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## What do geeks seek? Free food, creativity

**Leading Geeks: How to Manage and Lead People Who Deliver Technology**, by Paul Glen (Jossey-Bass, 253 pages, \$26.95).

Geeks as a rule are just not rah-rah people.

Management consultant Glen, a card-carrying geek himself, underscores that morsel of common knowledge in the "Nurturing Motivation" chapter of his uncommonly insightful and readable book, *Leading Geeks*.

Glen offers the example of a hypothetical motivational sales meeting. He describes a room charged with electricity, where the speaker has 300 highly paid, extroverted salespeople on their feet and engaged in a call-and-response about competition, challenge, success and winning.

Everyone is having a great time and vowing to go out and sell, sell, sell.

"But the geeks you brought aren't on their feet," Glen writes. "They aren't screaming back to the speaker. At first, they sit in the back, pondering the scene, mesmerized. Then someone starts sniggering and giggling. Eyes start to roll, and the judgment is in."

Geeks, Glen suggests, are incapable of believing that

anyone could be persuaded to do anything in that manner, and they are "appalled that the objects of their disdain probably make more money than they do."

Learning how to motivate geeks, Glen writes, is the first of the four responsibilities of those who would be their leaders. The other three primary responsibilities are:

- To provide internal facilitation and facilitate the flow of ideas and activities, in contrast to the traditional command-and-control approach.

- To furnish external representation, i.e., to buffer geek groups from the outside world.

- To manage the structural and environmental ambiguity of the geeks' work situation.

Back to motivation. Glen differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The former refers to those things that people are motivated to do for enjoyment, interest or self-expression, to satisfy curiosity or to respond to a personal challenge. The latter refers to those things that are done to achieve some goal or reward apart from the work itself.

In the traditional management model, Glen points out, the emphasis is on extrinsic

motivators such as money, time off, promotion and recognition. But that doesn't always work for geeks because you are seeking to encourage creativity and not just behavior.

"If a geek is uninterested in a problem, even massive incentives, such as potentially high-value stock options, cannot make the problem interesting," Glen writes.

But there is one extrinsic motivator that almost always works on geeks.

"Never underestimate the power of free food," Glen writes. "I can't offer any rational explanation, but for geeks, even those making sizable incomes, free food offers major support to motivation development. It may be due to the long hours or to some primitive instinct related to feeding together, but if you occasionally fill the office with free sodas, subsidized snacks, pizza and beer, the productivity boost far exceeds the cost."

Because geeks are so indispensable to the world of work today and will be even more so in the coming years, *Leading Geeks* is must reading for those who work with this special breed of creative artists.

— CECIL JOHNSON

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