

How To Become a Level-Four Santa

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Level-One Santa - literal belief in the myth of Santa Claus as an embodied person, who lives at the North Pole, says “Ho Ho Ho,” and comes down the chimney to give out presents, depending on whether a particular child has been naughty or nice. All our children receive personal letters from Santa, regardless of age. Santa talks about their past year, what he’s noticed, what to work on, how much he loves them. Then, one year, when they’ve had a lot of questions, and it feels like the timing is right, they receive a letter telling them that on the day after Christmas, they are to reach under their pillow, and there will be a special letter there that answers all their questions. They are ready to become a Level-Two Santa.

Level-Two Santa - You become privy to the giant mystery, the fabulous conspiracy that is Santa. You are entrusted with the secret, that Santa is so much bigger than you imagined — and that you get to be Santa, too! The entire framework is laid out, and you can see how far-reaching it is, how much more profound it is than a man coming down a chimney. People are so wonderful that all over the world, they will go to great lengths to ensure that others have a magical Christmas. NORAD (the North American Aerospace Defense Command) puts up video and a website so that families all over the world can track Santa’s progress. People go to the post office to pick up letters from children who have written to Santa, to actually fill some of those requests, out of their own wallet! Movies made, books written, collections taken up, all to make magic for children, the most powerless among us.

To become a Level Two is not automatic. It is a choice. You may decide to just close the door, believe that “There is no Santa Claus.” Or you can make the choice to join in, to become a Level Two Santa. A Level Two is someone who supports the Santa Claus efforts, promoting the wonder, keeping the mystery. Level Twos learn to listen intently, while looking casual; they pay attention to such things as what kind of thing a child plays with, what characters they like, their favorite colors. They themselves make magic, helping to put out the gifts on Christmas Eve, eating a cookie (but leaving crumbs on a plate).

Level-Three Santa - Becoming Santa for a child in your life: your child, your niece or nephew, your grandchild. You give, and receive no credit. No thank-you’s. It’s worth it, to be part of this magic.

Level-Four Santa - Becoming Santa for someone not as close: an elderly neighbor, a friend, a stranger, a name on a tree. The recipient can’t know who you are. If they did, you wouldn’t be Santa. And yes, you can become a Level Four before becoming a Level Three!

Level-Five Santa: Becoming the embodiment of Santa (or Mrs. Claus). They put on, or grow, the beard, put on the red hat, perfect their Ho-Ho-Ho. They wave from parades, and hold squirming babies on their laps for pictures.

Thomas Groome, *Will There Be Faith?*

Responding to “I think I don’t believe in Santa anymore.”

Movement 1:

- Echo the child’s question to avoid over-responding to a question the child wasn’t really asking: “What do you mean you don’t believe in Santa Claus anymore?”
- “It turned out that his first doubts were more about the reindeer flying through the air than about Santa himself. I asked how he felt about not believing. He felt sad for the loss of toys, but he also wondered whether we’d simply lied to him, a more important issue.”

Movement 2:

- Groom: “Why stop believing in Santa Claus now?”
- Child: “Nearly no one in third grade believed it anymore.”
- Then Groome “asked if that was a good reason and where his closest friends stood on the matter, whereupon he posed the direct question, ‘There isn’t really a Santa Claus, right?’ I knew it was time to share the true Santa story and the wisdom of it.”

Movement 3:

- Telling the story of Santa Claus’ origins in the story of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of anonymous gift giving, whose story is annually celebrated on December 6 in many Christian traditions. There are an increasing number of children’s book that can help parents tell this story such as Julie Stiegemeier’s *Saint Nicholas: The Real Story of the Christmas Legend*.
- Groome then Googled the famous *New York Sun* editorial of September 21, 1897, “Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus,” which he and his son then discussed. Alternately, you can watch a visualization of this correspondence on YouTube.

Movement 4:

- “So what do you think? Is Santa a good idea? Are you sorry or happy we [told you the Santa story]? Were we lying or being loving to you?”
- Then, his son “inquired if he’d still get presents at Christmas time. I assured him that of course he would and that the spirit of Santa will always live on, even if not as a fat old man with a white beard and a red suit. Teddy agreed with, ‘That’s cool, Dad.’”

Recommended Book

Love, Santa by Martha Brockenbrough (Author) and Lee White (Illustrator): In a series of letters, a young girl writes to Santa to ask about the North Pole, Mrs. Claus, and of course, Christmas goodies. Year after year, Santa writes back, and a heartwarming relationship develops, until one year, the girl writes to her mother instead: Mom, are you Santa? Her mother responds to say that no, she is not Santa. Because Santa is bigger than any one person -- we bring him out through kindness to one another and the power of imagination. This transformative tale spins a universal childhood experience into a story about love, giving, and the spirit of Christmas.