

# **The Envelope, Please**

## **Formulas for Rewarding Awards**

For everyone who is not receiving an award, there is something about awards presentations that excruciatingly elongates the experience of time - like waiting for recess on a sunny day. It would, of course, be indescribably rude and morally flawed to express such restlessness, so you may never see any overt evidence of it. But if you look closely, you may find subtle signs, like: people clapping at the wrong time, glazed expressions and comatose body language, whispered conversations erupting in laughter, trips to the rest room that last thirty minutes, empty chairs...and the ubiquitous sound of snoring. It's not a pretty sight.

But the recognition of achievement through the presentation of awards is essential to the conduct of business as we know it. It's the cornerstone of motivation, the lifeblood of sales incentives programs and the Main Event of many an annual meeting. So the challenge becomes: How do you give each award winner the maximum amount of recognition in the minimum amount of time? Here are some suggestions:

### **Theatrics - Maximizing Recognition**

Spotlights and Silver Screens - In a culture which lionizes theatrical celebrities the way we do, one minute in the spotlight is worth a whole evening at the head table. For both the illumination *and* the symbolic gesture they provide, spotlights are a must. Along with being "in the spotlight", we also value the notion of being "on stage". A few inches of elevated platforming raises a person "head and shoulders" above his or her normal status and multiplies the effect of spotlights. And, to complete the star-status metaphor, the winner's name and/or image should be projected to a 'silver screen', preferably through live video magnification. With large groups, this is essential. With smaller groups, it lends impact and importance to the proceedings.

Musical Fanfares - When the hero saves the day, it's the music track that tells us how to feel about it. The beating of drums and the blowing of horns turns a few steps across a stage into a triumphant procession. Commercial music libraries offer a wide selection of fanfares both traditional and contemporary, and the advent of CD's has made the logistics of their use almost easy. For building energy and excitement in a hurry, musical fanfares are the most cost-effective measure you can take.

Photo ID's - If live video coverage is not in your budget, or even if it is, projecting the winner's photo, name, title, award and/or performance statistics provides visual interest as well as information and recognition. The photo can be anything from a formal portrait to a candid photo of the winner at work or play, depending on the tone you want to set for the presentation. The graphic style of the ID is also critical to the tone of the presentation, as the taste and refinement of the graphic design tends to reflect on the esteem in which the winner is held. Getting a photo can be a little tricky if the award is to be a surprise to the winner, but spouses are usually eager to conspire in this cause and the extra effort is well worth it.

Signatures - Another element of visual interest which can be added to ID treatments is the winner's signature. A person's signature lends a degree of personalization to the ID which somehow goes beyond a photograph. This element is especially effective if it animates onto the screen as though it were being written. This can be accomplished through video, electronic graphics or, if you have the budget, graphic lasers. But even if presented as a static image, signatures are a worthwhile addition to speaker ID's.

Baby Pictures - If a lightly sentimental tone is appropriate to your ceremony, photos of your winners from early childhood can really enliven your presentation. Early childhood photos also provide excellent context for spotlighting a winner's personal qualities, as opposed to their professional accomplishments. This is especially appropriate when you want to recognize the sum total of a person's accomplishments. Here, too, spouses and relatives are usually more than willing to conspire with you to pull off a surprise.

Bio Videos - When it's appropriate to present biographical information on your winners, video is the preferred medium. In video, you can employ professional narration, camera moves on still photos, digital video transition effects and the emotional context provided by a music track to create a big impression in a short period of time. The tone of the video can be anything from somber to satirical, depending on the nature of your ceremony, and bio videos provide mementos of unparalleled value for your winners.

This-Is-Your-Life Testimonials - For those who remember the "This Is Your Life" television program, this technique is self-explanatory. For those who don't, this bit of theatrics involves using a significant person from the winner's past to present his or her award. Parents, old friends, former business associates and school teachers make good candidates, and their presentation can be made either live or on tape as logistics dictate. For maximum effect, the testimonial should be a complete surprise to the winner.

Guest Presenters - Parallel with the use of someone from the winner's past to present his or her award, is the use of a guest presenter. This person should be someone whose prestige within the organization or industry will lend prestige to the presentation by association. A top executive, the winner's best client or a former winner of his or her award are good candidates for this role. Close associates or colleagues can also be used, although this sets a slightly more personal and less prestigious tone.

Special Entrances/Effects - As a general rule, the greater the special effects which surround a person's entry to the stage, the greater will be the impact of that entrance. The almost unlimited possibilities include proscenium arches, revolving set pieces, mechanical portals, motorized curtains, scrim reveals, pyrotechnics and laser cones to name just a few. Obviously, budget and logistics play major roles in the determination of whether to use special effects, but if you've got the buck, special effects can certainly supply the bang.

### **Logistics - Minimizing Time**

The One-at-a-Time Maximum Exposure Method - If you only have a few awards to present, and you want to afford each winner the maximum possible recognition, then presenting each award separately is the way to go. In this method, the winner is typically seated in the audience when his or her name is announced for the podium, preceded or accompanied by some combination of the above theatric elements. Spotlights and fanfare music accompany the winner to the stage where he or she accepts the award, says a few words, then exits the stage to more spotlights and fanfare music. In this way each recipient is afforded completely individualized recognition. If you have a significant number of award recipients to recognize, however, you may want to consider one of the following methods.

The Queue 'Em & Do 'Em Method - In this method, a group or category of award recipients are called to the stage by having their names read from a list, one after the other. As they arrive at the stage, a stage manager queues them into the proper order, then cues each of them in turn to go up on stage and receive his or her award. As soon as one recipient is handed his or her award, the next starts across the stage. Although each winner's time on stage is limited, visual ID's and video magnification can still be used to afford a measure of individual recognition for each. Fanfare music typically plays throughout.

The Back-Stage Queue - This is a variation of the previous method in which all the recipients in each category are queued backstage prior to the announcement of their awards. This eliminates the time required for the group to assemble, which can be significant if you have several groups to deal with. Another difference between this method and the previous method is that this method eliminates the possibility of surprise and the spontaneous demonstrations that often accompany surprise announcements.

The Processional - This method is a progression of the previous two methods which saves additional time by parading groups of winners across the stage in a continuous procession. Each winner starts onto the stage after a set time interval, rather than waiting

until the previous winner is off stage. This is a more-or-less assembly line process, but if you have dozens and dozens of awards to present, it may be your best option. Presenting visual ID's becomes a challenge in this method, but video magnification can still be used to provide individual recognition. Fanfare music typically plays throughout.

The Group Recognition Method - If you have more awards to present than can be accomplished through one of the foregoing methods within a reasonable amount of time, you may want to consider recognizing groups of people *as groups*. In this method, theatrics are applied to the award category rather than to the individuals within it, and all the recipients are recognized *en masse*, by being asked to stand as a group while the names of everyone in the group are projected to the screen as a list.

Regardless of the methods you choose, the key to keeping an awards presentation interesting is to *keep it moving*. Remember, nothing moves so slowly as someone else's glory.