The special bonus for
Perfect Solutions for Difficult Employee Situations
By Sid Kemp

Difficult situations are always coming up, and there were more than we could fit into one book. This companion booklet contains the *Perfect Solutions* for a whole lot more *Difficult Situations.* Be sure to read and follow the guidance for how to deliver the perfect solution, which is in the original book, *Perfect Solutions for Difficult Employee Situations,* by Sid Kemp (McGraw-Hill, 2005). You can buy it online at www.amazon.com, or purchase it at any bookstore.

The Lost Songs

In the original manuscript, I had an excerpt from a song to open each chapter. The publisher decided to be safe and boring and take them out. So, here they are, just for you – a bit of music to remember that, whatever the issue is, *life is a flow of joy, full of problems.*

Chapter	Topic	Song
4	Money	Money, money, money, money—*Money, Money,* from *Cabaret*
5	Sex	I see you in a different light, the way I saw you last night—*In a Different Light,* by Doug Stone
6	Stuff From Home	I Wish I Didn't Know Now What I Didn't Know Then—by Toby Keith
7	Childish Games	Touch Me, Tease Me—by Case
8	Dis-orientation	I'm so dizzy, my head is spinning—*Dizzy,* by Tommy Roe
9	Time	Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?—by The Chicago Transit Authority
10	Attitude	Does anybody really care?— *Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?,* by The Chicago Transit Authority
11	Generations	Teach your parents well—*Teach Your Children,* by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young
12	Justice	We can change the world—*Chicago,* by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young
13	Anger	You'd better change your mind instead—*Revolution,* by The Beatles
14	Fear	If you go down there, you better just beware—*Bad, Bad Leroy Brown,* by Jim Croce
15	Illness	Body all achin' and racked with pain—*Old Man River,* by J. Kern and D. Hammerstein
16	Failure	Every hand's a winner, and every hand's a loser—*The Gambler,* by Kenny Rogers
17	Emergencies	Doctor, doctor, give me the news—*Lovin' You,* by Robert Palmer
18	Broken Rules	The sign said long-haired freaky people need not apply—*Signs,* by The Five Man Electrical Band
19	Respect	R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Find out what it means to me—*Respect,* by Otis Redding
20	Rewards	You can't get to heaven in a limousine—*Oh, You Can't Get to Heaven,* Anonymous
21	Love and Success	Love, love me do, you know I love you—*Love me do,* by The Beatle

An Addition to Chapter 6: Could You Please Leave This at Home?

I know you think it's pretty, but …

Ending the chapter on a lighter note, sometimes people's aesthetic preferences—in the way they dress, or in how they decorate their office or cubicle—conflict with company policy or with general good taste. We do need to be careful in these situations, especially where religious symbols or personal mementos are involved. For example, members of the Sikh faith wear small, symbolic knives on their person. This can be a problem in a security-conscious day and age.

It is important to be sure that we—and anyone making the complaint—are not feeling prejudice or rejecting something simply because it is different. I know one very talented writer who wanted to be freelance, and agreed to come on board a government agency only if she was allowed to fill her cubicle with plants. Her talent make an exception to the rules worthwhile—and everyone brightened their day by dropping in for a visit.

But if something is truly offensive or problematic, bring up the issue lightly, by saying *I know you think it's pretty, but …* or *?I know it's probably important to you but …,* and then explain the business reason why the item is a problem. Be open to changing your view or accepting a compromise solution if you can.

Two More for Chapter 7:   Childish Games

Old bad habits die hard

What do you do if a team member—or a pair of them, or the whole team—doesn't stop pranks, teasing, or criticism after you've raised the issue. Realize that *Old bad habits die hard—but they need to die.* The most powerful thing you can do is to give it a positive focus and make it a team effort. Use the technique in *Chapter 5, Sex,* have the team create a set of ground rules for itself, and then focus on using them and reminding each other. Over time, and with effort, the whole team will change the habits of the folks who find it more difficult.

If that isn't enough, you can set up a coaching program with defined regular—even weekly—reviews of the habit. It is important to remain positive and uncritical even when asking for people to change the way that they speak. Many of us are not aware of what we say, and can only change it if we are reminded clearly but gently when we do it. That way, we can stay relaxed and catch ourselves in the act. Critical awareness without criticism is the most effective path to change.

If the disruptive behavior still doesn't change, then additional help, such as an anger management program or an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may be appropriate. See *Chapter 22, When to Get Help* for more information.

Good times

There are times for a team—or a whole company—to celebrate. Forty years ago, these were pretty much set in stone: the office Christmas party; the company lunch after tax season where the partners of a CPA firm thank the staff. As businesses have grown smaller, budgets tighter, and our culture more diverse, things have gotten pretty muddy. And sometimes that muddle can lead to problems.

At the mild level, one wonders whether to say, "Merry Christmas," "Happy Chanukah," or "Happy Kwanzaa" before the new year. More seriously, holiday parties can be the occasion for behavior—perhaps egged on by alcohol—that can destroy a team or damage a company.

We can't just ignore the problem—then we'll have no fun at all, and lose a chance to build the team. All work and no play makes for a dull—unproductive—team.

I suggest you keep things small and simple. Unless you already have a tradition of using a restaurant or meeting hall, just have a small party in the office, and let everyone go home early for the holidays, or to celebrate completion of the big project. Make the planning and preparations into a team effort of organizing and sharing the work—and the cleanup—so that it is sort of a mini-project for all. You can use questions like whether to include family and whether to have alcohol as a brainstorming exercise for the team. The exercise is a good time for people to get to know one another's preferences and learn a little about each other's families. Be sure to include any rules HR may have, and to be very clear about what the office is paying for, and what people need to contribute towards party supplies or gifts.

One More for Chapter 8:   Dis-orientation

The new kid is showing off

Sometimes, a new team member will do things to get attention. Age doesn't matter—but the new arrival is trying to be accepted, and may not be aware of what he is doing. Also, it may be a matter of acceptance in the work environment—knowing he is doing a good job and will survive the probationary period—or it may be a desire to be liked, to get along with people, and to make friends. Typical actions include:

- Boasting about personal behavior—such as having a great time at a party or on a date—in an inappropriate way

- Boasting about work done, or taking credit for someone else's work

- Hanging around trying to be noticed

You may hear about these first from other team members who are made uncomfortable by these behaviors. Your job is to bring the situation out of control before the new team member gets labeled, and then cast out, by the team.

If the issue seems to be more social, rather than work related, it might help to enlist a more mature team member to help talk to the new arrival. In any case, take time aside to bring the behavior to the attention of the new employee. Realize he probably thinks he's trying to do the right thing and fit in. Explain that that isn't so. Then ask: *What do you really want?* Then help him see an alternate behavior that will get him the acceptance—professional or personal—that he wants.

Note that these problems are more likely to arise if the team member has just relocated, doesn't have a good family situation, doesn't have a social hobby or activity, or is otherwise isolated.

Two More for Chapter 9:   Time

Our breaks are broken

Sometimes, a company sets up a system of breaks for the workers. We've all seen the rotation of breaks at supermarket checkout lines, where each cashier has to check in and out, and a certain number of people need to be up front at any given time. These systems are great in theory, but if one person disappears for too long, the whole system can be disrupted. Or, sometimes, everyone forgets the rules and the whole system falls apart.

When that happens, take the heat and start over. *I guess I haven't been clear about break times. Let's get clear on the policy, and start over.* Review the policy with the team, and ask everyone if there might be a better way to do things. Once that's decided, write up the policy, and remind people for the first week or two, until they get the hang of it.

Don't I get paid for overtime?

Sometimes, a team member may have made an assumption about comp time or overtime pay that doesn't match company policy. They may be disappointed to learn that they are not due time-and-a-half, or overtime pay at all, or comp time. Open with *Let's review the rules together, and see what we can do.* Begin by making sure the team member knows what the policy is, to avoid future confusion. Then assess the gap between what he thought he was due and what he will get. Usually, it is not a good idea to make an exception to policy based on what someone thought they deserved. But if the employee acted in good faith—perhaps under an unwritten agreement with a former manager—it can be appropriate to offer some recognition, reward, or comp time to smooth out the difference just once.

A Story and Two Solutions From Chapter 10:   Attitude

Who's Who

One time, in my first job out of college, the receptionist came by at the end of the day and talked to me about my job, making a number of suggestions. They sounded like good ideas. I appreciated her interest, and patiently explained why those things wouldn't work.

There was only one problem: She wasn't the receptionist any more!

She had been promoted to executive assistant to the publisher. She wasn't politely helping me do a better job—she was carrying down orders from upstairs. Only no one had told me about her promotion.

If that can happen in a company with fewer than ten people, imagine how confusing things can be in an organization with hundreds, or thousands of people. Since then, I've been in a couple of other situations where I didn't know who was who.

The lesson: As a manager, make sure your team knows who's who.

False impressions

Sometimes, a team member seems disrespectful, but that isn't what is really going on. When I receive a call from a colleague or friend, I often say, "Why did you call?" Someone just told me that they feel disrespected by that, as if they always have to have a reason to call. I saw it as an act of service, the same as saying, "How can I help you?" but a little less formal.

There are a couple of keys to sorting these things out. The first is to let the whole team know *Sometimes, first impressions are false impressions. Take time to make sure you understand one another.*

Another technique is to ask *What were you trying to say?* Usually, the answer is something fresh and natural, something people would be happy to hear. Then you can say: *Then just say what you were trying to say, not something else.*

Three other techniques help anyone who is giving a false impression. One is to separate active listening from responding. Teach people to listen, then say something like, "What I think you mean is [then put it in their own words]; did I get that right?" Wait for a response, then say, "I agree," or "I see it differently." Another very simple technique is to replace the word "but" with the word "and." Compare the different impression given by these two phrases:

- "I understand you want the job done today, and I don't see how we can do that."

- "I understand you want the job done today, but I don't see how we can do that."

The third technique is to make our own role explicit. For example, we can say, "I want to help, but I just don't see how," rather than, "I can't help you." Teach these techniques to your entire team, and you'll all be working on the same side in no time.

I can't believe you said that to the CEO

What do you do if a member of your team says something inappropriate to a senior executive?

This situation, like the previous one, should be handled as a single mistake. However, there may be a need to clear things up at both ends. It can be challenging to build relationships with people in senior positions, but it is worth doing, because it gives you the authority to handle situations and keep the team growing. To the senior executive, send an email saying: *Let me know if you want to talk about what happened with my team member.* Talk to the team member between sending that message and talking to the executive, and clear up the issue in whatever way is best. Then you are ready to speak with the executive. Mostly, listen, but you can also say: *I've already spoken to my team member about this, but if there is more you want him to know, I'll tell him.*

Two More for Chapter 11:   Generations

What happened to the work ethic?

Many people in forty or older expect a certain type of loyalty to the company and dedication to work that we don't see in the younger generation. If, when you were growing up, your father—or perhaps your mother—stayed at one company for his whole career, you might think that that's the way things ought to be. Companies take care of their people, and people stay loyal to their companies. However, many people had a different experience growing up—parents who were laid off, or who never found suitable work—for example. With that experience, it's easy to grow up thinking, "I can't trust anyone to take care of me—I have to take care of myself."

Of course, this isn't just about the workplace. A child's experience of parents divorcing, or a parent dying, can shape our views of how we take care of ourselves, as well.

When you find yourself—or others on your team—thinking of some team members as self-centered, or not dedicated, or unsupportive, realize: *Maybe my own assumptions are getting in the way here. What do I really think this person should do. And why?* Then throw away your assumptions. Make a list of the behaviors the person is engaging in. If you think that they are a barrier to productivity or good teamwork, then meet with the person and discuss his behavior—not your assumptions.

For example, suppose you learn that a new employee is surfing to job-hunting sites on the Internet on his lunch hour. Company rules allow that, but you think: "He just got here. He should be trying to make this job work, not looking for another one." Following the steps in the previous paragraph, you clear away your bias and meet with him. It might go something like this:

"Our computer system sent me a report that shows evidence that you're looking for a different job. You did it on your lunch hour, and you didn't break any rules. But I'm concerned—are you thinking maybe of leaving?"

"Oh, no, not at all. It's just that the employee manual said that I'm on probation for the first six months. I want to stay, but you might fire me. I just need a Plan B."

Now that you understand, you can respond, *Let's talk about what the company and I can commit to. We do want you to stay. The probationary period is our Plan B. Our Plan A is to keep you here.* Then you can explain that an employee who works out a good professional development plan and meets defined goals is assured a position. You might end with: *No one can guarantee the kind of stability we had back in 1950. But, as a company, our focus is to hire, develop, and keep good people. We're hoping we can count on you.*

Age, tenure, and experience

Sometimes, conflicts arise because people view hierarchies differently. One person thinks he deserves the most respect because he has the most experience. But another has more tenure at this company, and a third has a higher professional degree.

The trick is not to get caught in the debate. Instead, remember *there are different ways of measuring these things.* Then ask: *Why does it matter?* If the issues are small, then say, *When we get caught up in who deserves what, we forget what's important: We're all people, we all deserve respect, and we all want to be listened to.* Then you might use the exercise in *Chapter 5, Sex* to help the team establish ground rules that express respect.

On the other hand, sometimes these things do matter. In a bureaucratic organization, HR may have a rule that says, regardless of degree or other job experience, the most recently hired person gets laid off first. If people know—or suspect—that jobs are going to be cut, they may be very concerned with their rank. In that case, tell people, *HR's seniority list seems to pit us one against the other. But the real problem is that the company needs to be more productive. Let's keep being a good team, and focus on real problems and solutions.*

It can be worse. Suppose the team knows that cuts are coming, and that you will need to decide who to cut. They may try to convince you—or argue with each other—about whether education, tenure, or experience matters most. Each person is likely to try to preserve a niche, making sure he is essential to the company. Some might even try to take credit for the work of others, or undercut them in other ways.

If this is happening, call everyone together and say, *As you know, the company may require me to cut some of you from the team. I hope that doesn't happen. But, in case it does, I want you to know the two things that matter to me most in making my decision:*

- *I will keep team players.* Once we're a smaller team, good teamwork is essential. So, if you want to stay, do your work, be helpful and make everyone look good.

- *A company can't rely on experts who don't share information and skills.* When you keep expert methods to yourself, you put the company at risk. If you get sick, or leave for some other reason, that would damage the company. So, the more thoroughly you document your job and make sure that someone on the team knows how to do your work in your absence, the more you're helping the team succeed, and the more I'll want you around.

Some people will be able to accept this reframing and make the team work. Others may not. That will tell you who you want on your team, and who you may have to let go.

One More for Chapter 12:   Justice

Misinformation, spin, and lies

Sometimes, people and companies habitually play with the truth for their own ends. There are tellers of tall tales, and there are corporate spin machines. In my view, this never works for any real, long-term benefit, whatever the apparent short term gains might be. When my team runs into this stuff—or is hurt by it—I say: *Let's focus on real work and good results.*

A Story From Chapter 13:   Anger

The come-to-God meeting

Several years ago, I was a subcontractor to a consulting firm for a government agency. The division head in the government agency had a weekly meeting every Wednesday morning with all the managers of the consulting firm. (Because I was a subcontractor, I didn't get to go.) They called it the come-to-God meeting because of the head of the agency had quite a temper.

I tracked my own productivity each week, and I found it dropped off on Wednesday afternoon and Thursday. I looked at what I was doing, and I found that a lot of people were coming by to talk. And they felt better when they left. At first, I was frustrated. The top executive's demeanor was cutting into my productivity, even though I didn't go to the meeting.

Then I realized that I was providing a valuable function by letting the other managers—who had to face the top boss directly—blow off steam. I silently added "help the managers refocus after the come-to-God meeting" to my to-do list, and counted it as part of my work—and productivity—for the week.

The lesson: If you are the manager of the team, find some routine way, such as a genuine, appreciative staff meeting with good snack food, to bring the team back into shape after they get bent out of shape by the big boss.

A Story From Chapter 15: Illness

Team helping family

I was working with a client recently when the department director's daughter got sick at high school, and had to get home. Her mother was out of town, and her father was in an important meeting. The team didn't want to lose him for two hours, so one team member suggested that her mother—who was home with nothing to do—go and pick up the boss's daughter. She did, and everything worked out well for everyone. The director was able to attend the meeting and thanked the helpful retired mother with a box of chocolates.

Someone pointed out that this wouldn't have worked if the child had been in grade school. There, the school can only turn a child over to authorized adults.

The lesson: A cooperative team can help everyone out. But we need to realize that, when we get involved with people's home lives, things can get complicated and problematic because we're working in unfamiliar territory.

A Story From Chapter 16:   Failure

A letter of recommendation

One time, I had to lay off my only employee. He was a great guy—very dedicated and hardworking. But the direction my clients wanted me to go didn't match his specialty. I made the decision. But, before I met with him, I sat down and wrote him a very strong recommendation, saying how disappointed I was that I couldn't keep him with my company, and what an asset he would be for a company that needed his talents.

When I let him know of my decision, he was—of course—disappointed. He was also a little uncertain as to whether he believed me that I thought he was really good. I handed him the letter and asked him to read it. His face lit up. The fact that I had already taken a step to let others know—publicly—that I thought he was excellent—made all the difference. His doubts about himself—and about me—vanished. We parted friends, and, in less than two weeks, he had a job that was just right for him at a salary higher that I could have paid.

The lesson: Prepare a letter of recommendation, and give it as a gift. Let your team member know how much you appreciate him, and help him on his way.

One More for Chapter 18:   Broken Rules

Nobody knows what the rules are around here

In some companies, rules are not made until it is too late, or there is no effective effort to communicate the rules or educate people about them. Perhaps a company grew quickly, and suddenly finds itself facing human resources issues that it never thought about before. Or perhaps the company changed the way it is working, and now rules are needed governing travel or computer use, but the situation is already out of control.

Upper management might grab take the bull by the horns and develop good policies, but don't count on it. You may have to take it upon yourself to talk to executives, talk to HR, and find out if there are any rules and what you are supposed to do with them. If no one is managing the rules, push for as much autonomy as you can get. Then, lead your team in building a set of effective rules that support productivity, fairness, and reduced risk.

A Whole New Chapter: Chapter 20:Rewards

You can't get to heaven in a limousine
—*Oh, You Can't Get to Heaven,* Anonymous

Effective rewards can increase performance and encourage better teamwork. If we understand motivation, we can deliver inexpensive rewards effectively, using them to build a team that makes a difference. However, there are many pitfalls, and making just one mistake can turn a reward system into a joke, or worse, reward unproductive behavior or trigger competition that interferes with teamwork.

Here are the components of an effective rewards system:

- *Rewards should be specific.* Skip "employee of the month." Go for "by planning the project well, allowed on-time delivery with no overtime for the team," or "supported the team by facilitating a difficult brainstorming session."

- *Rewards should be prompt.* An immediate "thank you" is actually more effective than an end-of-the-month bonus.

- *Rewards should be inexpensive.* Frequent rewards are most effective, but we can't afford to give a big bonus for every little thing. So small rewards for small successes is a good plan.

- *Rewards should not be competitive.* There is no need for "best," or "employee of the year." Instead, define professional development goals for each person, and reward an employee for meeting or exceeding his or her goals.

- *Rewards can be public.* Most people appreciate being given credit in front of the team. However, some may find it embarrassing. If you want to reward someone, tell him, and ask, *Can I announce this to the team?* You might make it easier for him to accept praise by saying, *Several of us have earned rewards, and I'd like to acknowledge each of you in the team meeting.* If a person wins an award from outside the department, ask if you can announce it to the staff. That announcement is probably an extra reward right there.

A rewards system built on these ideas takes advantage of several psychological factors that make it effective. First, our mind associates things that are closely linked in time, so immediate rewards are more effective. Second, we all have deep-seated fears of rejection, which, in a work context, is linked to loss of income. Frequent acknowledgment and appreciation reduces this stress. People become confident that they are accepted by the leader and the team, and feel secure, and therefore loyal.

This type of rewards system also uses certain social factors to reduce competition and embarrassment, allowing the team to come together more easily. For example, suppose one team member made a new productivity record, another solved a really nasty inventory problem, and a third entered a drug rehab program and kept his job. All receive the same rewards: *This team member met his professional development goals for the month.* No one needs to know what those goals were. And people learn that meeting their own goals and doing their best is all that is needed to be part of the team, to be secure, and to be appreciated. This encourages each person to focus on his or her performance, to meet goals and resolve difficult situations next month, and to keep growing in unique, individual ways while contributing to the team. The result is a robust, diverse team that remains highly productive even in a changing work environment. Why? Because, through our rewards system as a whole, we are teaching people to define reasonable goals that are valuable to the business month by month, and achieve them.

The company rewards program

  If your company offers a rewards program, talk to HR to determine how it works and how flexible it is. If it can be adapted to the guidelines at the beginning of this chapter, adapt it and use it. If not, give it less emphasis. Make a decision whether you want to give company rewards privately, or if you think that announcing them to the team would reward the right behaviors effectively. Telling the team *The company has acknowledged [team member] for [effective work]* is a good way to make the announcement.

Rewards for the team and by the team

  Sometimes the team has an opportunity to win a reward, either from the company, or even from a customer who makes your company "supplier of the month." Professional associations may also offer relevant awards. Find out what rewards are out there, and bring them to the team meeting. *I think this reward aligns with our team goals. Do you think we should go for it?*

  If you develop each person's professional development plan with him, then you should decide if the goal has been met and the reward should be given. However, you can also develop other rewards that the team as a whole—by voting—can offer to team members. You can define awards like, "major contribution to the team," or "cleared away a big roadblock," or "managed a difficult customer situation," and then let the team decide who gets the reward. Note that I avoided competitive words like best or most. Instead of just giving out one reward of each type per month, you can make a rule: "Anyone who gets five or more votes gets a reward" might work on a fifteen-person team.

  As we empower teams in this way, we also need to watch for mistakes and even abuse. For example, you don't want a bunch of people rewarding themselves in a round-robin by voting one person in each month. Make sure that the team understands the purpose of the rewards, and what makes them work. And listen to the team: if the rewards aren't working for them, then they aren't working.

"Why didn't I get a reward?"

Sometimes a person deserves and needs acknowledgment for extra effort or especially good work and doesn't get it. We need to be careful about this. A person who feels unappreciated will have a hard time focusing on improving performance, and may feel inclined to look elsewhere for work—quite appropriately.

The best solution is prevention. If we keep on top of employee effort and goals, and give praise and thanks, we make the rewards we offer the most important thing to the employee. Then, if an employee doesn't win "employee of the month," it matters less, because he has the acknowledgment he needs.

But sometimes we miss, as well. When an employee asks, "Why didn't I get a reward?" or, "Why wasn't my work acknowledged?" or "I worked harder than he did, and he go the reward," what do we do?

Review the work and results. Acknowledge them, and thank the employee. Even if the work is just what you would expect, and not special, thank the employee for his contribution. If the work is in any way special, make that clear. And give a reward.

Here are some ideas for having rewards to give out:

- Clip coupons. Keep a stack of two-for-one dinner coupons in your desk drawer, to give out as appropriate.
- Make certificates. Make nice looking certificates using a computer and a color printer.
- Know what matters to your team. Favorite restaurants, movies, sports events, flowers—be ready to give a small something that means something.
- Simply acknowledge the person in front of the team.

Rewards that really matter

Rewards that really matter are those that generate strong feelings. Therefore, the more personal, the better. That is why money doesn't work nearly as well as you would think. Sure, the person can use it for whatever he wants. But it is generic, bland, and impersonal. It doesn't say, *I know you, and I appreciate your unique qualities.* Generic gift certificates have similar problems. Gift certificates or discounts at a store or restaurant you know the person uses and likes are better. And if you know the person well enough, specific gift items are best.

But one reward tops everything else: recognition. The following story illustrates this point.

Better than a free lunch

A company regularly gave out an inexpensive appreciation reward—a coupon for a free lunch at the company cafeteria. Most people ate their regularly, so it was a good choice. But HR noticed that the coupons weren't being redeemed—people weren't picking up their free lunches, even though they were eating at the cafeteria. When HR looked into the issue, they found that people were so proud *of having received the reward* that they were posting the coupons on their bulletin boards as certificates, instead of redeeming them as coupons.

HR remedied the situation by including two slips of paper in the reward envelope: a certificate and a coupon.

The lesson: Public awareness of the recognition was more important than a financial reward.

I need a little recognition

In giving out rewards to our team, we may feel left out. How do we tell our team, "I need a little recognition"?

With a bit of humor, we can ask the team for one reward a month, but, each month, the team chooses *what our reward is for.* It's good feedback—the team is letting us know what really matters, of all the things we are doing.

Alternatively, we can share a piece of our own professional development program with the team, and ask the team—or a committee on the team—to evaluate if we've met our goals and deserve our reward.

"That reward wasn't fair!"

If someone complains about a reward, listen up. It's a sign of envy or competitiveness on the team. Listen, and acknowledge the person's point of view. If you sense competition or envy, try to redirect the person's attention: *I think that meeting our own goals and helping the team is more important than rewards. What do you think?* And listen again.

What you do next depends on whether you made the decision about the award, or someone else did. If you made the decision, and you think the team member has a point, say *Thank you. You've taught me something. When I give out rewards in the future, I'll be sure to …* and then mirror a positive version of the idea you learned from the employee.

If you don't control the decision over that reward, simply say *That's a good point. I agree with you. I don't know how the folks who gave the reward made their decision, but, from what we know, your point makes sense.* Then redirect the team member away from rewards and back to current work and current goals.

New rewards

If you don't have a reward system, or the system you have isn't working, consider scrapping it and starting over. Bring your team together for a brainstorming session. Say, *I want to create an effective, inexpensive rewards system that will keep us focused on goals and continuous improvement.* Then follow these steps:

1. Ask each person to describe one time that he received some acknowledgement, award, or reward that mattered to him—that made him want to do a good job again.
2. Introduce the ideas at the beginning of this chapter.
3. Raise a series of questions: How frequently should rewards be given out? How many rewards should be given out? What should be rewarded? Should the boss be included?
4. Ask for a volunteer, and delegate someone on the team to be responsible for forming a rewards committee, setting up the system, and keeping it running.
5. Follow up with the committee head to make sure that the guidelines are written down and that the rewards process gets started.
6. Periodically review the team's acceptance of the system and its value in actually supporting departmental goals and team commitment by asking the team for feedback.

Rewards getting out of hand

Sometimes, a rewards system gets out of hand. I know of one team that decided that desserts would be a good reward for coming to meetings on time, and had a rotation where people made a homemade dessert and brought it in on meeting day. But the dessert got competitive—from cookies to cake to seven-layer cake, to seven-layer cake with ice cream. Pretty soon, team members had gained an average of ten pounds and were spending the afternoon in sugar shock. The team saw how they were stuck, but they didn't know quite how to get out of it and get back to the simple desserts that had worked so well at the beginning.

If a rewards system gets out of hand, we don't want to scrap it entirely. We want to fix it. Periodically—and also when there seems to be a problem—ask the team to go around and have each person say how he feels when they get an award, and how he feels when he sees others get one. When you hear their responses, evaluate these concerns:

- *Have rewards become meaningless?* Is there no connection between the reward and the work that led up to it?
- *Are rewards appreciated?* If not, have people just accepted them as routine, or come to feel that they deserve them?
- *Are we rewarding the right thing?* Sometimes, poorly designed reward criteria, or poor tracking of work results, can lead to rewards that actually encourage behavior we'd rather not have people do.
- *Is the reward system generating envy or competition?*
- Most importantly, *Is the reward system generating motivation to work smarter or harder, and get a reward?*

If so, revamp the system. Our goal is a set of rewards, and a way of giving them out that leaves people feeling appreciated, and feeling enthusiastic about taking the next step in their professional development plan, towards the next goal and the next reward.

Rewarding bad management

This difficult situation occurred at one of my clients—the Information Technology division of a Fortune 500 company. The company had set aside a portion of the annual bonus to be distributed by senior management, and the managers decided that it should go to the most successful project teams. However, in the first years of the reward, the company had not yet set up an effective standard for project management, or a project tracking system. So, the executives rewarded the teams that were noticeable, the teams that worked hard and stayed late for a month or six weeks to make sure the project was delivered on time.

Once they set up the project tracking system, the executives realized that they had been rewarding bad project management for several years. The managers and teams that were doing well weren't working heroic hours and burning themselves out in the process—they didn't need to. Through effective project management, they were delivering on time without the rush. The real heroes were invisible until the tracking system was set up.

The company changed the way it chose which teams got the bonus. Instead of visible heroics, they measured progress against the plan and achievement of major project goals.

The lesson: Effective rewards require a clear definition of the job, and accurate tracking of the work being done. Keep on top of your teams work and goals so that you can reward ideas and actions that really improve productivity.

"We can't afford rewards any more"

Sometimes, you face a difficult situation created when a company tries to save money by reducing rewards or perks, or cutting the company picnic.

The solution is to develop a reward system of your own, using team participation and offering appreciation and acknowledgment. *The company may not be giving us all the good things that it used to. But, on this team, we appreciate one another, and acknowledge each other's achievements and contributions.*

Another Whole New Chapter, on the Best Topics of All: Chapter 21: True Love and Success

Love, love me do, you know I love you
—*Love me do,* by The Beatles

Let's not forget that work isn't everything. Sometimes, good things happen to people's lives at work: We fall in love; We join the office health club and lose weight; We throw a baby shower at the office. While making sure work goes on, we need to make room for life. When people have a chance to be themselves, it may interrupt work for a few hours, but the long-term effect called loyalty leads to higher staff retention and greater productivity.

In addition, we need to be aware of an odd idea from risk management—unexpected good events are risks, too, because we have to change our plans to adjust to them.

The team won, the department lost

This is a true story from a small town in New Jersey. The police department had only nine officers, and every week, they pooled their money and bought some lottery tickets. Well, the town got into trouble when they won big—$14 million big. The team split up the pot, and the whole police force retired.

The town had to hire new recruits straight out of the academy, and was left with the least experienced police force in the state.

The lesson: Even good news—such as promotions—can mean changes that are hard for the company, or the people still on the team.

Appropriate romance

Many people do meet their soulmate at the office. But the risks of office romance are high, as we discussed in *Chapter 5, Sex.* If the relationship goes sour, it seriously disrupts the team, and worse. Unfortunately, some people with hurt feelings seek revenge through harassment claims. What do we do when serious romance presents a serious risk for the team?

Bring in the couple, and talk to them. *I see you two really care for each other. Now, I need your help in caring for the team.* Look at the situation and the rules, and try to work out a structural solution. Is reassignment necessary? Might it even be best if one person got a job elsewhere? In creating the solution, consider:

- The corporate rules
- The status of the relationship—if the couple is already engaged, that may change the effect of the rules. But remember that about 50% of marriages end in divorce, some quite quickly.
- The current relationship of the two people. Does one report to the other? If so, a separation is more essential.
- How closely do the two work together? More distance is better.

All this applies if you find yourself in this situation, and more so if it is with someone on your team. If you want to develop a relationship with someone on your team, it is best to express your commitment through working out a solution, even if that means that one of you changes jobs or moves to a completely different department.

The team beyond the office

Sometimes, our team likes to get involved in other activities as a team, outside the office. Examples include:

- Office sports teams
- The team working together to support a charity event, such as walkathon or fundraiser
- The team traveling together to conferences
- The team hanging out together after hours or having gatherings with team and family

All of this is good stuff. As managers, we should take care of some issues to make sure that all goes well. Here are some problems that have occurred, and ways to prevent them:

- *Are you the boss, or a team member?* After hours, it might not work to just be one of the guys or girls, even if you were on the team before you were promoted to the boss position. Your power puts you at risk for claims of conflict of interest. Some people choose never to drink with their team. One good rule from *The Boss's Survival Guide* is: Never do anything with your team you wouldn't do with a customer.

- *Peer—and company—pressure.* People have complained that the environment of a company—or even company managers—have pressured individuals into giving to particular charities, or being involved in social activities. They felt—perhaps rightly—that their status and opportunity depended on going with the team, even when they felt it wasn't right to do so. Be sure to let everyone know that all participation in extracurricular activities is voluntary. Check periodically to remember that that idea is respected. And, if any work-related issues come up in the off-hours, be sure everyone is brought on board at the next staff meeting.

- *Who pays?* Sometimes, there is a lack of clarity about who is footing the bill for these events. Make sure it is always clear what—if anything—the company is contributing.

- *Is the company responsible?* Any activity has certain risks—liabilities and vulnerabilities—associated with it. Is a team member entitled to workmen's compensation if injured in a company softball game? Is a company liable if money is collected for charity at the office, and someone makes off with the money? I don't know. But, if my team is going to be involved in any such events, I'm going to find out ahead of time, and prepare appropriate releases for participants to sign.

Managing these events well—with a little thought about what might go wrong—goes a long way to preventing problems and encouraging the team to grow.

Family members working together

With all of the cautions about the problems of mixing families and work, does it work for family members to work together in the same office. Absolutely, yes, it can. I know one company that, with less than ten employees, shows the best and worst of mixing family and business. The worst is that the company used to be co-owned by husband and wife partners. When they divorced, the case included a bitter court battle that almost sunk the company. Now that that is settled, the owner has his daughter—a recent college graduate—working for him. Working there gives her a stable job in New York City while she pursues her acting career on the side. And it's good for everyone.

When family members get along well, it adds a lot to the office environment. The father-and-son team of Michael and Shawn Piller are co-creators of the TV Series *The Dead Zone*. Michael feels that his son Shawn's production skills support the creativity of his writing and carry the script's message through the production process to the final product. And everyone on the set appreciates their commitment to creating a positive family-style environment conducive to creativity and teamwork.

So, what makes it work right? I think that family members working together enhances a team as long as the family takes care of certain things:

- Keep home and personal issues separate from work
- Keep a focus on clearly defined work goals
- Resolve business issues professionally
- If family members are business owners, keep a clear and full separation of family and business finances
- Maintain a sense of humor—If you can't find laugh, out why, and correct it fast
- Bring the best of your relationship—a sense of home, support for one another, appreciation—gently into the workplace

Creating successful office social events

What makes for a good office holiday party or other celebration or social gathering? I think there are a few key elements:

- *Make sure it's what people really want to do.* Sometimes, people think that there *should* be a holiday party. You might even have the whole team saying that it should happen. But double-check: *Is this really right for you? Will you enjoy it?* Otherwise, either only a few will show, leaving hurt feelings, or everyone will come, but wish he wasn't there.

- *Make it reasonable.* Sometimes, a gathering at 2pm and a chance to leave before 3:30 to beat the holiday rush makes more sense than a dinner that keeps people from spending time with their families. Make sure that the timing, length, and cost are reasonable for the company and everyone on the team.

- *Picture the event, and think it through,* Here are some key questions: Will alcohol be served? Will the company pay for everything, or should employees contribute? Will there be any expenses employees might cover? (For example, some companies don't pay for alcohol, but have a cash bar. And what about parking costs?) If there is alcohol, who will make sure everyone gets home safely? Are significant others invited? Are children? If so, what ages? If family and children are invited, have you included appropriate activities for them? Will there be any business—such as announcement of awards—or will it be all fun?

- *Consider a professional service.* Would you be better off arranging for an office day at an amusement park or movie theater, and letting professionals do all the planning?

- *Create a party planning team.* Have two or three people work together to plan the event and carry it through. Have them keep you posted, and coordinate any company concerns—such as liability insurance or office security for the party—with them.

Family visits to the office

I'm a firm believer that family—partners and children—should come to the office and see what their partner's or parent's work and work environment are like. We spend more waking hours at work than at home, but how can our family understand us if they don't see who we work with and what we face on the job?

Have the team get together and brainstorm these questions:

- What limits, if any, should be put on having partners, friends and adult family stop by the office?

- What is the best way for children to come to work? How often? What ages? What times? What is best for the team, for productivity, and for the children?

- Are there any safety concerns?

- What are the guidelines for children coming to work when they can't be at school, or in an emergency?

Raises and promotions—sharing the good news

In some companies, everyone gets the annual bonus at the same time. But raises often occur at different times—at the anniversary date of when a person started his job. And promotions come as positions are filled. In general, promotions are of interest to the team because they change people's roles, responsibilities, and relationships. They should be announced both to give credit to the team member, and also to make sure that people plan the adjustment to new work relationships. Compensation, however, whether routine raises, merit-based raises, or bonuses, are private matters of compensation between the individual and the company. Don't share the news with the team, and let each team member know: *Your salary is your own concern, and not a matter for office discussion.*

Corporate public events

When your company has or sponsors a public event, it can look like a social gathering. There may be food and drinks and activities. But, with clients and others watching the you, you are at work. Be sure to tell the team: *Enjoy the event, but remember you are at work. Don't do anything that will be a good story for a client to take home about you.* If you have cautionary tales from past events, don't hesitate to use them.

Success and new roles

Teammates are friendly acquaintances, if not friends, and should celebrate one another's successes. I bought a new home recently, and was surprised and pleased at how many clients and colleagues went out of their way to let me know that they were happy for me. So, if a team member has good fortune—or a success—in his personal life or at work, make sure the team knows. This includes engagements, marriages, children, special trips, rewards or successes in hobbies, professional recognition or appreciation, and, of course, promotions and new assignments at work.

For major events, decide if the team, as a whole, should give some kind of card or gift, or if it should be left up to each individual. A card from the team includes everyone, and allows individuals to do more if they want to.

Remember that with some of these successes, there are also changes that may affect work. The workaholic who just got married may want to start going home at five. The new parent may arrive a little less perky in the morning after a month of sleep interrupted every night. Keep an eye out for these changes, acknowledge them, and—if appropriate—work with the team member to adjust expectations and professional development plans.

Saying farewell

When a team member leaves the department—whether for personal or professional reasons—it will raise mixed feelings for other team members. Formally express gratitude and appreciation in front of the whole team. Privately, make sure all work issues are written up and transferred. Also, be sure to have an exit interview. Some team members will reveal problems at an exit interview that they would never discuss while on the job, whether or not the problem is related to their departure. If the team member reveals a problem as a reason for the departure, consider what action should be taken, and, if appropriate, ask if there is anything that would cause the employee to reconsider.

Aside from these formal issues, make room for an informal farewell, and a chance for everyone on the team to say their good-bye's.

Keeping in touch

Most often, people don't keep in touch after they leave a job. It's an odd fact of our society that we can grow very close in one situation, and yet, when the situation ends, move on without a trace. Although I've never met you, gentle reader, as I come to the end of this book, I miss you. Feel free to drop me a line—share a story, or make a suggestion—by email at *sid@qualitytechnology.com*. You can always learn about my other books, training programs, and consulting at www.qualitytechnology.com.