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**Making incentives more incentive**

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News  
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If anyone doubts the continuing importance of employee incentives, they should note the number of thriving consultancies with titles like 'personnel reward providers', 'employee engagement leaders' or 'strategic recognition solutions'.

Incentives are not only a game for high stakes. They represent a major challenge for motivational psychology, where logic and reason are only one half of the picture. The successful motivator must also be able to find and read the other half - those dimly-seen motives and desires that are hidden in the irrational right-brain.

For example, if you asked your executives how they would like to see their efforts rewarded, they would instantly opt for higher salaries and bonuses.

But a demand for more money, especially by someone quite well-paid, is often a coded message for some other dissatisfaction.

In fact, your salary influences the quality of your life 'off-duty', but not 'on-duty'. It is your state of well-being through the working day to which motivators should turn their attention.

**Differences**

Reward is the more straightforward notion - basically a bonus proportionate to an official score-rate. Recognition is something less tangible. It is sometimes defined as an acknowledgement for having 'gone the extra mile' - perhaps volunteering to help out during an epidemic.

But that indicates a short-term appreciation in acknowledgement of your response to a specific, or one-off, crisis.

There should also be recognition of the same constructive attitude in the carrying-out of everyday tasks. A record of performance beyond the minimum requirement should be noted, whether it's a constructive attitude that generates more innovative solutions, or just a willingness to offer guidance and possibly mentoring to a younger member of the team.

Recording this attitude by awarding points within a structured scheme geared to corporate values, with the results made public within the organisation, will soon show up in improved retention of

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key managers.

And how to cash-in these points? One company had the brainwave of giving the monthly winner a reserved parking-space at the coveted front-gate location, where even the directors weren't allowed to park. But that will not always be feasible!

A generally popular incentive is a branded corporate credit-card offering significant discounts at select quality stores, up to the value of the points registered. Suddenly you're not only wearing that new suit and shoes that you thought were beyond your reach but your profile, job satisfaction and self-esteem have all measurably increased.

It reminds you, every day, that your efforts were genuinely appreciated. And the company has got itself a happier and better-dressed employee into the bargain.

### Key points

#### Rewarding efforts

- Many top marketing consultancies are dedicated to incentives.
- A good incentive scheme can motivate better than money alone.
- A selective retail discount scheme can yield lasting satisfactions.

*The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivational speaker, with 20 years' experience as CEO of Carole Spiers Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.*

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