

## Pay Now, Qualify Later

With most of our contests, reps have to qualify, and it's an exclusive trip, with maybe the top 12 or "x" number of winners qualifying. But our Caribbean Kickoff is something that anybody and everybody can attend. It's a huge trip that we encourage everyone to sign up for. It's our biggest and most fun contest—people are there because they want to be.

Pareto's Principle, or the 80/20 rule, works here—the same 12 or 15 couples will qualify for every contest. We kept getting feedback from our reps that said, "We want something that everybody can attend—not just the same few people." We have about 100 advisors, and 50 or 60 couples will typically go, so it's a ginormous trip.

What makes it unique is that it works in reverse. We get everybody to sign up for the trip in January and bill them for the cost of the trip on their open accounts. The reps can win money for the trip back if they hit certain targets that we've established. Our targets are usually geared toward getting new clients. We give the money to the reps—their spouses, actually—in the aisle of the airplane as we're leaving for the trip in April. This trip is not so structured, so it's really fun, and you don't have to worry about 1099s because it's their money.

Let's say the cost of trip is \$1,200 a person, so for a rep and the spouse, it would be \$2,400. That's \$800 for each of the three months of the contest period, so we will hold \$400 of that rep's commission statement every two weeks. Now we've got the \$2,400 for the cost of the trip up-front, and then the reps can win 50, 75, or even 100 percent of their money back. This is nice from a planning standpoint because we know from the beginning how many people will need airfare and rooms. It saves a lot of hassles.

We've been to some great places—Cancun, Key West, the Caymans. Because the contest runs from January through March, it enables us to focus on a strong start for the first quarter.

It is a major undertaking to move that many people around, so the logistics can be pretty daunting. We've done it maybe five times over the past eight years. And we haven't gone abroad since Sept. 11. To keep track of the numbers, we've used Excel, and we've worked with a company called Awards Linq that helps us design and track the program.

The year that our trip was to Key West, we had one rep who really had his sights set on going on this trip and spending some quality "alone" time with his wife. He was serving as an elder at his church, and they had a crisis at the church just as we were about to leave. He ended up having to stay home, so his wife brought their daughter on the trip in his place. We ended up recruiting the daughter as a college intern. Beauty for ashes—it was a tough situation for him, but it worked out well for us.

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