



From Idea to Income: Summer Fun to Summer Funds

For elementary-aged children, summer arrives not with a calendar date, but with the distinct scent of sunscreen, the splash of pool water, and the promise of endless backyard adventures. Gone are the rigid schedules of school, replaced by a glorious stretch of days dedicated to playdates, melting popsicles, and the unforgettable chaos of summer camp, complete with the mystery of where their water bottle disappeared to by day's end ("I swear I put my water bottle back in my bag!")

While earlier discussions have explored how older children can turn hobbies into hustles, this article turns its focus to the younger set, who often demonstrate budding entrepreneurial spirit in their own unique ways. Summer, for instance, frequently leads to a flurry of distinctly American entrepreneurial pop-up beverage bistros around neighborhoods: parents might know them colloquially as "lemonade stands". In many areas, there are lemonade stands touting their product as organic, others posting that a portion of their proceeds is donated to local causes, and at least one offering a discount for customers providing their own cup. For those who feel guilty about not carrying cash to patronize these temporary establishments, don't despair, many of these stands now accept Venmo. This all points to a very good sign: there's a whole generation of 8 to 10-year-olds demonstrating business savvy well ahead of when it's expected.

Maybe a lemonade stand's not your child's jam (maybe a homemade jam stand is), but summer *can* be the perfect time to turn a fun idea of theirs (with some assistance) into something distinctly cooler: a mini business. This isn't about encouraging a third grader to investigate setting up an LLC, nor leveraging their love for Doc McStuffins into a junior internship at the medical school. Rather, it's helping kids discover that something they love—drawing, baking, crafting, helping others—can also be something they *share* with others, and maybe even earn some money doing so.

Let's Talk About Steps, Baby:

The first step towards encouraging this project is low stakes: a conversation between you and your child when they're mentally ready to engage in some thinking. It might be in the car ride home from camp; it might be over dinner; it might be in the wind-down period before bed. Start by asking your child three things:

"What's something you'd do every day if you could?"

"What do your friends say you're really good at?"

"Have you ever made something that someone else said they'd buy?"

Maybe your child loves building LEGO creations and wants to teach a “Brick Buddies” class for younger kids. Maybe they’re always drawing comics, embellishing names with curlicues and stars, or creating complex mazes on paper, and would love to set up an “artist’s table” at a family garage sale. Maybe they know how to braid hair (human or doll) and want to open a “Backyard Beauty Salon” for neighbors. Even the quirkiest ideas are worth exploring because the point isn’t to make a million dollars, it’s to help your child connect *creativity* with *confidence*.

What Do We Do Now, Charlie Brown?

Once they’ve landed on an idea, turn it into a mini adventure. Give them your undivided attention (difficult, but undoubtedly the most important part). Ask them:

“What will you make or do?”

“Who might want it?”

“How will you tell people about it?”

“What supplies will you need?”

Use a notebook or piece of paper to help them visualize their plan. Don’t turn it into a full business class. Just let the questions guide the conversation. For example, “If your lemonade costs \$5 to make and you sell 10 cups at \$1, did you make money or lose money?” Suddenly they’re learning about cost, pricing, and profit, without even realizing it.

Make a Sign, Any Sign

Provide them with paper, posterboard, or an old cardboard box; break out the crayons, Magic Markers, or (if you’re really brave) the Sharpies. Suggest that a flyer or sign would really help advertise their product or service but refrain from helping too much: **Nina’s Fresh Lemnaid** or **Sams Lego Bilders Class** convey a childlike innocence that can be appealing in its own right, and the more you refrain from providing ideas, *the more they’re forced to come up with their own*. You can suggest things that should be on the sign, such as “How will someone know how much it costs?” or “What time are you open for business?” but allow them freedom to include and omit information.

The Verbal Appeal

Helping them spread the word builds communication skills. If they are shy, they might practice saying, “Hi! Would you like to see what I made?” in front of the mirror, a (supportive) sibling, or the dog. You can (and should) encourage them to use kind words and smile, say thank you even if someone doesn’t buy something, and talk about their work with pride. While these are early lessons in customer service, self-advocacy, and presentation, they bear repeating often as they grow up.

Celebrate Wins, Losses, and Everything In Between

This isn't about reinforcing the "everybody wins" ethos inherent in youth sports, but rather acknowledging the positives even when things don't go as planned. Somedays they'll sell out of the slime or cookies they made. Other days the rain will chase them inside, the sign will blow over, and nobody will stop. That's more than okay as this is where the real learning happens. Allow your child to make small mistakes in underpricing their items, overestimating demand for their product, or running out of supplies. Instead of stepping in right away to "fix" the situation, ask, "What do you think you'll try differently next time?" There are significant, underrated benefits to failing hard, failing fast, and failing often if they learn that setbacks don't mean stop: **resilience is built by adjusting and trying again.**

Wow, Look What I Earned!

Let's assume they've gotten their driveway business up and running and are pleasantly surprised by all the people that stop by (there's no shame in you surreptitiously plugging their efforts to friends and family on social media). When the quarters and dollars start adding up (or when you see an uptick in your Venmo balance), it's time to sit down with your budding entrepreneur and talk about what to do next: save some for a big goal, spend a little on a reward, and give an amount to a cause they care about. This can be as simple as labeling three jars "Save", "Spend", and "Share", and allowing them to decide how to allocate what they've made. You can guide them (or not) in how they do this— "Your dad and I believe that saving is really important"—but *allow them the agency to choose* without tut-tutting or suggesting a different allocation.

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

It's not uncommon to see spirited young entrepreneurs in action throughout the summer. Imagine, for instance, a seven-year-old and her friend setting up a curbside weekend stand ("Bracelets & Lemnade"). They might recruit slightly younger siblings to add enthusiastic screams and dances whenever a car drives by, and they'll definitely have homemade signs. Will they amass a fortune? Unlikely. However, through this hands-on endeavor, they'll gain invaluable experience in managing transactions, collaborating, articulating their offerings, and feeling immense pride in their creation. Plus, it will be truly heartwarming to witness them meticulously handling their funds at the end of the day, perhaps even allocating a portion to their younger 'staff.'

In a similar vein, somewhere in America there's a resourceful ten-year-old taking to the sidewalks and hawking Minute Maid with a distinct, resonating call of "Cooooold LemonADE!" Clearly, a budding entrepreneur betting that if a sales tactic works at the ballpark, why not door-to-door? \$4 is A LOT to pay for a warm lemonade poured into a Solo cup from a store-bought carton, but the novelty of his idea, plus his smile and presentation, pretty much guarantees remarkable success. His efforts demonstrate a keen understanding of market dynamics and salesmanship, often leading to the cheerful achievement of a personal goal, whether it's funding a desired item, contributing to a cause, or saving for a future endeavor.

Parent Cap Off, Investor Cap On

Your job isn't to do it *for* them. Your job is to ask good questions, cheer them on, help them stay safe, allow them to flounder, and verbally remind them often how proud you are of their efforts (*not* the results). Summer is the perfect opportunity to let kids surprise us with their ingenuity and creativity. Even if your child doesn't

stick with their hustle long-term (or, let's be honest, through an entire day) they'll come away with something way more valuable than money: the feeling that they can *do something*, make something, sell something, and share something all by themselves.

And that feeling? Well, let's just say a \$4 lemonade pales in comparison. It's the seed of independence, and it just might bloom later in the summer.



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