

## Happy Meals and Bonuses

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

In 1979, when McDonald's introduced the Happy Meal, I, along with every other kid, was excited to go to McDonald's all of a sudden. I was 9 years old back then and the McDonald's on Jefferson Avenue in Detroit, which had formerly been an "okay" place to go for French fries suddenly became *the place*--somewhere I wanted to go. It had very little to do with the food. I was most interested in the prize that would be in the Happy Meal.

I even remember that McDonald's used to advertise on television the different Happy Meal prizes that they had. For example, there would be Barbie, The Little Mermaid, Hot Wheels, and so forth. These prizes would also generally be coordinated with various kid's movies that were coming out from time to time.

Incredibly, my two-year-old daughter now even prefers going to McDonald's over other restaurants because she knows that when we order her a Happy Meal there will be a prize awaiting her. In addition, McDonald's even offers mini outdoor playgrounds in many areas, which makes it even more appealing, especially after taking any kind of family road trip.

The concept of the Happy Meal was and continues to be flat-out brilliant. When you think about it, all McDonald's is really doing is putting some little knickknack they have mass produced inside of a cheap colorful cardboard box, and throwing a little hamburger and small fries into it. Nevertheless, this drives children to the restaurants, makes parents take their kids there, and also creates long-term brand loyalty in children, from which McDonald's will be able to profit for years to come.

All of this is possible simply because McDonald's is offering a *bonus* or *incentive*, which is nothing other than a little toy or doll they have manufactured for a few cents out of China. One account I have read states that by 2003, the Happy Meal accounted for 20% of all meals that McDonald's sold each year.\* It should be obvious that the Happy Meal has been a stunning success. The brilliance of the Happy Meal, at least for me, all comes down to the little incentive that McDonald's offers. Who cares about the small French fries; I bet most kids are more interested in the Star Trek action figure!

One of my greatest weaknesses is a love of negotiating. I only enjoy negotiating with people who are good at negotiation, and my favorite people to negotiate with are people who have been negotiating for their entire careers. I am talking about negotiating for things like cars, stereo equipment, furniture, and so forth. If you negotiate with a good car salesperson, carry on the negotiation long enough, and he believes you will *walk* unless he does offers you some sort of bonus, he will start saying things like:

"What if I offer you free undercarriage sealant for your new car? That's a \$600 value!"

I do not know what it costs a dealership to spray a sealant on the bottom of a car; however, I am pretty confident that it does not cost them more than a few dollars. This sort of negotiating tactic really works, though. If someone tells me they are going to give me something that is supposedly worth \$600 for nothing, I get excited. You would too. Everyone wants something for nothing. Everyone wants a Happy Meal.

Most people are more focused on their needs than the needs of other people. Many failures in business, in [looking for a job](#), and so forth can all be attributed to a failure to provide people with enough of an incentive. An incentive makes people take action when they otherwise might not. Without incentives there are few people who will choose to use a product or service. You can use bonuses and incentives in all sorts of creative ways to get people to take an interest in your product or hire you.

Back in 2000, when I started my job as a [legal recruiter](#), I decided that I wanted to hire people who worked in a recruiting capacity inside of law firms. I started to interview many of these people and, ultimately I hired one of them. At the time, there were far fewer candidates than there were [good legal jobs](#) available, and good attorneys were very scarce. To my astonishment, a couple of the women who showed up for interviews said things like this:

"I have worked in this law firm for five years. Over the past year I have saved over 1,000 résumés of the best attorneys who contacted the firm, and I know who is out there looking for a job. If you hire me I will bring those résumés with me."

I am not sure about the ethics of this on my side of this conversation, but I am pretty confident it was not ethical for the interviewees to be offering me this information, and it would not have been ethical if they had brought the résumés over. Nevertheless, what they were doing was offering me the prospect of a very enticing *bonus* that I would have received, were I to hire them. Because the market for attorneys was so hot at the time, these résumés and the applicants' knowledge of who was looking for jobs had a lot of value, and it would have been very useful for me had I hired one of these people.

Anyone good at interviewing and tracking down jobs knows that an incentive and bonus can make a huge difference. For example, when generals and other important figures retire from working for the government they are often offered ridiculous jobs like working for a major defense company for \$750,000 a year. These generals are not necessarily hired because they have certain skills that the defense company thinks they can use. Instead, these generals are usually hired because when they are interviewed they give the defense company the distinct impression that they are friends with various people inside the government who make decisions about purchasing weapons. The idea is that as a *bonus* for hiring the retired general, the defense company will make a ton of money by selling weapons to the general's personal connections.

There are a lot of people out there who are hired on their merits, and this is good. But if you have any *bonuses* that you believe you can tie into an employer's hiring you, then you should let them be known. The more bonuses you have to offer, the more likely you are to get hired.

I interviewed someone once who told me they played a certain musical instrument and that they would play the instrument at company parties if I hired them. I interviewed a girl to be an assistant once and she told me that she was an "expert" in QuickBooks during the interview (this was not even stated on her résumé) and I hired her based on this. I hired a woman once as a cleaning woman because during the interview she told me that she had worked as a cook's assistant in a gourmet

restaurant in her home country. As it turned out, she was an incredible cook.

Most people do not realize how many bonuses they actually have to offer. Most of us tend to believe that people are hiring us because of our *core skills* and not much more. But the truth is that we often overlook the many extra skills and advantages we may bring to a potential employer. And these extra skills and advantages often make the difference between getting hired and not.

Once, during an interview, I discovered that the person I was interviewing lived a few streets over from me. In the interview the person blurted out something like: "I'd be more than happy to drive you to work if you ever need it." A statement like this and this little extra bonus is often enough to push someone over the edge and make them hire you.

In most instances the bonus you offer can be something very small. Most bonuses are actually quite inconsequential when it comes down to it, yet they are often enough to tip the scales and get people to purchase and use a product or service and, in your case, to hire you.

Several years ago I was purchasing a \$350,000 Xerox printer that was configured to print in two colors. It was the sort of printer that we used for mass mailings and so forth. The problem was that I wanted the ability to print in three colors. This required that Xerox provide me with an extra plastic tray that fit directly onto the printer, and some different software. In all, I cannot imagine that throwing in the extra color would cost Xerox more than \$100.00 or so--but they made it a \$20,000 option.

"We cannot do that," the salesperson told me again and again when I asked her to throw in the extra color.

We went back and forth for months on this and eventually the salesperson came back and said: "If I throw this in--and I am not saying I will--can you promise me you will purchase the printer today?"

I jumped at this offer and the salesperson went back and pretended to have a big argument with her boss and then, of course, came back and said that they could do it, that she was going to get in trouble and so forth. They threw in a pretty insignificant bonus, and as a result, I purchased a ridiculously expensive printer.

Throwing in a small bonus can make an incredible difference in everything you do.

- Can you work on Saturdays? If so, make sure the employer knows this.
- Are you enthusiastic about traveling on business when needed? If so, make sure the employer knows this.

There is something about you, your candidacy, and what you offer that is always going to be a *bonus*, compared to what other people are willing and able to offer. You need to make employers aware of this. The bonus can make a huge difference.

When I was applying to colleges I bought some sort of planning book that forced me to go through all of the things I had ever done that amounted to much. I remember some of these things were very small and amounted to the fact that I knew how to play the saxophone, that I had done a lot of volunteer work, and so forth. The book basically had a bunch of small questions that forced me to make a list of my various assets and what I could offer a school.

These were all things that I thought were very unimportant and that no college, or anyone for that matter, would ever be all that concerned about. I gave this list of things to the teachers whom I wanted to write me recommendations. One of the teachers was so impressed with the list that he started having all of the people for whom he wrote recommendations in the future do this for him. He asked me for a copy of the 100 questions or so that I had answered while compiling the list. He told me that without the list he never would have been able to write me such a good recommendation, because he did not know that much about me.

In your career you need to make a list of your various *assets*, and what you can offer an employer as a bonus if they hire you. It could be introductions you can make. It could be extra skills that you offer that may not seem completely relevant to your job--but could be. These extra assets that you have could make a tremendous difference in whether or not an employer chooses to hire you over another. In everything you do, you should always offer as many bonuses as you can.

\*<http://www.neilrogers.com/news/articles/2005052314.html>

## THE LESSON

Make a list of the bonuses that you can offer an employer if hired, whether they be contracts or additional capabilities. Your extra assets may form a tipping point in the employer's decision whether or not to hire you. Many businesses and career failures result from people focusing on their own needs rather than the incentives that they can offer others.

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