

THIS PARTY'S ON THE BOSS AFTER TOPPING A GOAL

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Don't try to call SKC Communication Products after 2 p.m. Friday. The company's Shawnee offices will be closed.

But if you absolutely must talk to someone who works there, you might look for a line of limousines traveling to the Country Club Plaza.

About 100 SKC employees will be headed out, each with a \$300 gift card in hand, on a company-paid shopping spree. And, after they've shopped, they'll be at Brio for a party.

"We announced at the beginning of the fourth quarter that if we hit our revenue goal, we'd have a shopping spree," said Kelly Ammeen Lambert, vice president of marketing at the telecommunications products company. "We hit it, and then blew it out of the water."

The revenue goal was \$66 million. As the year progressed, she said, they were thinking they'd come in at maybe \$62 million. Then they had a start-of-the-fourth-quarter "incentive talk" - and ended up doing about \$70 million.

And the estimated \$40,000 cost of the shopping spree, limo transportation and the party?

"Well worth it," she said.

The company's owners - Tray Vedock, president; Charlie Ammeen, vice president of operations; and Lambert - say they try to promote a teamwork atmosphere and reward everyone for pitching in. The thank-you event reflects that effort.

SKC has earned recognition for its human

resource practices in the past. The company, which sells headsets, telephone systems, voice and video conferencing systems, was honored in 2000 by the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. It won the chamber's Mr. K award, named after Ewing M. Kauffman and given for the area's top small business, as rated by multiple performance factors and personnel benefits.

"We have extremely low turnover," Lambert said. "And I really think our employees have a good time at work. I think they know we're continuing to invest in our company and in them."

The company's sales force is accustomed to incentive contests and bonuses. But teamwork tended to be strong only within business units, Lambert said. This incentive sparked a lot more "How you doin'?" conversations between departments, including backshop employees not on the sales force.

A few employees may opt out of the evening party. As in any workplace, there are those who don't care to build a social life with co-workers. But, Lambert said with a laugh, she didn't know of anyone turning down the gift card.

Budget constraints - particularly absorption of higher health-care insurance costs - are keeping many companies from similarly rewarding their work forces. The kind of industry makes a big difference, too: Some are growing and prospering, while some are shrinking and staving off red ink.

But any thank-you gesture for hard work often matters as much to employees as the dollar amount attached - and that's an employee benefit many company owners and managers appear to have forgotten.