

Hey! What's New? 2025-116

Play Isn't a Distraction — It Is the Foundation of Success and Connection

According to Cas Holman, the author of *Playful: How Play Shifts Our Thinking, Inspires Connection, and Sparks Creativity*, “Play may be the single most overlooked skill that sets leaders apart, and it is necessary in times of uncertainty.”

In an article on the CNBC *make it* webpage, Holman says that “we’re taught that adulthood is about control and productivity. Yet I’ve seen play unlock creativity, resilience and connection. Leaders who play shift from obsessing over outcomes to embracing curiosity. They reframe failure as exploration, and they discover that a playful team fuels success.”

For example, she notes that at the Performance Theatre in London, she challenged CEOs, philanthropists, and government officials to “create a way to live in a cloud.” She gave them planks, wheel, and bolts but no instructions. She asked them to not build, but create. “And this wasn’t a presentation, either. This was an opportunity to tell a story.”

At first, the room was tense, Holman says. “People hesitated, unsure of how to play with something new without looking foolish. Five minutes in, jackets came off. Laughter erupted. Teams collaborated instead of competing. A ‘cloud mole machine’ emerged. A flying robot came to life. By the end, participants were energized, open, and connected — not just to the task, but to each other.”

Play isn’t just fun. It changes how we think, act and lead, she points out. “And you don’t need a boardroom full of construction kits to start.”

Holman suggests five ways to bring play into your life and leadership today:

1. **Revisit a childhood favorite.** “Think about games or activities you loved as a kid: building forts, drawing, exploring outside. Recreate a version of that today. The goal is to reconnect with your own unique curiosity and imagination.”
2. **Try “object play” at your desk.** “Let yourself tinker with whatever is around. Fold up sticky notes, rebend the paperclips, find something (not someone!) to shoot a rubber band at. Spend five minutes tinkering without a goal. Making things with your hands will shift your brain into problem-solving mode and sparks creativity in ways staring at a screen never will.”
3. **Practice “social play” in meetings.** “Start with a lighthearted icebreaker or ask your team to brainstorm deliberately ‘bad’ ideas before getting serious. Lowering the stakes encourages experimentation and helps teams become invested in each other’s ideas.”
4. **Embrace locomotor play.** “Stand up, stretch, or walk around during a call. Try dancing or just hopping around between meetings. Movement resets your energy and often sparks new ideas.”

5. **Make room for (mis)behavior.** “Play can look silly or unproductive — that’s the point. Sketch ridiculous inventions, stage a mini talent show, or build something with whatever’s at hand. The goal isn’t perfection; it’s exploration.”

The science backs this up, she believes. “Highly creative professionals often approach work playfully. If you want to lead well during uncertain times, innovate boldly, live fully, bring play back. Success isn’t just metrics. It’s how alive you feel while building, making, solving and connecting.”

For more, see [I worked with execs at Google, Nike and Disney—here’s the No. 1 'overlooked' skill I teach.](#)