

Five Tips to Follow Before Awarding Gold, Silver and Bronze at Work

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Although rewarding performance tangibly is important, there are several things to consider in addition to 'medals' to ensure you maintain the inspiration and motivation of your workforce.

A fellow in Britain is making fourth place medals to send to synchronized divers Tom Daley and Peter Waterfield, and others who just missed bronze. He believes increasing numbers of countries and participants mean more should have a chance for Olympic acclaim. He raises an interesting point.

But what would more medals mean for the honor, happiness and motivation of athletes, the future of the Olympic tradition, award ceremonies, less popular sport and the precedent it may set? Obviously, there are many factors to consider.

There are also many factors to consider when establishing reward and compensation programs for your company. So before Olympic fever inspires you to start dishing out gold medals, consider the following:

1. No one should win at the expense of another.

Competition is the whole point of the Olympics, but not of your company. You need everyone excelling, not just a few superstars. Furthermore, you can't measure complete work performance with a stopwatch, nor take time out between every 'routine' to collect scores from an international panel of judges. Thus, fairness will always be called into question, only a handful of employees who believe they have a shot at winning will play the game, and the majority will 'watch the Olympics from the couch.'

2. It's not a team unless members win and lose together.

If you want people to act like a team, you need to treat them like a team. Teams win and lose together. That means they share goals,



responsibility, and rewards. Most companies call teamwork a core value, and then dish out compensation and rewards based on individual goals.

3. Don't let the 'right time, right place' syndrome cloud your vision.

Too often, there are a handful of projects or accounts that afford greater visibility and status than others. As a result, those lucky enough to be on the right projects at the right time usually benefit disproportionately, whether through monetary rewards, promotions, or additional favourable assignments. If you want all to excel, keep the playing field as level as possible.

4. Beware white knights in shining armour.

When projects get into trouble, we are thankful for those who step up, put in long hours, rush off to customer sites, and save the day. These firefighters, heroes, white knights, whatever you call them, deserve our appreciation. Mostly. Firefighters thrive on fire fighting, and in some cases, they actually help create the conditions that allow them to save the day yet again.

While obviously hazardous, the problem is worse still. For every firefighter, and every project in need of rescue, there are usually many conscientious workers, quietly keeping their projects on track, and never requiring the services of white knights. Those are your real heroes, but they are often neglected, especially when rewards and promotions are in the offing.

5. Being able to contribute effectively and be appreciated for those contributions is far more motivating than money.

There have been countless studies showing that monetary incentives and other external motivators don't really motivate, at least not for more than a few minutes. People do their best, work their hardest, and draw on their personal strengths when they find the work challenging and/or meaningful. If they value the goal and/or the activity, motivation comes naturally. If they also know their efforts are appreciated, they will be motivated by the sense of community and the ability of a team to accomplish more than a single individual. Rewards, incentive plans, unwelcome public acknowledgement, competition, a lack of fair play, and a difficult working environment can all destroy intrinsic motivation.

If you want excellence, forget the medals. Concentrate on giving people responsibilities that match the activities and outcomes they value. Create a fair and supportive environment. Honestly appreciate the contributions of all. Express that appreciation to each individual. Establish shared goals that make teams out of groups. Share the fruits of your collective labors fairly. And celebrate what you have created.

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