

Successful Employee Incentive Programs

Business Development

By Sherri Petro

Employees are an extension of the business and can assist the organization with business development. Not only is this an excellent use of resources, marketing for the firm gives employees valuable experience which is critical when they move up the ranks. How can one insure the business development program is successful when planning? Lessons are in order – make it clear, make it simple, make it fun, make it valuable.

Make it Clear

As usual, communication is the key. The goals, rules and process of the program must be clear from the start. Confusion can kill a worthwhile effort. The goals should be *SMART* – Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Time-sensitive. The rules should be clearly defined. Running employees through the process helps to manage their expectations. If they put forth energy now, what is the return, when will they receive it, what will it look like?

Employees should know how this effort strategically fits with the company's mission. This does not need to be a manifesto. A simple but eloquent case can be made for how their efforts contribute to the financial health of the firm. Effects of previous marketing efforts or the success of the partners' efforts can be highlighted as examples.

Make it Simple

Resist the impulse to make a complex, multi-tiered campaign. Though it may sound like a lot of fun, remember this part of the employee's job is adjunct to their function. If it takes monumental effort to understand the rules, employees may talk themselves out of participating. Opportunity lost. Some firms institute a point system for a multitude of marketing behaviors. While the intent is admirable, simplicity should be the ticket. Keep the employees engaged by recognizing a manageable number of key behaviors.

Make it Fun

Themed contests go a long way in incorporating fun into the campaign. Sports, movie and music themes fit as they are a common ground most employees understand. Periodically celebrate. Both planned and spontaneous celebrations recognizing significant accomplishments create a dynamic marketing program and engaged employees. Display progress charts in a heavily traveled area such as the lunchroom.

If employees are energized by a contest, divide the company into teams who compete with each other. While not everyone will be heartily involved, being a part of a team may assist those who would not otherwise participate. It's also important to recognize that marketing is not for everyone. Some will simply be comfortable as a spectator. Don't be tempted -- mandating fun is not an option.

Make it Valuable

Recognize that one size does not fit all. Value, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Build flexibility into the business development compensation structure. Surprise – not all employees are motivated by money only! A little internal market research can help create a great program. Discussions with potential participants before program rollout to understand what they would value most can go a long way in ensuring a successful program. This polling tool can assist your firm in developing a program that holds value for your employees.

Conclusion

A successful employee incentive program is well thought out beforehand and integrates clarity, simplicity, fun and value. [Click here for a checklist on how to develop, introduce and monitor a program.](#) Clearly communicated, customized programs can encourage engaged employees to develop additional business

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for the firm – a proverbial win-win. Employees receive rewards and recognition in the short-run, but more importantly practice a skill set which becomes more valuable as they advance in the firm. The firm receives more business, excited employees and an avenue to identify potential candidates with upward mobility potential. Win-win, indeed.