how you've put it to use or how you've seen it come alive in the LEGO Group?

Lydia: I have to admit, when I first heard this, I was a little bit sceptical to hear that leadership is for everyone and not just those who have people leadership responsibilities. When you're a part of a hierarchy, that's the norm. That's how I've been used to leadership.

However, when you take that back to normal day-to-day life, you get more of an understanding that actually leadership is for everyone. So, once I got over the shock that actually this is business, but we're planning to use leadership for everyone as you normally would do in a day-to-day world in the world of

business, then I was super happy to really experience it and to see that first-hand.

If you think around the world that we live in, leadership for everyone is demonstrated in the simple acts that we do. We help guide our children. Teachers guide our children. We help our neighbours. We listen to our friends. All of those are simple but yet really effective ways to show leadership.

And, actually, that cemented in my mind that leadership was for everyone and we all have our part to do, and we can all make a difference. And I think that's the biggest thing, right? It's about leading ourselves. It's about leading others. And if we can do that, and we all do that to the best of our ability, the impact that that can have on ourselves, on our team, and then if I'm being really optimistic, on the world, that's huge.

Loren: I think those are some great examples because leadership does manifest itself in the daily acts. And, in a way, what we're trying to do is to demystify that leadership is not something for the few and something so unique. It's actually something that people are demonstrating on a day-to-day basis. And we hope to just encourage and cultivate people to step into that.

Have you found any challenges in playing this role? Of course, you are a people leader, you lead a team while at the same time creating the space for others to take on their leadership qualities?

Lydia: I think the biggest issue in this is making sure that we all find the time and the space to do so. If you think about leadership and leadership for teams, the most important thing about that is finding the time and space to grow and develop yourself, because only once you do that can you then invest in leading others. You can't go into the role of leading a team when your tank's empty.

With that in mind, especially in the challenging world in which we live, where there are so many demands on our time, I think it's so important to make sure that we make the time and the space to grow.

And that can be whether you're like I was: onboarding in a new role and a new company. That can also be the same whether you've been in a position for years. It's important to continue to make that time, to continue that learning and growth journey. And, also, by role-modelling that it's okay to get things wrong.

Now, that was really easy for me over the last 15 months because I had to learn, and in that process of learning I would get things wrong. But, actually, if we can role model that to our teams - that it's okay to fail - we then learn from that, and we learn fast. It allows and gives us the freedom to make a difference. It gives the team the freedom to learn and to grow, and that learning and growing can come from a failure. It can come from a 15-minute call over a coffee. It can come from an all-day training course.

As the saying goes, 'every day is a school day'. And we need to make the time to do that learning because actually, it's not just the learning in itself. It's then the reflection and then putting it into practice.

Loren: Oh, very, very well said. So, Lydia in that context, are there any methods or tools, models that you use to encourage your team to take on their leadership role when they're leading a project or leading other colleagues?

Lydia: I suppose one of the first things, and hopefully the team will agree, is that I lead by example. It's important for my team to know that it's okay to get things wrong, but we learn and we grow from them. And by doing so, it opens up opportunities to try to learn and to develop.

I also hope that what they see from me is the encouragement to try. Because if we don't try, we don't move forward. If I think of my kids trying to learn to ride a bike, then when they got to that wobbly stage, when I gave them that encouragement, it would make a difference. And, generally, they'd keep going. And that's the same whether you're learning to ride a bike, whether you've got your first day or whether it's your second year. If people encourage you and help you along the way, then actually, you're more willing to give it a go.

And I suppose probably the last thing I'd say is: don't shy away from those difficult projects or tasks. Sometimes we can be our own worst critics, and we can put ourselves down and say that we're not the right person for the role or it's too difficult. But, actually, if we put ourselves in those situations, if we put our team in those situations and give them the opportunity to take on the difficult projects or different tasks, be ready to support and spar, when they deliver, the sense of achievement they get is absolutely amazing. And that's the best way for them to see their true potential, by having the ability to deliver on that.

So, I apologise to my team now because I have put them in those difficult situations and given them difficult projects. But to see the growth in them over the last 15 months has been absolutely phenomenal.

Loren: Have you received, Lydia, any feedback from your colleagues or team members that's been valuable and useful for you in developing people's leadership capabilities?

Lydia: Definitely. One thing I love about the LEGO Group is the openness for feedback. Feedback is given, but also feedback is sought on a regular basis. And the reason why this is really crucial to me is because it helps me learn and grow.

Feedback that I got given fairly early on in my time at the LEGO Group was being told that 'I had it all together'. That, 'I seemed to be on top of everything'. And that definitely wasn't the case. When you're trying to home school two kids in the middle of a pandemic, and you're learning a new job, you definitely don't have it all together, I can assure you. But actually, that was a really good

reminder to continue to be authentic, to really be open. To share the things that were difficult and how I was trying to overcome them. And also to keep checking in and keep trying to get that feedback in the moment to make sure that I was giving a true and accurate representation of how things were.

And, yes, it meant that I could share in the failure, but I could also share in the success. Because actually, when you've mastered multiplication again, it's a really good thing to succeed in as well as delivering your plan for the month and sharing both those personal and work-based successes.

Julie: That first meeting really changed Lydia's perspective on leadership. Now, more than a year later, being open, authentic and encouraging team members to take on leadership has become a key part of her own leadership style.

Meanwhile, for Senior Project Manager Sanne Dollerup, our approach to leadership for everyone instantly made sense. When she first heard about our approach, it was love at first sight.

Chapter 2: Leadership for everyone (10:17)

Julie: Sanne, what did you think when you first heard that leadership at the LEGO Group was not just something for people leaders, but for everyone?

Sanne: I was excited. I knew that this would move some of the barriers that I, as an informal leader, often experience. So, it was a realisation that this is finally something I can identify with. And this is finally also embracing me as an informal leader. So yeah, I was super excited.

Julie: And why do you say 'finally'? Was it something that you had been feeling like we needed for some time?

Sanne: Absolutely. In my role as a project manager or project lead, you have the informal leadership role, and for many years I haven't had the same opportunities as a formal leader. Not saying that has prevented me from doing my job. But to excel or even bring it to the next level, get the sparring, get the training - both in-job, but also at formal classroom training or such - the accessibility to certain training programs was not the same. And I see that has changed already.

Julie: So, what does the concept of leadership for everyone mean to you now?

Sanne: It means that we have a common language that makes it more easy and more simple to speak to each other. In my job, for example, it's more easy or quicker to get to an alignment on our expectations to each other. Beforehand, I often took responsibility for tasks that perhaps weren't in my field of expertise because no one else spoke up or raised their hands or volunteered to take it.

Today, I think that common language that Leadership Playground offers has made it easier and has made it more obvious that we all need to take responsibility and all volunteer to take those tasks that we identified as necessary to move forward.

Julie: That's awesome. And how do you show leadership in your everyday work and your everyday life?

Sanne: Ah, there are so many examples of doing that, but thinking about it, the most general thing is that I bring myself into my work life. So, I bring myself in play, meaning that I speak up in meetings or just in general. I ask difficult questions. I'm being curious about other people and their perspectives, but I also share my own perspectives.

Julie: It sounds like you show a lot of bravery in your everyday job, I think is safe to say. But what are the biggest lessons that you've learned about being a good leader in your ten years at the LEGO Group?

Sanne: That my assertiveness, which used to be my strength, isn't always a good thing.

Julie: Oh, really?

Sanne: Yes, it has sometimes prevented me from being curious enough to learn more about other people and different personality profiles. I thought I rocked bravery and curiosity, but I've realised that I often spoke assertively before really taking in what someone else was saying. So, that's one of the bigger learnings, and it was a learning that I really appreciate.

Chapter 3: The Leadership Playground in action (13:38)

Julie: Speaking of learnings, last year all LEGO teams were invited to take part in the 'Keep the Fire Alive Challenge', with lots of super cool prizes up for grabs. It was a chance for each team to share their Leadership Playground story of success, failure and, most importantly, what they learned in the process.

Teams across the organisation shared inspiring videos of how they put the Leadership Playground into action. One of these teams was the new India Market Group, who told their story through a rap song and became one of the proud finalists.

I caught up with Senior Operations Manager Gaurav Sahni, on what the experience meant to him. As a Playground Builder, he was responsible for embedding the Leadership Playground in his team.

Gaurav, you're part of the India Market Group, which went live last year in the middle of the pandemic. Can you share the story behind your team's contribution to the competition?

Gaurav: Certainly. That video is very close to me. I was the Leadership Playground Builder in 2020. When we started off with creating that video, one thing was very clear in our minds: that we have to create to win. When you start from that thought, you actually end up putting in your best, whatever you do. And trust me, we were just a team of 14 at that point in time. And what does that mean? That means that you have only 14 votes for your side!

Julie: Haha! True.

Gaurav: And you are up against the 'who's who' of the world, the Builders which have been there for the last 50 years, from 40 years, from 20 years, from factories which have been operating with 1,000+ employees, you're competing against them.

But again, we have a very clear message in the LEGO Group, which says 'only the best is good enough'. So, we just followed that. We gave it our best. Everyone contributed. You can see in the video though we are only 14, each one of us is there in the video and dancing, singing, doing everything.

And again, this came from the culture, because the culture is not such that you will be bullied around because you were dancing like that, singing like that. So, I think it goes back to the LEGO Group, to the culture that enabled us to create that video. And, actually, we ended up on a podium.

Julie: Let's hear a short clip of their creative song!

Video insert:

In 2019, a plan was frozen.

To reach more children, India was chosen.

A team was assembled to execute the plan,

bring joy to children as much as they can.

The team stepped in to get on the ride,

with guidance and support on their side.

So, the anchor was lifted, and sail was set,

with a vision in their eyes to be the best.

Julie: By adopting a leadership mindset, we all feel empowered, inspired, and responsible for the future of our brand – whether we're an official people leader or an informal one.

You've been listening to Our LEGO Stories with me, Julie Foster.

Loren: And me, Loren I. Shuster.

Julie: Talking about what leadership for everyone means to them were Lydia Warren, Sanne Dollerup and Gaurav Sahni.

This podcast is brought to you by the LEGO Group. Thank you for listening to season one of Our LEGO Stories. You can find all of our episodes on our [website](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), or wherever you get your podcasts. And please do rate and subscribe so we can welcome more listeners.

Stay tuned for season two, where we'll have more great stories that take a peek into life at the LEGO Group.

Explore more

Our LEGO® Stories

A peek into our world. Our LEGO® Stories is a brand new podcast brought to you by the LEGO Group. In this pilot season, we'll be giving a peek into what we do to have a positive impact on the world and how we bring LEGO products to life. Hosted by Julie Foster, who's a member of our Communications Team, and Loren I. Shuster, our CPO and Head of Corporate Affairs.

Listen to the first season of Our LEGO Stories on your favourite podcast platforms! Explore more [here](#) and listen to the six episodes:

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- Episode 2: Never Too Old to Play
- Episode 3: Building Digital Relationships
- Episode 4: Making LEGO Bricks Sustainable
- Episode 5: Build Vital Skills With LEGO Bricks
- Episode 6: Leadership for Everyone

More about the LEGO Group

Joining the LEGO family means building your career with one of the world's most recognised and loved brands. You will experience a safe space to grow, learn and do your best work. We believe leadership is for everyone, not just people leaders, and we succeed together.

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