

Award Season Is Upon Us



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Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: HR Risk and Employment Practices

The first quarter of a new calendar year ushers in a familiar round of award shows that disrupt network television's customary prime time programming. Popular magazines offer predictions about which films, directors, actors and actresses are the "front-runners" and which nominees are the "dark horses." While it's rare that I can boast having seen more than one of the films nominated for "Best Picture," I do enjoy reading commentary by entertainment industry journalists and columnists about why particular films were nominated as well as the occasional "what were the voters thinking" rant.

Pondering this year's season of award shows and the upcoming broadcast of the Academy Awards*, led me to reflect on the role of *awards* and *rewards* in risk management. When I review the various lists of "do's" and "don'ts" the Center has published on an array of risk topics, the subjects of holding staff accountable and enforcing rules crop up over and over again. The topics of rewarding thoughtful risk-taking and recognizing effective risk management efforts have received less than deserved air time.

According to the [U.S. Office of Personnel Management](#), "In an effective organization, rewards are used well. Rewarding means recognizing employees, individually and as members of groups, for their performance and acknowledging their contributions to the agency's mission."

How you structure an awards or rewards program in the risk management area is up to you. Why not be creative?! Here's one approach for identifying "what's working" and "what isn't."

1. *Poll your employees to solicit their views and opinions about the organization's risk-taking appetite.* Consider asking:
 - In what ways does our organization encourage employees to take risks? Please share an example.
 - How does the organization, through its policies, culture or other means, discourage risk-taking? Explain.
2. *Invite employees to identify risk management innovations or success stories.* You might ask:
 - Help us identify and celebrate our risk management success stories by naming something noteworthy (in your view!) we have done in the past year to better protect our reputation, personnel, clients, funding streams, donor relationships, or other assets (financial, property, etc.). Tell us "what" and then "why" the "what" is a strategy or change in practice deserving of recognition.
3. *Ask employees to open up about mistakes and missteps.* For example:
 - To err is human. Our agency not only serves human beings—its mission cannot be achieved

without the hard work of our terrific team of human staff members. From time to time, however, we make mistakes. Sound risk management invites us to learn from our mistakes. Help us advance our mission by identifying a mistake that occurred and the “lessons learned” or lessons ripe for learning. Please use the space provided to describe a mistake made in your area of responsibility and how the mistake was—or should have been—a learning opportunity.

- There is a natural tendency to hide or obscure mistakes or less-than-hoped for results. But by bringing errors to light we can fix the systems and policies that made the mistakes possible. Please identify one step that you believe would be helpful in bringing mistakes and missteps to light as learning opportunities in our agency.

With the results of a survey tailored for your nonprofit in hand, consider how to recognize the good and learn from the ugly. Be creative in designing your “awards” program. Learn from the pros in Hollywood and consider setting a time limit on “thank you” speeches. With business casual dress the norm in most nonprofit offices these days, why not invite staff to “dress up” for your celebration of risk management triumphs and lessons learned from mistakes or near-misses?

*The [83rd Academy Awards](#) will air on Sunday, February 27th on ABC.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about risk management rewards/awards, feedback on this article and questions about the Center's resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or (202) 785-3891. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at www.https://nonprofitrisk.org/ and offers custom consulting assistance. Melanie's recent books include [No Surprises: Harmonizing Risk and Reward in Volunteer Management-5th Edition](#), available as an old fashioned hard copy book or as a downloadable PDF.

Learning Season

In lieu of dust-attracting statuettes, the Center is offering an array of education programs during this year's Hollywood awards season. Our learning season line-up includes:

- A brand-new [Nonprofit Employee Benefits Conference](#), scheduled for **May 16-17** in West Nyack, NY. In a poll whose results were released yesterday, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) revealed that as many as 50% of human resource professionals are undecided about how their organizations will respond to landmark health care reform. If you're uncertain about what the future holds for your nonprofit's benefits program or you want expert advice on the options, mark your calendar and plan to attend the Center's first-ever [Nonprofit Employee Benefits Conference](#). The conference features an impressive line-up of topics, including an opening session on health care reform. The program will begin at noon on May 16th and wrap up at 12:30 on May 17th. The affordable registration fee and convenient, accessible location make this a not-to-be missed opportunity for leaders whose nonprofits spend growing sums on employee benefits. Seating is limited at this new event. To guarantee your spot at the training table [register](#) online today.
- The Center's 17th annual conference – SAVE THE DATE and plan to join us in the Pacific Northwest for the [2011 Risk Management and Finance Summit for Nonprofits](#), September 18-20 at Seattle's “premier waterfront venue,” the [Bell Harbor International Conference Center](#) and [The Edgewater](#).
- The Center's popular [First Wednesdays](#) monthly Webinar series, featuring 12, sixty-minute programs coverage a wide range of thought-provoking risk management topics. Missed the first two programs? When you sign up for the series you will be able to watch and listen to any programs you missed. Next up is our program on [Risk Communication](#), scheduled for **Wednesday, March 2 at 2 pm Eastern**.
- Our brand-new [Third Thursdays](#) Webinar series offers four, ninety-minute programs on HR risk. This new offering has been very popular with past customers of Center webinars as well as those who are new to our education offerings. The second program in the series will cover [“The Employee Handbook: Do's and Don'ts.”](#) Join us on **Thursday, February 17th** for a practical look at employment policies in a 21st century nonprofit.