Pitching an Employee or Sales Incentive Program to Management

Managers often believe that an incentive program for their team would be effective, but plans are stalled when they can't get support or funding from upper management. What information will your management need in order to justify funding a performance improvement program? It's possible to show a measurable return on investment from properly structured incentive programs. Here's what you need to know when proposing an employee program or sales incentive contest to management.

Engage your Stakeholders

> *"Stakeholder: a person or group that has an investment, share, or interest in something, as a business or industry"*

The success of any program is largely dependent on the support from management and from the participant audience. Stakeholders can be valuable partners and resources - or they can become a major roadblock. When you understand the needs of your stakeholders and gain their support on the front end, you'll be setting the stage for a program that will achieve results.

- Identify the needs of each stakeholder or stakeholder group.
- What's in it for them? Customize the messaging so that each stakeholder understands the benefit.
- Take the current "pulse" of each stakeholder. What is their level of buy-in? What additional information will they need to gain their full support?
- Communicate & train. Let your senior leaders know what actions they need to take to demonstrate support. You can go so far as to write scripts for them and templates they can use in their communication efforts. Provide step-by-step instructions consistent with your program message.
- Schedule town hall or other group meetings with senior executives where they can announce the program and update employees on progress.
- Conduct stakeholder interviews & invite feedback throughout the process. Use that input to adjust the program as needed.

How Sales Contests and Employee Incentives Benefit the Company

[Sales incentive programs](#) have been around for many years, and programs that offer [non-cash rewards](#) are particularly effective in increasing sales. In addition to the obvious positive revenue that sales contests generate, there are other benefits to the company. Share those that resonate with the company leader that holds the purse strings:

- **Culture of Teamwork.** When structured properly and support staff is included, sales incentive campaigns can foster a greater sense of teamwork and camaraderie.
- **Increased employee engagement.** When employees feel recognized and appreciated, they are more engaged in their work and with their colleagues.
- **Increased customer loyalty.** Highly engaged employees treat customers better, fostering a higher level of customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Significant Return on Investment.** There are few strategies that can claim a direct ROI: incentive programs are one of them. Whether you develop a sales contest or non-sales employee performance improvement program, partner with a professional to help you maximize the budget and you'll be able to show your management a clear return on investment.

How to Structure a Successful Sales Incentive or Employee Program:

Theories of employee motivation are rarely taught in business programs, and many company leaders are surprised to find that their marketing or advertising agencies are not experienced program designers. To ensure the success of your program and avoid unintended consequences, it's best to partner with an experienced [Incentive Professional](#) or [Certified Professional of Incentive Management](#).

Best practices when designing a performance improvement or sales incentive program include a strategy that rewards activities linked to specific business objectives. The most effective programs link recognition to performance rather than effort, attendance or longevity.

10 Steps to Designing an Effective Incentive Program

1. **Determine Objectives.** Set 2-3 measurable, achievable goals. These should be "stretch" goals but achievable with extra effort.
2. **Identify the audience.** It's likely that 100% of your employee audience will not be involved in your program. In a sales contest, remember to include any support staff that enable the sales force to reach their goals.
3. **Fact Finding & Audience Involvement.** Determine what training or tools are necessary to support goal achievement. Involving your participant audience in setting objectives and program planning will ensure ownership in the program and increase participation.

4. **Program Structure, Rules & Budget.** It's important that the program be fair to all participants, so it may be necessary to weight or handicap certain audiences to ensure fairness. If the participants determine that the rules are unfair or the goals are unrealistic, they'll quickly disengage. An experienced program designer can provide help with your rule structure also help you develop a realistic budget.
5. **Select the Rewards.** Again, ideally with input from your participant audience. Don't be tempted to use cash rewards as the path of least resistance. [Tangible rewards](#) or experiences are proven to be most effective. All rewards should be a good brand match to your company's brand attributes.
6. **Communicate the program.** Decide on your communication channels. Many program platforms now have social channels similar to Facebook. Use your company intranet or other in-house communication platforms. Plan for a strong launch, communication throughout the program and a way to announce final results. Make sure your program messaging resonates with each [employee demographic](#) represented.
7. **Operate & administer the program; track results**. Periodic updates will keep participants engaged and informed about their progress.
8. **Fulfill the Rewards.** The more immediate, the better! Partnering with a firm that specializes in corporate rewards will ensure a positive reward experience for your recipients. They will also be mindful that the reward experience is consistent with your company brand
9. **Evaluate & Measure.** Were your 2-3 goals achieved? If not, why not? What outside factors played a role? Even less successful campaigns can provide valuable data for future programs.
10. **Celebrate success!** Reward achievement, ideally in a public setting, with top management participation.

[The Incentive Research Foundation](#) reports that the most successful companies:

- Have goal-focused employee programs
- Have a strong belief in non-cash rewards
- Have strong executive buy-in

[Top performing companies](#) achieve measurable results with properly-structured performance improvement and sales incentive programs. Use the tips above to get upper management on board, partner with a professional who can guide you through the steps to designing an effective incentive program and you'll be among those top performers!