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Incentives: expert advice on how to motivate your agents

My 10 golden rules will make your incentive scheme rock

DRAWING on our experience of designing and delivering motivational programmes for many of the big call centres, here are my top tips:

Make it fun An environment full of buzzy, energetic people with a tough, sometimes repetitive, job thrives on stimulation and excitement. Give your campaign a quirky theme, a great corporate look and transport your agents to a virtual online world where everyone can play and win.

Make it manageable Create a single campaign spine which will accommodate all your different motivational activities, incentives and promotions. By pulling everything together and streamlining reward, you'll have a programme that's easy to manage, and which builds to encourage ongoing achievement.

Make it fair Everyone, not just your top performers, must be able to compete. And check you're rewarding the performance you really want. A mix of quantitative and qualitative targets help focus on good practice as well as results. Team and individual elements keep people pulling together.

Make it possible Do your staff have all the product knowledge they need in order to achieve? Online quizzes turn essential training into a fun experience.

Make it happen on day one Hit that launch date so it rocks! Build suspense with a teaser campaign, posters, flyers. On the big day, run a campaign-themed floor walk packed with activities, games, competitions and novelties, all helping communicate campaign information and promote registrations.

Make it buzz Keep communication coming throughout your programme with things like interactive areas on your campaign website, news, hot tips and coming-ups. And constant achievement updates for everyone. The award-winning contact centre manager for one of our soft drinks customers, Michelle Smith, says: "We run spot competitions on the floor, using our big screens for online prize-reveals."

Make it inclusive Involve staff with a peer-to-peer nominations so the real team players get recognised and rewarded. Encourage staff to send one another e-thank-you-cards. Spread a little love!

Make it lively Keep ringing the changes with quick, one-off activities. We use a portfolio of campaign "add-ons" – online games, gimmicks and mechanisms – to deliver one-off promotions and give programmes a constant buzz.

Make it rewarding By using a single reward "currency" for all activities, from short promotions to ongoing performance targets, staff can save and build to the reward of their choice. Add a big prize, spot awards, recognition items – spread your budget with different ideas.

Make it measurable Is it working? Ask your agency for regular reports. Check year-on-year performance and staff turnover. At campaign end, include an online survey – what did your participants think? What would they change? There's always something new to learn.

Don't try to do it all yourself We had, of course, to add an 11th recommendation: use an agency who's done it all before and already knows what works!

Sean Wilkinson, MD, Corporate Rewards; sean@corporaterewards.co.uk

Decide what you want, then offer what they want

WHILE attrition has dropped slightly to 16 per cent, it's now even more important to recognise the contribution made by your best performers. Differentiate your call centre with an incentives package that will establish your business as the employer of choice.

First, establish your objectives. These may include fundamental issues which have the potential to impede your company's performance, such as staff attrition, absenteeism, productivity, time-keeping and morale; or customer service levels, customer retention and sales.

Second, offer appropriate rewards. They need to engage, excite and inspire. If you have a diverse workforce which includes both men and women of differing ages your rewards should appeal to everyone. Understanding what they want is critical; get the rewards wrong and you simply won't achieve good participation levels. Before starting, research the recipient base and select rewards that are a "best match".

Gift cards and vouchers are successful because they are simple to administer while offering a vast array of products with which recipients can treat themselves.

Consider the structure of the scheme. Your objectives will dictate whether you take a team-based approach or reward individual achievement and endeavour.

You may wish to run a scheme offering collectable points to drive repeat behaviour; recipients will be encouraged to earn, bank and redeem points for higher value rewards. Equally, instant wins and on-the-spot rewards are a great way to create theatre and excitement – a long-running scheme can really benefit from this type of tactical activity.

If you choose to offer gift cards or vouchers, have in mind that providers offer discounts of 2.5-10 per cent off the face value for bulk purchases. For repeat rewards, consider gift cards which you can remotely activate and load and re-load with value at any time.

While many schemes are launched with a great flurry, ongoing promotion and regular communication will make you're a success. Take every opportunity to communicate with your staff – whether it's to publicise individual or team achievements, remind everyone of the rewards on offer, or introduce new elements. Aim to use all types of media, from intranet to posters, email and mobile messaging.

Mark Towler, head of House of Fraser Business Incentives; mtowler@hof.co.uk.

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The Motivation Agency
Telephone 0370 405 2020
enquiries@corporaterewards.co.uk
www.corporaterewards.co.uk/call-centre-motivation