

Incentives
January 7, 2007
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The incentive industry offers incentives to their clients' employees that can stimulate their productivity, make them happier at their jobs, reduce their turnover and ultimately establish their loyalty. Most incentives are predicated upon monetary rewards to accomplish these goals; which are contradictory to my philosophy of using non-monetary incentives to develop loyal employees. However, I am receptive to new ideas and suggestions that may be affiliated with money if they are unique and ingenious. I recently read about an idea that is unique, ingenious and even intriguing: online gambling. The company who created this incentive, Snowfly (www.snowfly.com), develops web-based software programs that allow employees to immediately earn tokens for small accomplishments, such as returning early from lunch or shaving time off a sales call, which can be used to gamble for online products. In one instance a call-center operator used Snowfly's program to motivate its call-center representatives to increase their sales conversions, reduce their talk time and increase their attendance. Each time center representatives converted a call, they logged onto their accounts, recorded their accomplishments and received a virtual token they could use as a wager in one of several games, such as horse racing, that took only seconds to complete. Employees could win up to 5,000 points at a time and redeem them for prizes, such as a 15-minute break (250 points) or a day off (7,600 points). One employee accrued 11,000 points over four months to buy a Cuisinart from the company's incentive list

This type of incentive is particularly well suited to call centers because it allows the reps to be in control of their activities and to decide what they want to do with their winnings. It also provides them with an immediate reward, which has been shown to be an effective method of influencing positive behavior, dating back to original research conducted by B. F. Skinner². More importantly, it allows them to decide whether they want to participate in the program or not. By using their volition they feel empowered, in control and are therefore amenable to the program. The call center who adopted this program has found it helped increase productivity, reduce absenteeism and its employees have been very eager to participate in it. However, once the novelty of the program wears off, the long term

affects may not be as apparent and the company will need to develop other programs to develop employee loyalty. In the meantime the program has exerted a positive effect upon the employees and has so far been successful.

There are many types of incentives that can facilitate employee loyalty. The Incentive Marketing Association has a website (incentivemarketing.org) filled with lists of various programs, studies, groups and events that can be used to develop incentive programs for employees, many of them that are non-monetary in design. Keep in mind, however, that whatever program is selected, it will work only if the employees are allowed to decide if they want to participate in it; forced programs are doomed to fail and will not develop loyalty. Programs, such as on-line gambling and those I have outlined in previous newsletters, that allow the employees to determine what they want are the only ones that will help to develop visceral, long term loyalty.

¹.*Inc. Magazine* December, 2006 A New Kind of Perk: Online Gambling

² www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BF_Skinner