

Getting paid twice for one job: everyone's favourite scam

by Linda M. Clement

originally published in *Peninsula News Review*
August 27, 2006

There are only two requirements to pull off a successful scam: a mark and a way to confuse the mark. Sorry about the jargon: a mark is a con artist's victim. Marks are gullible, although they will tell themselves and anyone who will listen that they are naturally skeptical.

Oh, man... oops. This is a parenting column, isn't it? Right... focus, focus..

Paying for grades

Getting paid twice for the same job is an excellent scam and, hilariously, often the mark's idea –at least in case of 'Paying for the grades,' an Associated Press article that appeared in papers all over North America over the past few weeks. No five-year-old goes eagerly off to school saying to his parents 'if I do this well, I'll get money at the end of the year, right?' Kids go to school expecting a couple of things: work and grades for work. Kind of like how parents go to work expecting a couple of things: work and money for work.

The reward for 'doing something

well in school,' that Dawn Waller, a former teacher, thinks is reasonable is money. Economically, this idea has no contact with anything in the real world. Paying for good grades is exactly like bribery offered by relatives for earning good pay or, sillier, withholding the bribes for not earning good pay.

Why it doesn't work

As a behaviour modification technique, it's too little, too late. The effort needed to achieve the grades was too long ago. For behaviour-mod to work well rewards need to be immediate. Cash for grading is so far removed from the daily effort needed that it has no impact: kids who will do well because they are in the habit of doing what it takes will get paid and; kids who do not do well because they are not in the habit will not, period.

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So, the mark that has been confused into thinking that paying for grades will have any effect is left either foolish or frustrated. Either the child does the work anyhow, which makes the bribe unnecessarily expensive, or the money has no power to influence the child so the bribe effectively doesn't exist.

The victims in the article say comical things like 'it's a personal choice' and 'it may be a bit of bribery,

but I [used] M&Ms ... when potty training.' Their gullibility is displayed in their willingness to go along with cultural lies (like 'punishment and rewards ever work') without thinking about those stories critically or doing any research or their own experiments. Even their personal experience is disregarded.

The fallacies

Marks are confused by feedback – taking unrelated results and connecting them to the bribe, such as:

- x If the child goes back to school eagerly, the bribe worked, right? No. Children are eager to return in the fall for reasons unrelated to long-since-spent-and-forgotten money from June.
- x The child is happy to receive the bribe at the end of the year, so it worked, right? No. Children are happy to receive gifts or bribes regardless of the donor's intention.
- x When children negotiate for larger-scale bribes, this indicates effectiveness? No, again. Negotiating for larger bribes is intelligent and no indication of anything but 'I'll take that.'
- x If the child's grades improve, that means it worked? Still no. Improving grades may be a result of better teaching,

interest in the subject, improved habits or brain development that enables understanding.

Children are happy to add confusion –they accept the money, knowing that it had no effect on their grades and will have no effect on what they do in class next term. Children will happily do anything they'd be doing anyhow in exchange for free stuff. Heck, if someone wants to send me cheques for this column, already written, delivered and paid for, I will be happy to cash them.

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