

EDU-TAINMENT

Initiating and Supporting Change

What Is EDU-TAINMENT?

In our work, we frequently assist managers and other professionals who are ready to introduce changes within their functions, and to their staff. Our series of EDU-TAINMENT articles offer out-of-the-box ideas, tips and techniques that we have used successfully to support managers and change agents to improve:

- ❑ Receptivity to change
- ❑ Readiness for change
- ❑ Results in your target organization.

Edu-Tainment ideas are quick, unusual and easy to implement—they assist you to smooth transitions, focusing your employees on key activities and opening or maintaining lines of communication.

More with Sugar: Campaigns for Fun and Profit, Part One

In a recent assignment, we assisted a client introducing a new on-line error tracking system. Acceptance was dismal as the organization allowed employees to continue to use the old system. As a result, virtually no one was using the new functionality. Sound familiar?

We remembered Grandma's old saying: "You can catch more flies with sugar than with vinegar." No single communication can change an employee's perception or behavior. To get the change you need, your staff must be frequently reminded, encouraged, influenced and—well, if Grandma was right—even flattered. So we designed a campaign—an ongoing effort. What are the elements of a successful communications campaign?

- ❑ Consistent, insistent, "cut through the clutter", unique and ingenious communications
- ❑ A manageable time-frame
- ❑ Performance-based recognition and rewards

The Campaign: Remind, Engage and Promote

Here's a tip for designing the communications campaign: first outline, and then specifically deliver on your objectives.

- ❑ You want to get and hold the audience's attention.
- ❑ You need to get them talking about the challenge and their progress toward success.
- ❑ You may want to appeal to their competitive nature (if appropriate for your group).

The best campaigns combine several types of communications vehicles to keep employees interested and surprised. Using a variety of vehicles keeps the employees entertained, praises their efforts and results, and delivers guidance that gets the job done. You can build your own series of communications from the list of suggestions below.

❖ E-mail Announcements

An e-mail announcement of the campaign, personalized to each member of your group, can effectively ensure that your message is received uniformly. The announcement should include an overview of the challenge you are confronting; the results you wish to accomplish; encouragement for immediate participation; details about the ongoing communications you plan; and a description of any promotions planned within the campaign.

Everyone loves rewards for their performance. If you choose to offer prizes, or awards for meeting goals or passing milestones, the announcement is a terrific place to describe them, in connection with the requirements to earn each.

❖ Teasers

Crisp electronic messages—or e-postcards that are visual, to-the-point and engaging—can be very effective in keeping up the momentum of your campaign. The message is always “You can do it!” or “You did it!” If you can identify a theme that relates to the outcome you want to accomplish, that’s even better.

For example, in one campaign, we needed the audience to use a new business procedure that avoided costly errors and the associated repair processes. We wanted the audience to remember that their daily efforts were essential to efficient, cost effective, client focused company service. Our e-postcard opened with a cartoon image of Mighty Mouse speaking his famous line: “Here I come to save the day!” When the receiver clicked on the picture, the caption morphed into “He saves **the** day. You save **every** day.”

❖ Print Cards

You can produce and print greeting or postcards for use in interoffice or regular mail. Sending such a card to the home of your employees—for example if you’re running a big stakes contest— can ramp up the impact of your message and involve the significant others at home in encouraging the change you seek. Or you can send a congratulatory message supplemented with clip art to make the point.

For our campaign, we sent team members a two-panel card with the *A-Team* pictured on the first panel. The caption read: “In the ‘80s, they rescued people in need.” The second panel was a mirror. That caption read: “Now it’s your turn.”

❖ Voicemail Updates

A “thank you” message for each member of your group will go a long way. The more specific your message, the more it will mean to your team members. Acknowledge a personal contribution for that day or for a specific time period.

For even more reaction and interest, leave the voicemail as a sound-alike celebrity. Choose a celebrity with a very recognizable voice, like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Mr. T (the hero from the old *A-Team* television show), known for overcoming obstacles or succeeding at challenges. If you can’t do the imitation, look for someone who can, and write a message that congratulates a new user of your new system, or report *A-Team* performance—100% team participation on your system—for that day, or week. If used judiciously, this can really get your audience buzzing.

❖ Newsletters

Depending on the length of the campaign and the size of your audience, you may want to consider creating and distributing an electronic or print campaign newsletter. When the change you want to support is complex, you might encourage employees to nominate colleagues who have mastered a particularly difficult aspect of the new performance for campaign recognition. This newsletter then becomes the fulfillment vehicle for public “thanks” to successful individuals who have approached and mastered the new tasks. It should be filled with personal success stories and managerial congratulations to spark ideas in others and keep the audience interested in mastering the challenge themselves.

Make It Short and Sweet

Campaigning isn’t only for politicians. A campaign designed with frequent and attention-getting communications, seasoned with recognition will deliver results. It will keep the fire lit under the performance effort until the target has been met.

If the campaign is kept “short and sweet”—kicked off and completed within a short calendar timeframe—it will harness the energy of the audience, and amplify the “buzz” around the target performance until the job is done. And, it can be fun—fun-for-profit—sweetening the change effort until it seems just plain easy!

Coming soon: We’ll explore another key element of successful campaigns—*Reacting and Rewarding*.

Melissa Surow, Senior Managing Director, Jeremiah Associates, July 2005