

CEP Magazine – December 2019 Game-based training for gift and hospitality management

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When you're a compliance officer, staying on top of your company's gift, travel, and hospitality expenditures is a never-ending task. The basic principle is straightforward: Small tokens of graciousness and appreciation are an appropriate part of business, but too much generosity may be an inappropriate attempt to bribe one's way into favored treatment. The actual job of drawing the line between an innocuous gift and a nefarious bribe requires significant training, experience, and judgment.

In the face of real-world complexity, we can step back and find pleasure in simpler recreation—the games, sports, and stories that help us relax and keep us entertained. But these forms of play have a serious side as well, mirroring real-world scenarios and challenges and subliminally preparing the player (whether child or adult) for eventual reengagement.

How broadly can this principle be applied? For example, could managing gifts and hospitality somehow be turned into a game? What would that look like? Would it be fun? Challenging? Instructive? With nothing to risk but strained credulity, let's see what we can come up with.

Start simple

First off, we should note that a game doesn't need to be complicated to reflect something about real life. For example, my organization recently developed a casual video game to mimic and reinforce a proper understanding of corporate gift-giving. It's nothing fancy—basically a spin-the-wheel defense game, with a base in the center, a rotating shield, and a bunch of small discs flying at you. The base is your "client gift box," and your job is to make sure nothing inappropriate gets through. It's easy to tell what's what: Acceptable gifts are bright green, and unacceptable bribes are dark red. Each little ball also has an picture on it that signifies a specific kind of gift—a simple meal, a birthday present, or a cup of coffee on the one hand; a fancy car, a tropical island getaway, or a stack of cash on the other. You've got to let the permissible gifts through, or they'll just keep bouncing across the screen, but if you allow the bribes to pass, it'll soon be game over.

The game is simple and so is the message for compliance personnel: You don't want to block everything, it's important to identify and catch the problematic items quickly, and you'll be overwhelmed if you let things get too cluttered.

From reflex to strategy

Of course, this sort of arcade-style game is just a starting point. We're more interested in a kind of strategic simulation. Think of board games like Risk or Diplomacy in which the players struggle for global military dominance, or computer game franchises like Sim City or Civilization where the goal is to establish and nurture a thriving metropolis or nation state.

The key in designing this sort of game is establishing the right level of detail, and computer-based simulation allows a nice middle ground of complexity. The mass of individual actions or battles that constitute the game world can all be richly plotted and nuanced, rather than reduced to a simple roll of the dice. This is done with artificial intelligence elements: in-game agents occupying the same role as the human player and making their own decisions in the face of each one's distinct circumstances. With the CPU managing such agents by the thousands and tracking their interactions and responses to the player's own decisions, a well-designed game can feel alive in its dynamic development.

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