

# Bob Kustka

Factoring Human Capital Into Your Business Plan

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## Isn't it about time this holiday tradition come\$ back in \$tyle?

Employees to Find Coal in Workplace Mailboxes: Scrooge says he couldn't be happier.

This is my Christmas story for you, and I hate that it's on such a dreary topic. After all, I had just one wish for you this time of year: a big, fat holiday bonus.

I really didn't care if it came in the form of a plump, honey-glazed ham or a wad of beautiful green cash. I just believe that employees should be thanked in some way at the end of the year.

"If these soft-hearted bosses start spending money just to show they care, the companies will go under," the Scrooge told me. "What value can be found in that kind of spending?"

Sometimes it doesn't pay to reason with a cold-hearted guy like him, but he's not alone in his thinking. The Grinch didn't return phone calls but through a spokeswoman said he wholeheartedly agrees. And these two misers' opinions aren't really that far out, says a guy who actually has emotions and has studied the holiday bonus issue.

Bob Kustka, president of management consulting firm CHR Partners in Massachusetts, says companies this year still are "trending away from the holiday bonus," a phenomenon that has been going on for a while. But why?

"When bosses looked at the cost of giving these bonuses, they couldn't show the value," says Kustka. "They couldn't prove it did something for the organization."

What about morale? What about making workers feel like people? There was a quaint and better time years ago when the boss walked around the office handing out fruit baskets and checks with a smile and a thank you. The holiday bonus wasn't an "if"; it was a "how much?"

Today, 59 percent of companies do not award holiday bonuses, according to a 2005 survey by Hewitt Associates. At small businesses, that number jumps to 61 percent.

After digging around and checking Santa's Good List, I found a plastics company that is giving workers 20 hours of pay as a holiday gift, a manufacturing company in Indianapolis that gives a ham and a doctor's office that takes workers out to a festive lunch. On the Bad List? Well, there were plenty. Many don't do anything. One this year is yanking the grocery gift card it had been giving workers.

"It just breaks my heart," says Santa Claus. "I know the true meaning of Christmas isn't about material things, but those material things can go a long way toward showing a little love."

Kustka says management better start taking Santa's words to heart -- and he believes it won't be long before the holiday bonus returns. Companies are going to have to start catering to the millennials, a new breed of workers who are not all that loyal.

Unlike the baby boomers they will replace, millennials have no problem bolting a company over something as trivial as a slashed bonus or poor raise.

"What they are asking from employers, it isn't just about the paycheck," Kustka says. "They are looking for an organization that says, 'We are creating a culture here because you mean something to us as employees.' " Can't wait for those better times to return so I can wipe that smirk off Scrooge's face.