



STAR WARS MEETS EMPLOYERS: CREATIVE WAYS TO REWARD EMPLOYEES

by Gloria Reisman et al.

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The panelists represent managers from manufacturing, consulting, software and internet companies. Panelists will share with the audience:

- ♦ *meaningful ways to motivate, acknowledge, and reward employees and teams,*
- ♦ *what works and what doesn't for employees who are older, younger, geographically separated, and telecommuters, and*
- ♦ *creative ways to reward employees on a shoestring budget.*

OVERVIEW

Gloria Reisman

In May 1999, major newspapers across the U.S. printed headlines similar to the Philadelphia Inquirer's:

"STAR WARS' PREQUEL LURED THROGS OF FILMGOERS AWAY FROM CLASSES AND JOBS."

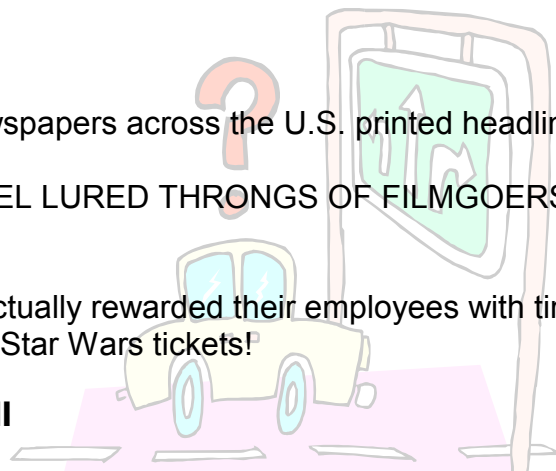
Yes, some managers actually rewarded their employees with time off to camp out and wait in long lines to get their Star Wars tickets!

Rewards in a Nutshell

Rewards are given to acknowledge an employee or team for a job well done, for achieving a goal, for meeting a deadline, or for going above and beyond the scope of a job. Rewards come in many forms, such as incentives through formal awards programs with expensive prizes or gifts. Or, they can be informal and low-cost, and still have significant value to the recipient. The key is to know what motivates an employee, and ensure that each reward fits the following criteria: fair, timely, in proportion to the performance or accomplishment, presented sincerely, and meaningful to the individual.

The creative possibilities of rewards are endless, including thank you notes, spot cash awards, announcements in company newsletters and emails, eliciting employee ideas, listening, a relaxed dress code, and gift certificates, to name a few.

Peggy E. Schiffers, a certified management consultant and human resources expert, writes in her April 1999 article, "Employing Recognition and Award Programs that Work" that a more formal awards program should meet a number of criteria to be effective. She includes



items such as consider your corporate culture and organization, have specific objectives for employee behavior and performance, have well-defined eligibility criteria, identify the decision maker, have the award's purpose drive the timing, communicate the recognition, and maintain flexibility.

Why Rewards?

Giving rewards and recognition to employees is not just a “nice to have” in the workplace. It can make the difference between retaining highly motivated employees versus incurring the high-costs of lost company knowledge, and recruiting and training new employees.

Saul Carliner notes in his January 2000 *STC Intercom* cover article “Trends for 2000: Thriving in the Boom Years” that the tight labor market and increase in demand for technical communicators has “led to an increased focus on recruiting qualified applicants and a change in incentives.” He also notes that “Fewer organizations focus on retaining employees, and marginally dissatisfied employees often opt to change jobs rather than remain in jobs that are intellectually unsatisfying or in which the employer takes the employee for granted.”

Finally, employee surveys and exit interviews consistently reveal that employees demand more than just salary and benefits to remain in a job or for taking a new job. In a survey titled “The National Study of the Changing Workplace” a nationally representative group of 3,400 employees were asked what they considered to be “very important” in deciding to take their current job. The top three reasons included open communications (65%), opportunities to balance life (60%), and meaningful work (59%).

Summary

Rewarding employees can be a useful management tool to help retain valuable employees and keep your team working at top performance.

THE STRATEGY OF REWARDS

Diane Beadle, Deloitte & Touche

In the Technical Communications field, the required skills are evolving, and we all need to adapt and learn—sometimes at a pace that can be downright frightening. Years ago, we needed writing skills and word processing, and if we knew desktop publishing, we were at the front of the pack. Now, some of the skills encompassed by my department include writing skills (some things will never change), HTML, DHTML, JavaScript, animations, Lingo, web design and development, graphics competence—the list goes on. Seeing that all the required skills are adequately represented and keeping employees from feeling overwhelmed by all of this is my biggest management challenge. Rewards and incentives play a large part in the overall strategy.

There are many levels at which one can reward, from the most obvious means to other, more personally meaningful ways. At the most traditional level, there is money. Our office within Deloitte provides “ABCD” awards –Above and Beyond the Call of Duty. These are given to those individuals who voluntarily helped a person or department through a crunch,

or otherwise went out of their way to ensure that a project went as planned. The award has two parts: a letter of appreciation explaining the reason for the award is presented to the employee and read aloud by our Director, and a gift certificate is given. Because these awards are presented in front of their peers at our monthly All Hands meetings, the impact is significant.

But there are other ways to reward employees, and these may be tailored to the likes and needs of the individual employee. For employees with long commutes, families, or other outside commitments, the ability to work flexible hours and/or telecommute may be key incentives. Free team lunches are always appreciated, as is my ability to overlook a less-than-strict adherence to company dress codes, especially when a crunch is on.

Providing training in areas of interest is a huge incentive that accomplishes several things. It allows people to acquire, keep, or advance key skills, while encouraging them to keep abreast of the latest happenings in our field. When people establish niche areas of expertise, they accomplish the department goal of having the right skills available, and they achieve personal recognition and fulfillment, which are always appreciated by the individual.

One employee, a graphic designer and recent graduate, is developing an in-house training course on using PhotoShop for our department. He is an expert, and we all need to raise our level of proficiency. In part because he is so recently out of school, the idea of developing his own curriculum and presenting it is empowering. It has been a rewarding experience for all concerned.

Having input into their own career paths is a big incentive. Based on input from staff, we have recently established a Specialist career path, which allows employees to enhance and deepen technical skills without sacrificing career potential. Because of this, a key employee has been promoted to Specialist and now functions as team leader and product manager for our more complex technical projects, while another employee with an interest in the more traditional management path functions as the project leader. This allows both a degree of freedom to acquire the skills necessary to develop in their chosen paths. This is a significant, intrinsic reward.

Overall, I think positive exposure does more for morale and productivity than any other single factor. Always give credit where it is due. Whenever possible, include the names of team members in publications or colophons. When you receive praise for any piece of documentation, online or print, be sure to acknowledge your team, and pass along any positive emails, voice mails, or comments you receive. Knowing their contributions will be acknowledged and recognized is, in my opinion, the single most important reward of all.

REWARDS AS MOTIVATION

Ellen Goldhaar, Erisco Managed Care Technologies

As the manager of a team of technical writers, one of my biggest challenges is to keep my staff motivated and excited about their work. Rewards are a way of letting them know they are appreciated and provide an incentive to keep up the good work.

I'm fortunate that my company believes in rewarding employees for their extra efforts, whether it's coming up with an innovative idea, going the extra mile, or doing a great job. We have a strong company-wide award program in which individual and team service awards are presented at important company functions where employees receive gift certificates and plaques. Team luncheons and group activities, such as bowling or a day at the races, are held to celebrate the completion of a major project or release.

While public and monetary awards are important, I find that more personal rewards are among the most effective. Interesting work and more responsibility is often seen as a reward, and many employees appreciate extra time off or working at home. Most employees are not shy about letting you know what they want, if you take the time to listen. By keeping the lines of communication open, you can tailor the reward to fit the individual thus making it even more relevant.

One of the most important rewards I can offer an employee is the ability to work on projects they find exciting and fulfilling. This means assigning a new set of user guides to the employee who prefers the challenge of writing on complex issues, while the employee who enjoys the more technical aspects of our work coordinates our online help builds with the software developers. Everyone is encouraged to explore new technologies and I try to assign projects that will enable them to learn new skills. Since we all juggle multiple projects, this helps to keep up the level of interest, even when working on more routine assignments.

I also find that if you're asking employees to go the extra mile, you need to reciprocate. This might be as simple as rewarding those employees who worked overtime on a project with time off during the day for a doctor's appointment or special family activity. You can also say thank you by ordering pizza during a team meeting, celebrating birthdays with cake and taking the team to lunch.

While team lunches and other group activities are a great way to encourage team spirit, they're not for everyone. For those who prefer not to join in the festivities, it's important to let them bow out gracefully while finding other ways to encourage team spirit. And nothing can beat a simple thank you or giving public recognition for a job well done.

CREATIVE TEAM REWARDS

Michele Gordon, CNET

CNET is a young Internet company with fast-paced projects, tough deadlines, and constant change. Although some would say that working for a profitable Internet company is its own reward, it's a tough environment and rewards play a big part in keeping the job fun. Good employees are hard to find and, with the constant lure of the next new Internet start-up, hard to keep.

Half of my team works in San Francisco and half in New Jersey. Because of the virtual nature of our team, I need to be particularly creative when recognizing performance. Team rewards must be inclusive and equitable across offices.

Public recognition is a great way to reward a great team. This can take the form of email announcements, mentions in a newsletter, videoconference announcements, or recognition at a team or company meeting. I've noticed that while employees appreciate getting positive feedback from me, their manager, they appreciate it even more when it comes from the head of the department or the CTO! The more specific the recognition, the better. Recognizing a team by simply saying that "the XYZ Team did a great job" won't be nearly as effective as providing details about what was accomplished and individually recognizing each team member by name and contribution.

Besides being an opportunity to thank and recognize a great team, I view team rewards as an opportunity to foster bonding. Bonding is especially difficult and important when the team members are on opposite coasts. Public and peer team recognition reinforces the feeling of being part of a team and of "being in it together."

Managers should have fun with rewards; this is one of the best parts of the job! One of my most effective reward-plus-bonding exercises was a scavenger hunt. My brand new team wasn't getting off to the best start. They met an important deadline, but were experiencing personality conflicts. By sending them on an office-based scavenger hunt, they had to work together to interpret the clues and find the next item. It was a great way for them to have fun and work together and in the course of the hunt they learned a lot about CNET and met a few key coworkers. A wonderful side effect was that their hunt attracted a lot of attention in the office (and lots of offers of help). By the time they found the 'prize', just about everyone knew why the team was getting a reward, PLUS they were all jealous that their group wasn't nearly as much fun :-)

RECOGNITION IS IMPORTANT

Douglas Mc Intyre, American Honda Motor Co., Motorcycle Service Communications

American Honda Motor Co. was the first overseas subsidiary of Honda Motor Co., Ltd., first as distributor of motorcycles, and later as distributor of power equipment, Honda and Acura automobiles.

The recent challenge for the Motorcycle Service Communications team has been the large increase in the number of products supported with service publications. This increase has been 30% during the last 4 years without the benefit of additional resources. To meet this challenge, the communications staff has to work additional hours for the extra support required. This can be demoralizing, and cause staff to look at alternatives. So it's imperative to keep morale up and make the workplace environment as upbeat as possible. Simply taking the time to give recognition for this extra effort through words of praise and appreciation to the team members is one of the best ways to do this.

For department awards, we usually provide lunch for the team after an extraordinary effort, a very busy time, or the completion of an important project. We also provide lunch to honor those who have received awards from organizations such as the STC.

Singling out individuals for public recognition can be embarrassing for some of the quiet ones. So special care is taken on how they are approached. It may be better to take them out for a lunch on the manager. For further recognition we provide articles to the company

newsletter describing the events leading to an award, and invite senior management to our award celebrations. Recognition by others outside the department is very important. Senior management usually accepts invitations to attend STC awards banquets. Extra efforts and awards are recognized in performance appraisals that have a positive effect on merit increases and position advancements. Recognizing the team and the outstanding individuals of the team on a regular basis has proven to be successful in maintaining morale and retaining staff.

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Diane Beadle is Senior Manager of Information Design (recently changed from Documentation) at Deloitte & Touche, a Big Six accounting and consulting firm. Diane and her team are responsible for producing a wide range of deliverables, from marketing brochures, to multimedia, to Internet and Intranet design and development. Although Deloitte is a large, established organization, the development environment is fast-paced and demanding. Rewarding employees and keeping them from feeling overwhelmed by constantly evolving technology is a large part of her job. Diane is a member of the STC Philadelphia Metro Chapter.

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Ellen Goldhaar is the Manager of Technical Communications at Erisco Managed Care Technologies, Inc. (a division of IMS Health), a leading provider of software-based solutions for the managed health care market. Ellen and her team are responsible for producing online and paper documentation. She also manages Erisco's internet and intranet design and development. A senior member of STC, she has been the Competitions Manager for the NY Metro chapter for the last two years.

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Michele Gordon is the Director of the Documentation, Training, and Support group at CNET, the Computer Network. CNET is one of the world's leading new-media companies providing information about computers, the Internet, and digital technologies via the Internet, TV, and radio. Michele and her team are responsible for bringing workers and information and knowledge together. Some of the tools they use to accomplish this include: instructor-led training, WBTs, integrated help systems, online documentation, and knowledgebases. A senior member of STC, Michele has presented at the last three STCs and received a Distinguished Award from the NY Metro chapter for her team's work on their Technology Intranet.

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Working for American Honda Motor Company since 1977, Douglas Mc Intyre was a technical writer for several years before taking the management track. During his tenure with American Honda Doug has always been in the Motorcycle Service Communications Department producing technical documents and user manuals. Doug became interested in rewarding employees, when he realized the effects of not recognizing individuals who have made an extraordinary effort to make sure a task is completed better than expected.

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