

Case Study: Making the Annual Management Meeting a Unique Experience

THE SITUATION

A major equipment design and manufacturing client was looking for a way to make their annual worldwide management meeting a much more engaging event as a way to kick off their new initiatives. For those readers who are not familiar with company annual meetings, they do vary greatly in quality and entertainment level. The theory of rewarding your best managers can get lost in the reality that it takes hard work to keep your best race horses engaged for two or three days. Unfortunately, I have had more than my share of thinly disguised multi-day annual snooze fests where an endless lineup of monotone technical speakers batter the senses and challenge one to stay awake against their two color PowerPoints while seated in an overly warm hotel ballroom. The client's managers asked for an engaging teambuilding experience and we gave it to them. We proposed turning this into a large team competition with almost 300 managers on nearly 30 teams.

THE SOLUTION

We built a video based competition that had teams solving real business problems with points awarded for each event. We scripted, shot and edited a series of video business cases using their own managers as actors and even did several in Japanese and Chinese languages (with subtitles of course) to keep the sessions culturally diverse. Each team had a trained facilitator (using HR staff and selected managers) that coached them with feedback on group process and their use of structured problem solving models. We mixed in some game show competitions for fun (To Tell the Truth with senior managers) and kept the pace moving for two and a half days. To keep the competitive juices flowing, we tracked team performance on a big board daily, and at the end, the winning teams were rewarded with \$1,000 for each member.

THE RESULTS

The ball room buzzed for three days as managers were on their feet discussing and debating issues. In the evaluations at the close, most of the managers said this was the best annual meeting they had ever attended. Carefully mixing the managers from different functions and cultures provided a very good team building experience for all of them. The energy and enthusiasm generated helped prime the audience for the new initiatives. We developed some common understandings and vocabulary on new management principles of talent management.

SUMMARY

We live in a world where managers and employees expect interactive and engaging experiences. We know that long one way presentations that are intended to win the audience over, often provide the opposite effect. Don't engage in old school event

thinking. Inviting your best managers to an old school annual meeting can be seen as more of a punishment than a reward. Use your annual meeting to demonstrate that senior management is in touch with your workforce. Turn your annual meeting into a competition that is based on learning about real business problems will provide a great opportunity to build your management team and win them over.