



The Kristiansen Family: Building the LEGO® legacy over multiple generations

BY: CHRISTINA OUTRIDGE

For more than eight decades, LEGO®, one of the world's most beloved toy brands, has been owned and led by the Kristiansen family in Denmark. Brick by brick, the Kristiansens have constructed an extraordinary legacy that originally captured CMG's attention in 2020 with [this story](#). Here, we first discovered the family's deep commitment to transparency, maintaining control of the family business, and their unyielding focus on long-term thinking and continuous innovation.

This commitment has paid off.

Today, 85 years after it was founded, LEGO® remains one of the world's truly iconic businesses. And it continues to be owned by a highly accomplished business family that many other such families around the globe look to for inspiration.

The Kristiansens have remained true to their word. About a month ago – on May 1, 2023 – they passed the baton from the third to the fourth generation of family leadership, and [Thomas Kirk Kristiansen was named the new Chairman of KIRKBI A/S](#) – the family's private holding and investment company. Thomas assumes

the reins from his father, Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, who served as Chairman for 24 years.



“Today I pass the baton to Thomas with a great sense of gratitude and pride...as a family, we have fortunately been able to prepare this transition thoroughly together and complete the handover to the 4th generation gradually. We have had time for many, meaningful conversations about the future and about making a difference for children and the world around us. It has been enriching to experience the passion for play and learning that has always been the driving force in our family and to see how Thomas, with the support of the family, our competent boards, and employees, has taken on an ever-increasing responsibility with care, compassion, and ambitions for the future.

It, therefore, feels like a natural and right time to step down from the Board of Directors of KIRKBI and safely leave the helm to the next generation.”

~ Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, descending Chairman of the Board of Directors of KIRKBI A/S

Son Thomas
Kirk Kristiansen
with Kjeld Kirk
Kristiansen



The ongoing generational handover of the Kristiansen family business has been in the works for years, with Thomas gradually taking on more responsibilities. His ascent was no accident; he was deemed “most active owner” of the fourth generation of the family in 2016. Since then, his role has expanded, with appointments to the Chairmanship of the LEGO® Foundation in 2016 and the LEGO® Group in 2020. These moves speak volumes of the family’s dedication to keeping their legacy alive.

Lessons learned from the Kristiansen family

We’ve observed from working with many of Canada’s business families that long-term sustainable success is often built on a foundation of strong family values, active and engaged ownership, and effective planning. The Kristiansens are a living example. In particular, the words from the family’s own [leadership announcement](#) last month point to three striking themes:

- 1. Planning is an ongoing process – not just an event.** The Kristiansens recognize planning is not a static process but an ongoing journey to be continuously nurtured and managed. *“I have been preparing myself in close collaboration with my father and Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, the former CEO of the LEGO Group, since joining the board of LEGO A/S as an observer in 2004 – and later in 2007 being appointed to the board,”* says Thomas Kirk Kristiansen. As Thomas steps into his new role as leader, he’s also already thinking about the fifth generation of leadership for the family: *“I feel privileged taking over the baton from my father today... and look forward to continuing the work until it becomes my turn to pass on the responsibility to the fifth generation.”*



2. Active and engaged ownership drives family business success. With a shared vision to maintain a close connection to the very heart of their ventures, the Kristiansens have entrusted one individual per generation with the honour of becoming what they call the “most active owner.” Through this process, the family has designed a strategy to minimize potential conflicts and power struggles. This approach involves a thorough evaluation of family members’ capabilities, commitment, and passion, which results in selecting whom they consider the most qualified individual to assume the leadership role going forward. It seems to work for them. In addition to ensuring a seamless transition of leadership, this strategy creates healthy competition and transparency within the family. In this environment, everyone knows the rules, eliminating surprises.

3. A gradual transition can help to build trust and respect. By planning effectively and gradually introducing the fourth generation to different roles and positions within the business, the Kristiansen family has constructed a solid foundation for Thomas to build on. “The gradual handover of power allows the next generation leader’s voice to be heard – *to gain the trust, confidence and respect* – not only from the family but from the family’s advisors, employees and loyal customers. “It’s an opportunity to instill the founder’s core principles for the family’s next chapter,” says Marty McConnell, partner at CMG.

We believe the Kristiansen story (and its growing legacy with LEGO®) offers lessons to all business families. “Investing in a deliberate, defined planning process like this can often be perceived by other business families as a cost or distraction. However, at CMG we have observed that dedicating *time and energy* to this process yields substantial long-term dividends in the *business of the family*, as exemplified by the success of the Kristiansens,” says Marty.

And the family rolls on. They continue to emphasize the importance of staying true to core principles, taking a hands-on approach to ownership, and embracing change to stay relevant and thrive over time.

Brick by brick.



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