

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

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# What's in it for you?

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A culture in which personal gain and reward is put above everything else is not one that will succeed.

If you read this blog, you'll have a better chance of being promoted, paid more and liked more, and a better chance of going home early.

Got your attention?

“What's in it for me?” as a strategy is short-term and unsustainable for marketing, for management and for life. It can be a successful short-term marketing tactic (buy one get one free; text for the chance to win; free lip gloss with every SKU), but it can lead to a race to the bottom.

When you're the first to market with this tactic, you can gain temporary advantage. When you begin to rely on it because all the competitive brands in your sector do it to drive share or sales, you're in a race to the bottom.

A strong brand doesn't have to discount its way into the shopping basket. Brand strength is one of the true paybacks of successful long-term marketing. The case studies that are rewarded in this year's [IPA Effectiveness Awards](#), which I had the honour of judging, are full of strong stories about building distinctiveness and driving effectiveness beyond the short-term drug of discounting. The Databank is full of still more.

"What's in it for me?" can also be a way of managing staff. Open bar, summer picnic, free biscuits. Tick off all your tasks and expect a reward. Of course, staff need fun, rest and relaxation, but a culture in which you treat them like pets being trained to perform with treats doesn't develop them or grow your business.

And what if you do want them to do something without reward, over and above the job description? If the culture is one of performing seals purely acting in the hope of a fish, your chances of achieving this are slim.

A strong team is made up of individuals who look out for each other, not a collection of people who only act if there is something in it for them. People don't just act selfishly; we're not just in it for ourselves. The collective matters, the team matters – and good managers find ways to encourage and reward good team citizenship that goes beyond striving for personal reward.

Not all managers do this. There are those who will set their deputies the task of competing with each other for praise and promotion. The best response to this is to point out that there's plenty of competition outside the organisation, so generating internal competition in a hideous parody of *Game of Thrones* is a misuse of time and energy.

Of course there must be a reward exchange. There needs to be something in it for you. But if it's the first and only criteria, then the outcomes won't be pretty. If you're hooked on that

“What’s in it for me?” hamster wheel professionally or personally, it’s time to get off and start considering the bigger picture. There are many ways you can behave at work that will help others. Don’t be a [bystander](#) when you witness unfairness. Speak up for the overlooked, the bullied or the silenced. Or [sign up here](#) to be a game changer for disability in Scope’s new initiative.

What’s in it for you? A real reason to get up and go to work happy.

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