

The Simple Brilliance of
LARRY, the Super Manager

Finally, a Contest, and an Award, That Motivates

In my travels over the years, I have had the advantage of meeting many fine managers—producing and otherwise. But the one who really separates himself from the pack is Larry, the Super Manager.

Larry, until 2002, ran a large recruiting operation in Portland, Oregon. For years and years, he was either the top office in his network, or close to being the top office. And here's the strange thing. In an industry noted for our extraordinarily high turnover, Larry had none, zero, zilch. Account Executives (AEs) only departed when Larry let them go. Otherwise they stayed forever.

Now, Larry is noted for giving us several special techniques—techniques such as: team closing; the closing room; multiple closing rooms; the Directors Club; daily morning meetings on special topics, given by the AE considered weakest in that topic; and others. But I think his finest contribution was his 'take' on the AE of the Month Award. I know what you are thinking, "Big deal! We all do AE of the Day, Week, Month, Quarter, Year award—you pick 'em." But Larry's Award was different.

Contests as Demotivators

First let's look at the downside of contests. We all strive to make our contests interesting and motivating. But the reality is discouraging. Most, if not all, of our contests tend to be demotivating. And they're demotivating for many reasons: First, the same AE, usually your best AE, tends to win all of your contests no matter how you structure them. Second, and conversely, all of the other AEs sense that they can never win, so they stop trying to win. Third, when you offer a specific prize, often the winner already has the item, owns a higher quality of that item, or could care less about it. Fourth, a money prize is either considered tacky or too little of a sum and the manager is therefore seen as stingy. The list goes on and on. And so, this is why you don't see as many contests as you did in the good old days. What a shame!

Larry's AE of the Month Award

Larry had a different style with his contest and so it became very motivating. Everybody participated and was excited about winning the AE of the Month Award. This is how Larry's award was structured.

The AE of the Month was determined by the following monthly percentages:

- 20% on number of Send Outs
- 20% on number of Job Orders
- 20% on amount of Billings

20% on amount of Cash-In (the only true measurement—*my note!*)
20% on the subjective judgment of the manager (Larry)

Because of this structure, Larry was able to award the AE of the Month to the most deserving AE. Now no one AE won all of the time. There were just too many variables and the last percentage, the subjective variable, always gave Larry control over who would win.

All of the above was fine, but this is where it got better.

When an AE joined Larry's office, they were required to do three things. First, they had to go to Larry's professional photographer and have an 8½" x 11" picture taken. Second, they had to write a one page Bio to be typed up on an 8½" x 5½" sheet of paper. And third, they had to designate a 'significant other' person. If you were married, it had to be your spouse. If single, it could be your partner, mother, sister, brother, etc. After these three items were completed, you were welcomed into Larry's office.

At the beginning of each month, Larry called all of his employees into their office waiting room. There, in the waiting room, were two elaborate picture frames fastened to the wall in a position of prominence. Everyone who entered the waiting room would immediately see both frames. Inside the larger frame was the photograph of the AE of the month from the previous month. Below the photograph was that AE of the month's Bio. At this point, Larry would begin by thanking everyone for the past month's production and recognize, again, the past AE of the month. Then, with a certain amount of suspense, he would grandly remove an envelope from his pocket, open it slowly, and read the name of the new AE of the Month. Then he made a big production of opening each of the frames and inserting the new photograph and Bio to the general applause of the assemblage. The new AE of the Month would give their little appreciation speech and everyone would return to their desks and their work.

And all of this was exceptional, but this is where it got superb.

Larry would then retire to his office. He would take out the AE of the month's personnel file and find who they had selected as their significant other. He then handwrote a heartfelt letter to that person explaining how he knew that in this difficult business the AE wouldn't have succeeded without their help, encouragement and support. Then he would hand-address the envelope and insert a \$500 check made out directly to the significant other as a token of his appreciation. As a final touch, he would have the prize couriered to its final destination.

You can imagine the groundswell of excitement among the AEs and their significant others. Every AE wanted to win this award for themselves and their significant others. And every significant other wanted their AE to win the award and gave them the support that is so often needed to be successful in our business. All of a sudden, late nights at the office were encouraged, not discouraged. Late dinners were better tolerated. And, toward the end of each month, the significant others were asking their AEs how they were doing

with SOs, JOs, etc. For the first time in our business, the family was considered as essential to the success of the AE. For the first time in our business, all of the AEs were motivated by a contest. And for the first time in our business, Larry, the Super Manager, had touched a chord that had heretofore been missing.

This was brilliant—but so was Larry. He was, indeed, a Super Manager!

*“The Simple Brilliance of” is one in a series of articles focusing on ideas and techniques from some of the great thinkers, movers and shakers in the field of recruitment who Bob Marshall has had the privilege of meeting and discussing various topics over the past 25 years.

Bob Marshall, CPC, CIPC started in the search business in 1980 and became Western Regional Manager for over 60 Management Recruiters Int’l. offices in 1984. In 1986, he founded The Bob Marshall Group, International, training recruiters across the nation as well as in the United Kingdom, Malta, and Cyprus. In 1996, he returned to working a desk full time and continues to train recruiters. To learn more about his activities and descriptions of his products and services, contact him directly at: 770-898-5550 or espro@bellsouth.net or www.TheMarshallPlan.org.