



## Entrepreneur—Developmental Toys

**SALARY RANGE (2017):** \$84,000–\$96,000

My business started as a small idea, cultivated in my living room and encouraged by my friends and family. I was learning about stages of child development (in a second-year university class) when my nephew was born. As we learned about developmental milestones and physical maturation, I kept wondering how I could help my nephew to thrive. For a class project, I made a few mobiles out of black and white images to hang over his crib and observed how he responded. As he grew I made toys in contrasting colours that he could work with, taking them apart and putting them back together in a number of ways. The ideas kept coming and he was an excellent teacher, helping me to sort out what was interesting to his changing brain and what was downright boring. I started getting toy requests from my sister’s “mommy group,” and as the demand grew, I learned how to bring materials in and hired a manufacturer to create products that matched my designs. My sales are all coordinated through my website, and my marketing strategy that started as word-of-mouth has grown to include social medial channels, video advertisements and sponsorship. I have delegated the bookkeeping to an accounting team and I’m proud to say that I employ 10 staff who work to keep our business running. Our emphasis has been on providing toddlers with safe, interesting, educational toys that stimulate their visual and motor development. I hope that one day my nephew (now 11) will come to work for the company he helped to inspire!

**The Tip:** Don’t be afraid to test new ideas. Some of them will fail, but you’ll learn a million things through that experience. Taking the fear out of failure has meant I fail more often, but I also achieve amazing things.

### **PRIORITY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS:**

#### **Evidence-based Decision Making**

- See a need and respond to it
- Develop materials that are relevant, evidence-based, and useful
- Build business partnerships based on sound evidence

#### **Advanced Research & Analysis Skills**

- Critically analyze market data, consumer reports and customer feedback
- Synthesize information from multiple sources

#### **Knowledge of Human Behaviour**

- Understanding of early childhood development and stages of learning
- Understanding of parenting development

#### **Advanced Communication Skills**

- Strong written and verbal skills; able to write for the web and for packaging
- Create a sound business plan
- Create strategic documents that are engaging for target audience

#### **Inter-personal Skills**

- Work locally with individuals and virtually with various suppliers and clientele
- Coordinate people and delegate tasks
- Adjust pace, detail and priorities in response to market demands

#### **Intra-personal Skills**

- Self-motivated, self-starter
- Willing to take risks, try new things,

<p>and caregiver needs or preferences</p>	<p>experiment with new designs or products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to manage stress and uncertainty</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Additional Skills</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative, innovative thinker</li> <li>• Strong organizational and record-keeping skills</li> </ul>
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**BUILDING BLOCK EXPERIENCES:**

<p><b>Education &amp; Learning:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) with a minor in business management</li> <li>• Took a few additional bookkeeping courses post-graduation</li> </ul>	<p>I added a minor in business management in my third year once I got started on my own business. These courses were a strong compliment to the psychology courses already under my belt and I think I graduated with a good theoretical foundation and some practical skills in both areas.</p>
<p><b>Employment Experiences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retail work at a convenience store</li> <li>• Front desk receptionist at a car dealership</li> <li>• Casual employee for a local entrepreneur where I dealt with email, web orders and delivery processes</li> </ul>	<p>I learned the most about running a business when I worked at the car dealership, actually. From that front-desk position, I was able to observe the whole operation: advertising and marketing, customer relations and client development, human resources, manufacturing relations and supply chain management. I turned that little job into an internship experience.</p>
<p><b>Community Experiences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing up, my family helped to organize block parties and community BBQs, and I've kept up with that tradition by volunteering with our community association. I host two or three events a year with the hope of bringing neighbours together. We're launching a lending library, seniors' dance classes and a recreational hockey league in the New Year, and I think my next step will be to run for a board position.</li> </ul>	<p>I know it will get harder and harder to stay connected to my community as my business grows and I feel more pressed for time—but being connected, giving back and feeling like I really belong here matters to me. Making time for this kind of volunteer work gives me a kind of satisfaction that you can't buy.</p>
<p><b>Contextual Experiences:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm a family-oriented person. I live close to home and I think I talk with my parents or my sister almost daily.</li> </ul>	<p>My family has been incredible to me through this journey. Along the way, they listened to all of my ideas, gave me honest feedback, tried things out and helped me hone my ideas. They didn't have to bail me out financially, but I know they would have come to my rescue had I needed it. Their emotional support and enthusiastic involvement made all the difference in the development of my products.</p>

**Relationships:**

- In addition to my strong ties with my family, I've developed strong connections with my employees, distributors and even some of my customers. I care about who people are, what they need, and what's happening in their lives. I don't think I could do this work if I didn't really like the people I'm creating things for.

I didn't realize how important relationships were in a business until I started to build my own. And it's true: everything comes down to relationships. Are you trustworthy, reliable, fair and honest? Will you follow through on what you promise and will you respond to issues as they arise? My customers come back to me because of my excellent products, but also because of my excellent customer service. My employees have stayed with me through the years because we've built a family together. We work hard, laugh hard and see value in what we're accomplishing. I share the rewards and I praise my team often. Surround yourself with amazing people and you really can't go wrong.