



SimplyFun

Working hard
at playing

by Shawn Sullivan

When Gail DeGiulio came up with some ideas to create new and original board games, mass-marketing executives asked her how many millions she was willing to spend on advertising. When she went to stores promoting her innovative games, they asked her which game they should remove from the shelves. Two years later, DeGiulio sits comfortably behind a desk in Bellevue as the chief executive officer of SimplyFun, a company that manufactures and sells table top games the old-fashioned way—one at a time.

“After working in the marketing industry for more than 25 years, I was humbled to find out how little innovation there was in table top games,” DeGiulio said. “The table top game and puzzle industry accounts for \$2.5 billion in the United States and has demonstrated a constant 2 to 5 percent growth every year.”

Even with the adversity she experienced with mass-marketing executives and large chain stores, DeGiulio remained dedicated to her idea. “I let this great idea languish in my mind and finally decided that I was just going to do it,” DeGiulio said. “I spent the next 18 months learning about table top games and joined up with some of the industry’s professionals.”

DeGiulio partnered with Jeremy Young and Matt Molen to create a multimillion-dollar company that provides entertainment to families nationwide. “We procured a variety of games from some well-known designers not found anywhere else,” DeGiulio said. “We launched SimplyFun in 2004, and in nine short months, we had hundreds of consultants across 49 states.”

SimplyFun manufactures and sells a variety of games that cater to all age groups—including adults—and offers several different types of games. Liebrary, a game created by actress Daryl Hannah, is one of the many games SimplyFun distributes. “Thanks to the popularity of Liebrary, we were able to be on both Ellen and Kimmel,” DeGiulio said, referring to recent visits on The Ellen DeGeneres Show and Jimmy Kimmel Live. “We are proud to say that all of our games are original from the ground up.”

DeGiulio and her partners formed the company as a direct sales and party-planning corporation that employs consultants desiring to earn money while playing games and throwing parties. “Most of our consultants tell us, ‘I had so much fun at one of your SimplyFun parties that I want to sign up to be a consultant,’” DeGiulio said.

Consultants host parties for potential customers, which offer customers the ability to try any game before buying it. "How many times have you purchased a game in a large retail store only to discover that you did not enjoy the game," DeGiulio said. "By using our consultants, consumers have the ability to pick the game from which they got the most pleasure."

SimplyFun distinguishes itself from other direct sales companies by the amount of assistance it gives its consultants. "We host the Web site of every consultant, limit their expenses, offer as many resources as possible, and provide them the infrastructure needed for a successful business," DeGiulio said. "We always recognize that we rely on our consultants to stay in business—they are our employers."

SimplyFun bases its successful business model around the advancement of play. "Even at our headquarters we dedicate time for play every Thursday," DeGiulio said. "Playing games with your family is perhaps the best way to learn what life is all about." The company is so passionate about the importance of play that it dedicates a lot of its time and resources to hosting fundraising parties for schools, churches and other nonprofit organizations.

"Last year, we partnered with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America to provide relief to hurricane victims," DeGiulio said. Not only did SimplyFun raise money for the people affected, the company also donated hundreds of games to children.

Games manufactured by SimplyFun are different from most games because each one has either a learning or moral component to them. For example, SimplyFun created Peace—a game completely opposite of War—where each player is trying to give cards away and the winner is the one without anything left in his or her hand.



Photos courtesy of SimplyFun

SimplyFun co-owners Jeremy Young (left), Gail DeGiulio and Matt Molen try to devote 30 minutes to play time every day.

The company created the games with the playing habits of American children in mind. "We recognized children in the United States spend nine months in a structured environment, so our products allow you to bring structure to play," DeGiulio said. "Europeans consider games an important piece to family life—in the United States, play is merely an afterthought."

The lack of time devoted to play is something DeGiulio wants to change. "Our goal is to get as many homes as possible to set aside 30 minutes every week and just play," DeGiulio said. ■

