

KORN FERRY
***Briefings
Podcast***

A new deep dive
into **leadership**



DOWNTIME

Pursuits 57 | Visit 60 | Suggested 63 | Endgame 64

PURSUITS

Grandma's Got Game

Leaders turn to age-old hobbies to slow down.
By Meghan Walsh

©2025 The LEGO Group



“It soothes the nervous system and lets my mind relax.”

Lauren Patterson's "grandma hobby" is assembling LEGOs.



After Lauren Patterson logs off as chief executive officer of the advertising agency she cofounded and puts her two toddlers to bed, she pulls out the LEGO set she hides from the kids. One by one, she clicks the colorful, riveted plastic pieces into place. Currently, she is assembling a three-foot by two-foot replica of the famous Van Gogh sunflowers. “Having the tactile experience of a grandma hobby is a good, like the kids say, ‘touch grass’ moment,” Patterson says. “It soothes the nervous system and lets my mind relax.”

A “grandma hobby” is any practice that’s performed without technological mediation, often something that doesn’t require rigorous physical or

BUILDING AN ANALOG BOX

Compile a stash of supplies so that when the urge arises to reach for your phone, your hands instead go to a puzzle or pen. Some ideas for the executive’s hobby box:

MINDFUL AND COGNITIVE HOBBIES



Jigsaw puzzles



Crosswords



Letter writing

ARTS AND CRAFTS



Knitting



Sketching



Jewelry making

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES



Gardening



Bird watching



Photography

mental effort. It’s a slow-paced, minimal-skill activity, such as crafting, reading, beading, drawing, or solving puzzles. Needlepoint is especially trendy (sales are up more than 200 percent year-over-year). These pastimes, once relegated to seniors and kids, are now emerging as an antidote for terminally online adults of all ages. The explosion of interest in birding, knitting, and breadmaking represents a collective yearning to slow down and to reengage with the physical world.

Of course, the irony here is that social media and the internet are driving this trend, with searches for analog hobbies almost doubling this year. There are entire websites and accounts dedicated to grandma, or analog, hobbies. Business executives are posting on LinkedIn about their geriatric pleasures of choice.

Ekaterina Vasiljeva-Bagier, Prostock-Studio, Zbyszek Popiński, Olga Yastremaka, Thanasia, Light Field Studios, Alire Images, Sasha Bell, Richard Drury, Oscar Sanchez Photography/Getty Images, Marcie Green

Work in Progress Wednesday on TikTok elicits tens of thousands of users to post pictures of their unfinished creations—because these pursuits are about a process, not an outcome. But psychotherapist and author Phil Lane says, “We might view these as much more than just empty or unproductive activities—they are actually vital tools for staying healthy.”

Work-related burnout reached an all-time high last year, Lane points out. The constant stimulation and subsequent cortisol dump takes a toll on the nervous system, leading to cognitive impairment, depression, insomnia, and weakened immunity. Meanwhile, digital interfacing has, to an extent, replaced hobbies. These days, we reach for the phone when we’re tired, bored, stressed, or amped. We sit in front of the computer or TV late into the evenings. The problem is the pastimes of the past served not just as entertainment but also to bring people into the present moment and help them to unwind.

In response, people intuitively began creating analog boxes filled with easily accessible alternatives to scrolling or working that they could reach for instead. It’s a way of redirecting the mind and body. Lane contends it may be more

about regressing to a simpler time than jumping ahead to retirement. He likens it to a concept in psychology that involves “adaptive regression in service of the ego,” which essentially posits that creativity and play can be skillful ways of coping and self-regulating. “By allowing ourselves to occasionally let go of the seriousness of life, we are doing our mental health a favor,” he says.

On Patterson’s desk she has a vase filled with pastel-hued flowers, not from the garden but from her childlike interest in methodically snapping together building blocks. “It adds some fun and whimsy,” she says of her LEGO art. “It’s not about launching an Etsy store. It’s just about making LEGOs for the process of doing it. Not everything has to be productive for it to be worthwhile.”

THE ART OF

Asking Hard Questions

Many go to great lengths to avoid asking uncomfortable questions. Others feed off the thrill. Few are skilled in courageous inquiry. But when done well—and with compassion—asking hard questions is a gift to the inquisitor and the recipient, because both will learn from what emerges.



1 Get consent. Check whether it’s a good time before diving in. Asking a hard question when someone is stressed or distracted is unlikely to be productive.

2 Soften the blow. Imagine swinging a baseball bat wrapped in big, fluffy pillows. Lower the person’s guard by beginning with a phrase like, “I’m trying to better understand ...”

1 QUESTION

3 Keep it simple. Ask just one clear, intentional question at a time and make sure the recipient understands the context. Don’t shotgun multiple inquiries.



4 Listen deeply. Allow silence, so the person can give a contemplative response. When they’re finished, repeat back what you heard—and give gratitude.