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## **A benefit they can't refuse**

By Robert C. Harris, CAE

**GOLDEN-HANDCUFFS**—a term describing benefits so appealing that members simply would not drop out of the association. It is said that golden-handcuff benefits hold members "captive."

Many associations do not have a golden-handcuff benefit; their membership brochure describes the usual advocacy, promotion, education, networking, publications and travel discounts.

Not long ago the commonly valued benefit was insurance coverage. Some programs collapsed under the weight of claims while others became available from sources other than the association

Association benefits usually center on information, products, and services, or a combination of these. This is a look at how associations are able to create golden-handcuff benefits.

### **Repackaging Member Products and Services**

Nearly every association member represents a product or service. Some associations have created agreements with members whereby the organization has authority to package and sell the products. For instance, if members create a product that they want to sell it to a new market, perhaps state government or a "foreign" market, the association may combine, repackage, promote and coordinate the sales of the member products. As a result of sales to the new market, the association adds value to members' "bottom-lines."

Examples of products and services might be the sale of billboards, broadcast time, member published books, unique services offered by members, or advertising display space by those members who agree to let the association sell it. The programs can generate significant income for both the members and the association.

In these cases, it is the creativity and skills of the association staff to coordinate the member services and products, draw up participating agreements, market, sell and generate significant income. These organizations thought "outside-the-box" to design

golden-handcuff benefits. The result is enhanced income for members and the association.

### Knowledge as the Valued Benefit

Associations are knowledge managers—researching, collecting, analyzing and delivering information to the members. Knowledge delivery can take multiple forms, such as studies, seminars, reports, surveys, manuals and articles.

Packaging of industry or professional information is a significant benefit. If the only place members can receive a cost of doing business report or comparative operation ratios report is the association, then it makes membership more valued. For associations, they need to carefully package, safeguard and promote the information they have that can be turned into valued reports available almost exclusively to industry members.

The Internet can facilitate delivery of knowledge-based benefits. An industry Listserv where members can easily seek solution to problems is invaluable. ASAE is a master at providing effective Listservs where I can post a question and receive a half dozen solutions by day's end.

Online education could be another valued knowledge based benefit. Imagine offering a training program that was always available to the employees of your members; thus every new employee can take an online orientation and members appreciate the ease and consistency of distance training. Websites, when effectively designed may act as the golden-handcuffs for some members who visit the site regularly for communications, purchasing, training, auctions and classified advertising, for instance.

### Examples of Golden-Handcuff Benefits

A limited indemnification program for the purpose of paying damages occasioned by a member's negligence or misjudgment. The first time a member finds himself or herself being sued for failing to provide service, for example, they may seek financial help from the association's indemnification.

A credit or check verification service exclusively for industry members. The avoided bad checks and saved thousands of dollars and time.

Marketing programs that are so sophisticated that a member feels left out when they are offered; for example the opportunity to participate in a trade show as a part of the association booth rather than bearing 100% of the burden and participating independent of the association.

Shared services developed by the association; for example if the members have a database, the association could manage it for them offering the best available technology and or website hosting. This takes investments in technology and staff, but may act as a

"hook" for members who come to depend on the investments of the association and cannot afford the same type of technology.

Accreditation and certification programs. Members are loyal to the certifying body and must return periodically to renew.

Self-insurance programs or recommended insurance coverages; though beware because markets change, loyalty is thin, and competition is growing.

Statistical gathering and reporting. For example, a pricing survey or economic impact survey in which members could not perform independently but the association can collect, analyze and package the information to be of significant value.

When Golden-Handcuffs Tarnish

Even golden-handcuffs are not foolproof. A danger exists that the single most valued benefit will be offered by another organization and members will turn to the new supplier. Or the benefit will lose member interest and they will forget the many reasons for which the association exists.

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## **10 ways to make sure your bar president is prepared for the media**

**The key to survival is value**

**By Sarah L. Sladek**

Just as there is a calm before a storm, there is an eerie calm among America's membership associations. Some realize that the brunt of the storm is yet to come; they are scrambling to prepare and ward off the worst of it. Others are resting on their laurels – sitting ducks – that believe this shall pass, and they will survive it.

But this is a storm unlike any other. According to industry experts, associations who refuse to change their course of action will not survive this storm. These associations, they say, are likely to fold within the next 10 – possibly five years.

In 1999 there were approximately 135,000 associations operating in the United States – a significant upswing considering that in 1995 there were only 100,000. Since then, on average 1,000 new associations have started each year.

This rapid growth is endangering the stability of many associations. There's simply too many organizations vying for the attention of your members, and your members are increasingly pressed for time.

Today's workforce is working 130 extra hours per year, and one-eighth of the workforce is caring for an aging relative and a child under the age of 18. The number of employees with care-taking responsibilities will continue to grow: the Baby Boomer generation is aging and Americans are living longer than ever, plus we're in the midst of the largest baby boom in history.

Between work and family – who has time for membership organizations? Who has time to wait in lines at event registration tables, attend long or numerous meetings, or participate in anything with little to no return on their investment?

In their harried lives and pursuit for more balance, your members are taking an inventory to determine what really brings them value and is a worthwhile pursuit. Those organizations that fail to deem themselves worthwhile will not make the cut.

Your membership association has to change if it's going to weather this storm. You're going to have to stop doing business as usual and start focusing on the needs and interests of your members. That means fewer meetings, less hassle, and more convenience among other things, but first and foremost it means exceptional value.

Do you know what keeps your members up at night? And if so, does your organization provide an answer to their problems?

That's what I mean by value. It's knowing your members better than anyone else and literally taking care of them. If you can offer an answer to their problems and do so in a way that your competition doesn't, with on-going, effective communication and exceptional customer service, your organization will surely survive.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? The problem is, most organizations get so wrapped up in their day-to-day operations and trying to do new and different things that they forget why they were in existence in the first place.

Your organization's sole purpose is to bring your members success. If you have a program or service that doesn't fit into this scope – eliminate it. If you don't know what inhibits your members' success – ask them. If you're not sure what one thing your organization does better than anyone else – focus your energies and figure it out.

If you can bring value to your members, they will never question whether a membership in your organization is a worthwhile investment and they will refer your organization to their peers. In one fell swoop, you can increase your recruitment and retention efforts, as well as credibility and respect.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's a storm coming. Will your organization be a sitting duck or a survivor?

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## **Giving Employee Performance Feedback: A Best Practices Approach**

**By Colleen J. McManus, SPHR  
Director of Human Resources  
State Bar of Arizona**

You may recall seeing some statements being circulated on the Internet a few years ago that were supposedly taken from actual performance appraisals. Remember these?

“Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig.”

“This associate is really not so much of a has-been, but more of a definitely won’t be.”

“This young lady has delusions of adequacy.”

“He sets low personal standards, and then consistently fails to achieve them.”

“This employee is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot.”

Well, whether true or not, they certainly provide some great examples of what **NOT** to say when giving employees feedback on their performance!

Chances are that your organization has some type of employee evaluation system. Chances also are that managers in your organization need training and ongoing guidance from senior management and/or Human Resources to consistently and effectively administer this evaluation system. Even in organizations without a formal system, chances are that managers and supervisors require development in order to effectively provide performance feedback. This article is intended to impart information on best practices in providing employees with feedback on their performance, whether or not a formal evaluation system is used.

There are five simple steps to this process:

- 1) Set the stage
- 2) Confirm purpose and expectations
- 3) Review performance

- 4) Discuss future plans and goals
- 5) Close the meeting

## **Set the Stage**

In setting the stage, be sure to come prepared. Perhaps you have reviewed work products and/or observed the employee handling some challenging activities. Most employees will appreciate that you've done your homework! Likewise, allow the employee to be prepared. This is an important discussion for him/her, so you'll want to give some advance notice. Schedule some time together, perhaps even away from the office, so that you will not have interruptions. Create a positive, non-threatening, and private environment. This is always important, but is especially so if you have negative feedback to discuss with the employee. Set a positive tone and put the employee at ease when welcoming him/her to the meeting. Making small talk about things going on in the office and/or a neutral topic outside of the office, such as the weather, is a great way to do this.

A very important goal for the person providing the feedback is to maintain the employee's self-esteem. You can do this by focusing on the specific behavior rather than on the individual's personality. For example, if an employee missed an important deadline on a project, talk about the specific problems that resulted from the employee's approach, rather than to say that he/she made a "foolish choice." Use coaching language to help the person understand what should have been done: *"Jane, the next time you work on a project like this, I'd like you to consult with me more frequently on the status, to ensure that we stay on track and meet the deadline. Missing a deadline like this is not an option in the future. I'm sure that with your ideas and our regular communication, we can accomplish this goal."* There are times when very pointed feedback and direction must be given, but this kind of message can and should still be delivered in a way that attacks the problem, and not the person.

## **Confirm Purpose and Expectations**

Remind the employee that the purpose of these discussions is to recognize his/her accomplishments and to improve their continuing performance, growth and development. Let the individual know that this type of meeting allows for two-way communication, and encourage his/her input throughout. If you have a certain format or agenda you'd like to follow, let the employee know. Verify his/her understanding of your comments, observations and, if applicable, ratings. You'll also want to verify his/her understanding of your standards and expectations for the future. Active listening is a great technique for this part of the discussion.

## **Review Performance**

Focus on performance standards and objectives, and describe how the employee's performance met or did not meet these standards -- this is not a time to compare the employee's performance to that of other employees. The provision of specific examples can be key to this type of discussion. The more you can illustrate examples or situations

when the individual's performance met or did not meet the standards, the better he/she will understand the feedback, and the less likely that he/she will take the feedback as a reflection on the person or personality. It may help you to provide positive observations first, and then to discuss areas needing improvement. It may also help you to discuss areas where you expect the employee's agreement first, before you discuss areas where there may be disagreement.

In the event of disagreement:

- Remain calm
- Listen to the employee's views, using active listening to demonstrate your understanding of his/her views
- Remember that acknowledgement is different than agreement; you can acknowledge the employee's feelings even if you do not agree with his/her position
- Be prepared to repeat relevant information and provide additional examples when necessary
- Acknowledge areas that may not have been (or may not be) within the employee's control
- Keep a positive tone and let the employee know you are interested in achieving his/her understanding and agreement

## **Discuss Future Plans and Goals**

Discuss future targets and goals to ensure the employee's understanding and agreement. A very proactive approach is to discuss the things you are prepared to do to support the employee in meeting these goals. For example, if one goal for the employee is to complete an outside training program, you may be able to provide him/her with a flexible work schedule and/or additional staff coverage for his/her function so that this can be accomplished with minimal inconvenience to the employee.

If the employee's performance met or exceeded expectations, help him/her to identify new challenges for employee growth and development. Ideas may include cross training in another area, working on an organizational project outside the scope of normal job responsibilities, and becoming involved (or more involved) in a professional association. If his/her performance did not meet expectations, reevaluate objectives and strategies. Be prepared to address roadblocks that may not be within the employee's control. Help the individual to redirect his/her energy on achieving the goals, and let him/her know that you are there at anytime to provide guidance and to support this effort.

## **Close the Meeting**

Summarize your observations and ratings, being very clear in your comments to the employee. Review the targets/objectives to which you have agreed, and discuss how you will monitor and assess the employee's performance in working toward their accomplishment. Ask the individual for other thoughts or input he/she may have to offer.

Also ask if he/she has any questions about anything covered in the discussion. Remind your staff member that you are available for questions at any time over the course of the evaluation period.

Finally, thank the employee for participating in this important discussion. Express your support for his/her efforts and your desire to continue to work with him/her in achieving the goals you have discussed together. As appropriate, you should also express your confidence in his/her ability to be successful.

## **Summary**

I have often heard managers say that employees are their most valuable resources. If true, those same managers should agree that effectively supervising and evaluating their employees is one of their most important job responsibilities. By taking the time to prepare for a performance discussion with your staff, you can set a professional, proactive tone and provide specific information that will help them to better understand your feedback and expectations. This is a very important step in building the most effective working relationship with your team.

## **Tech talk: Are you ready for disaster?**

By Dan Kittay  
Owner, Kittay New Media

Whenever I hear of a disaster such as the recent hurricanes that wracked Florida, I think of two things almost simultaneously: I hope no one got hurt or lost their home, and I hope people had backups of their computer data.

We have all become so dependent on our computers, to do everything from managing our association's finances to reading this article. Some of us have almost all of our important information locked into the little 0's and 1's that reside on the surface of our hard drives. Yet how many of us take the time to make current, ongoing backups of that information? If you lost everything on your computer today, how long would it take you to recover it and continue from where you left off before the loss? Would you even be able to replace everything?

It takes a lot less than a hurricane to cause a catastrophic loss of computer data. A surge or drop on your electric line can do it. Some of today's viruses and worms can erase information before you realize it's happening.

And it doesn't have to be as dramatic as that; hard drives are appliances, just like refrigerators and air conditioners. Ever have an air conditioner shut down, and need a service call? Hard drives spin at speeds up to 10,000 RPMs, and as with any appliance, at some point the wear-and-tear means they will stop working. With an air conditioner, it's easy to swap in a new part, as the rest of the parts don't need to "remember" any

information that was stored on the old part. With hard drives, it's more complicated. You may lose all the information that's been stored on them.

With a current backup, the worst that can happen is that you'll have to spend some time reloading that information onto your new hard drive, although you may not have anything you worked on since your last backup. Without that backup, where do you even begin to reconstruct all your work?

Those of you who work in larger bars probably have some kind of network server where all your work is stored. Your IT department probably makes nightly backups of the server, and if you had a problem could restore your information. But if you don't have that luxury, or if there is work that you store on your computer's hard drives, then you need to be making those nightly backups yourselves.

Ideally, you'd make two sets of backups, one to keep in your office, and one in another secure place, such as your home (if your office is destroyed in a fire, and your backups are sitting on a shelf next to your computer, they won't do you much good).

In the less-than-ideal world we all live in, at least one set of backups is mandatory for some level of protection. These days most computers have CD or DVD drives that can record information onto those discs. Typical backup software will back up anything that's been changed or added since the last backup, so after you make your first backup of everything on your computer, subsequent backups should take very little time.

If you don't have a CD/DVD drive in your computer, you can buy one to hook up to it. Or you could use a tape drive, an external hard drive, or even a Web site devoted to storing backups.

Many of us don't learn the importance of backups until it's too late. In my case, I was lucky. At a very early point in my career, I worked for a newspaper, and lost a 15-inch story in the new computer about a half-hour before deadline, and had to re-create it with an editor standing over my shoulder. I learned about the fragility of computer data, and have been making regular backups since then. I hope that you don't have to go through a similar or worse fate to "see the light."

### **Take an Extra 10 seconds**

The concept comes from Walt Disney World's Guest Relations. Take a few extra seconds to find another way to help the member (guest), then you improve their experience and level of satisfaction.

We can do the same with members calls. Before hanging up... practice taking just 10 seconds longer to ask them a satisfaction-question.

- "Is there anything else I can help you with today?"
- "Did you receive the most recent newsletter?"
- "Are you planning to attend the upcoming conference?"

- "Can I help you with any other membership questions?"
- "Would you like to speak with anyone else in the office?"
- "Would you like me to confirm your address, telephone, fax and e-mail address while you are on the phone?"
- "Do you need any membership applications or other materials?"
- "If you do need anything else, please call me back (my name is \_\_\_\_\_)."

Remember -- We are all Member Service Representatives in customer relations!

## **Meet Ken's sixth Jeopardy! victim**

By Anne Fritz  
NABE President

I grew up in a family who liked to learn things just for the sake of knowing them. We didn't care if the knowledge would ever be of any practical use, which may explain why one of my brothers is a history professor and I'm a lawyer. One of the things we did was watch Jeopardy! (My parents, ages 86 and 82, still watch it faithfully every day.

Even though I don't watch Jeopardy! much any more—something called “work” gets in the way—I still dreamed of someday trying out and being chosen for the show. My chance to put the dream to the test came in March 2003 when the Jeopardy! contestant challenge came to Peabody Place. I walked over during my lunch hour and found myself at the end of a line that stretched around the block. I almost left, but decided that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Luckily, the line moved fairly quickly, and I met some interesting people (including Rufus Thomas' son).

An hour later, I reached the end of the line where I was handed a sheet with 10 questions to answer. I finished quickly, handed my sheet to one of the contestant coordinators, and waiting for him to grade it. Insider's Tip #1: You never find out what the passing grade is. All I know is that I was handed a letter and told to come back the following day to take a second test.

On Day 2, I went to the Peabody and found myself in a group of 68 people (out of the initial 1,000 or so who had lined up the previous day). One of them was the woman I had roomed with on a trip to Israel and Egypt a few years ago. She was at the head of the line the day before so we had not seen each other.

Day 2 consisted of, first, a pep talk and Q&A session by Maggie, who is a cross between Janis Joplin and Richard Simmons, and the completion of some information about yourself. Insider's Tip #2: The hardest part of the whole experience is trying to think of interesting things to say about yourself. Then came the questions, 50 in all, on a variety of subjects, delivered by Alex via video projector and screen. Our sheets were collected and graded and, again, the passing grade was never revealed.

Mine was one of 28 names called as having survived this second test. We played a brief practice game and Maggie “chatted” with us to see, I guess, if we had sufficient personality to be on the show. We were then excused with the caveat that our names would be put in a file for 12-15 months, during which time we might be called to appear on the show.

I went home, excited that I had made it to the finals, never expecting to get called to appear on the show. That feeling was reinforced when the year passed, and I received no call.

Then, at the end of January 2004, I received a call from Glenn, another of the contestant coordinators, who advised me that they wanted me to come to LA (OK, Culver City) for a taping at Sony Pictures Studio on February 25. Suddenly I was faced with a dilemma: Should I treat this as an adventure or make a real effort to study and win? I decided on a “middle road,” at first telling people that my goal was to have enough money to play Final Jeopardy!, but later admitting that I would like to win at least one game. I ordered some study books from Amazon.com and began to “bone up” on lots of truly unimportant facts. Insider’s Tip #3: You never know how many people watch a TV show until you tell that that you’re going to appear on it.

On the day of the taping, I, along with several other contestants who were staying at the same hotel, rode the shuttle to Sony Pictures Studio, taking with us a couple of changes of clothes in case we won. We waited outside, with garment bags in hand, for Glenn to arrive and usher us into the inner sanctum. For each day of taping, there are 12 contestants plus the returning champion. Five shows are taped in a day, which means two contestants will not appear and must return the following day.

We were driven back to the set where Jeopardy is taped and ushered into the contestants’ quarters. We sat at a table while Maggie, a/k/a Janis/Richard, went over the rules and we filled out more paperwork, swearing that neither we nor our immediate families nor anyone we had ever met, was an employee of Jeopardy! or Sony Pictures Studio. We also had to practice our “hometown hellos,” promotional spots that are taped for use by your local TV station.

Barry, the make-up artist (my favorite person!), made sure we wouldn’t be washed out on camera, and then we were taken to the studio to be instructed on camera placement and how to write our name on the monitor (I’m not kidding!), and to play a brief practice game.

Insider’s Tip #4: It’s all about the buzzer. White “Christmas Tree” lights (which you can’t see at home) surround the left and underneath sides of the game board. They flash when Alex finishes reading the question, and which is your cue that your buzzer is activated. If you ring in too early, your buzzer is frozen out for a split second; you are told to keep pressing the buzzer until Alex calls the name of the person who rang in first.

I was having trouble getting the rhythm of the buzzer in practice. It was a bad omen of things to come.

The returning champion, a 29-year-old software engineer from Salt Lake City, had won three times the day before, amassing over \$95,000 in winnings. The first chumps, er, contestants to come up against him were the two people who had not been chosen the day before. They were quickly eliminated. The remaining contestants kept hoping and praying that the champion would be beaten before it was our turn to face him. The next two contestants, chosen at random by (I'm not making this up) Maggie drawing their names from a hat, also went down to defeat (although Paula from Ohio had a chance to win if she had gotten the Final Jeopardy! answer correct. Unfortunately for me, she did not.

Kevin from Atlanta and I were the next to face the champ and we fared no better. Not only was Ken (the champ) fast on the buzzer, he rarely missed an answer. At the end of the first round, he had \$12,000 and Kevin and I each had \$2,000. The frustrating part was that I knew the answers too, but couldn't ring in fast enough (that's my story and I'm sticking to it!). The next round was no better. I was trying so hard to ring in that a couple of times when Alex called on me, I couldn't remember the clue. (You try reading the questions, listening to Alex, and waiting for the lights to come on—it's not as easy as it appears!)

The good news is that I was in the black so I got to play Final Jeopardy! which was a ridiculously easy question. (Category: Fictional Characters. Answer: In the first draft of this novel, Charles Dickens called this character Little Freddie.) We all got it right, which left Ken with over \$180,000 in winnings. For third place, I will receive \$1,000 (no more parting gifts), to be sent to me within 120 days... which reminds me, I haven't received my money yet. Anyone know a good lawyer?

### **30-second drill**

Tip from a membership retention calendar reprinted with permission from Mark Levin, CAE, CSP

- Twice a year send members an e-mail message linking to your directory on your Web site. Ask members to check their listing for accuracy and send you any needed changes. This keeps members involved with the way they are represented/marketed, and it assumes they want to have a correct listing because they are going to keep their membership."