

CAMPAIGNS FOR FUN AND PROFIT: Part 2

In our last EDU-TAINMENT article, we discussed our experience assisting a client who was having difficulty introducing a new on-line error tracking system in his department. To get his staff to use the new system, he needed a significant change in behavior. To accomplish this, we designed an ongoing effort—a campaign. A successful change campaign is composed of several core elements.

Short and Sweet

First and foremost, it needs well-planned and targeted communications vehicles to keep the goal clear and present. Communication is key to achieving results. However, there's more to it than talk. To be successful, campaigns must be supported with thoughtful managerial action.

A well-designed campaign should be short **and** sweet. Short? The end can't be too far away in time or performance will wane. And what makes it sweet? The manager must react to the performance along the way in a timely manner. Research has shown that careful use of recognition and reward can virtually assure that the objective of the campaign is achieved.

Reacting and Rewarding: Structuring Consequences

Predictable, consistent positive and negative consequences—tied directly to performance—are the most powerful behavior modifiers known to man. Does this sound like an overstatement? Let's review some evidence—a familiar life experience for many of us.

It's fair to say that, for most adults, skiing doesn't just "come naturally." Remaining upright while sliding on wooden planks down the side of a snowy mountain is definitely a learned behavior. So, then, how do we learn to ski? Every time we lean over too far, we fall down. The consequence is relentless. There are no second chances because "we are trying very hard." Gravity never decides to change the rules or ignore our bad days. On the other hand, every time we move our bodies correctly, we have a thrilling experience. The result? Our behavior changes to seek the reward—exhilarating skiing—and avoid the negative consequence. That's the way it works.

The Power of the Positive

In the workplace, however, it's well known that rewards are better behavior change incentives than punishment. Negative consequences can convey a very "parental" message that most adults dislike. In addition, punishment loses power over repetitions. Rewards and recognition, on the other hand, are always welcome.

What does this mean for designing successful campaigns? To accomplish the goal, we will need to reward, recognize—and keep recognizing—positive performance. Concrete rewards—like raises in salary or cash bonuses—can have a significant influence on results. But who has limitless resources to pay for every change we need to make?

We sometimes fail to consider the full range of positive incentives that can influence our employees' performance. We downplay our personal power and the perceived value of our approval and appreciation. When designing your campaign, you can maximize your influence by applying any combination of the following incentives and rewards.

❖ **Fast-Start Awards, Trophies, Books, and Gadgets**

By using a bit of thought and discretion, small gift items can reinforce the change made and express your appreciation. Where possible, choose items that relate to the challenge. Or choose items of personal importance to the employees you wish to reward. The rewards don't need to be expensive.

❖ **Identification as a Performance Coach**

Employees who make swift progress toward the goal are not only great examples for you to single out for praise and thanks—they are the best kind of coaches for colleagues not so quick on the uptake. If you ask a member of your group to help others, be sure the “reward” doesn’t turn into a punishment by extending the new coach’s workday, or transferring to him or her, single-handedly, the responsibility for improving the performance of the rest of group. For most employees, a little coaching is a reward, and a lot is just a pain.

❖ **Time with the Manager**

Surprisingly underutilized as a means of recognition, we find that establishing an advisory board of high performance employees is a terrific incentive. Employees appreciate the confidence you demonstrate, and often increase their effort and willingness to contribute. You may discover all kinds of valuable information about performance obstacles that you can remove. If an advisory board is too formal for your challenge or your organization, why not take the high performers out to lunch?

❖ **Introduction to Senior Management**

For superior performance, or to reward an employee for a particularly challenging accomplishment, providing an introduction to a member of senior management, or allowing that employee to participate in a project visible to senior management is a high-powered reward likely to motivate not only the employee you select, but also others in your group who understand the potential of such rewards as career development opportunities. And, it doesn’t cost a dime of your operating budget!

❖ **Recognition Event**

For employees who exceed your goal, you may want to consider a special event. This can be as lavish or simple as your budget can tolerate, as long as it is an exclusive get-together. You must be willing to exclude those who did not make the required change for this to have its maximum impact.

Here’s an example of what can go wrong: A manager we know threw a party for the entire department when the challenge he issued was met. While circulating amongst the attendees, he was surprised to note two standing in the corner, obviously disgruntled. He asked why they didn’t seem to be enjoying the gala. One reluctantly responded, pointing to a non-contributor in the group: “That son-of-a-gun is drinking my champagne!”

They Really Oughta Wanna (But Sometimes They Don’t!)

Simply put, using recognition and reward keeps the manager in the driver’s seat. When implementing a change campaign, we not only need to orchestrate consistent communications, support and reminders, we need to structure motivating consequences. Employing a variety of techniques to say “Great job!” strengthens employee loyalty and energizes your staff. It can get the job done.

Even though it’s tempting to believe that success should be its own reward, where our results are at stake, isn’t it just plain smart to stack the deck?

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