

Peter Ruppe

VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER
OF MEN'S TRAINING AND FITNESS, NIKE

play is *innovation, results, teamwork, leadership and curiosity*

From kick-the-can to impromptu football games, the boy's play has three important ingredients: a group of kids, running, and open space. In his small town, it's not hard to make friends and build a big community of teammates. The boy's father is a coach, which means that the boy gets nearly endless opportunities to play sports.

He becomes a bit of a coach himself, or at least a team leader. Unlike most 10-year-old boys, though, he doesn't just dictate what the game is going to be. He asks his friends, "What do you feel like playing?" What is important to him is to create a truly playful environment in which everyone feels included, be it on a football field, a quiet street, or a backyard.

"What I like about being on a team is the fundamental feeling of connection to other people in the human experience, like you are part of something bigger."



● at work

Peter Ruppe has been a leading force at Nike for over 25 years. Much of that time he has spent doing exactly what he loved to do as a kid: creating a playful environment in which everyone can excel.

He creates an open, supportive dynamic, which allows everyone to voice their ideas and inspirations as well as their fears about their ability to perform. He has found that when people feel truly included, they perform best. Nike's success as a company might well be measured by how well its internal teams "play" together, which is due in no small part to Peter.

One of his favorite roles at Nike was when he was a leader in the basketball footwear division. He was part of a team of truly talented people who communicated well and challenged one another, with the result being phenomenal, unanticipated products and team success.

I was part of that team and personally witnessed Peter leverage all five of the play outcomes that are shared in the book's section headings. Peter was curious about where I hoped to take my career and passion for sport. He believed that if I was given a bigger platform to share my story of how a red rubber ball changed my life and if I was given more resources, I would be able to better the lives of others. He lured me away from a position with the Philadelphia 76ers in the National Basketball Association, and I joined his team. As a member of his team, I learned that breakthrough innovation doesn't always need to be BIG but it should always be meaningful. From Peter and the team, I gleaned that being "forever" curious will serve me well. I watched as Peter demonstrated that leaders exist at all levels in a business and on a team and that leadership opportunities should never be solely based on a person's title, position, or the hierarchy of the organization. And the most valuable lesson I took from my time as a member of Peter's team was to always deliver on your promise and have FUN in the process!

“Our very early play experiences help us to define what we are and what we enjoy. We then try to recreate those key parts of ourselves over and over again, in work and in life.”

