

JUST CONSIDER IT FUN

By Fred Hobbs

Did you ever get tired of working for someone else and longed to run your own business? No, this is not the beginning of a commercial for some questionable “home-based” enterprise promising an immediate \$10,000 a month income. But by the dubious virtue of getting fired, I was given just that opportunity.

It was a gamble. And, by coincidence gambling (legal gambling, to be sure) played a key role in the modest success the business enjoyed. My business partner and I opened and operated a small public relations agency that was able to land a substantial, but challenging account, the Colorado Lottery.

The Lottery, run by the state, began in 1983. Nine years later, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) was created by voters. GOCO uses a portion of the Lottery dollars to “help preserve, protect, enhance and manage Colorado wildlife, park, river, trail and open space heritage.”

Our role was not directly to help sell Lotto or scratch tickets or to promote the various other games, but principally to spread the word about the funds from the Lottery spent on those three thousand-plus parks and recreation facilities around Colorado. Many of the projects would not exist or would not have been maintained without the money generated from the Lottery.

As their public relations agency, we had to learn and abide by some very specific and strict policies. We were not allowed to play any of the games or win any of the prizes. We could buy tickets to give as gifts, though.

At one point when the Lotto Jackpot had reached nearly \$30 million, one of our staff joked that he could resign on Friday, buy some Lotto tickets and if he won, we could accept his resignation. If he didn't hit the jackpot in a Saturday drawing, he expected us to take him back. We teased him he might lose his \$2 wager and his job!

Lotteries have been around a long time. The first recorded public lottery in the western world was held during the reign of Augustus Caesar for funds to make municipal repairs in Rome. The first recorded lottery to distribute prize money was held in 1466 in Bruges, in what is now Belgium with the announced purpose of providing assistance to the poor.

That brings up the question of the possible negative effects of a Lottery. Some believe folks in the lower income brackets are most likely to be lured by the prospect of winning large sums of money, only to lose their hard-earned cash. Actually, research shows that most lottery winners come from that big, important group of citizens that politicians covet: the middle class.

This was borne out by another task our P.R. firm was handed. We had to plan yearly events to keep previous big jackpot winners happy, specifically those who had won a million dollars or more. The members of this “Millionaires Club” would serve as ambassadors spreading the word that it truly is possible to win the big prizes. The first year, we held a party for them at the historic, upscale Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs. We expected them to show up in their new Cadilacs or racy sports cars. Instead, most arrived in pick up trucks or modest two or three year old family sedans. Mostly clad in jeans and often wearing cowboy hats, they seemed genuinely uncomfortable in the posh surroundings of the Broadmoor.

The following year, we arranged a picnic in a park in Golden, one of the state’s Lottery-funded projects. Popcorn, cotton candy, beer and hot dogs. They loved it.

Regardless of who plays the Lottery, everyone who does so must remember it’s only a game. Games can be won and they can be lost. Consider it fun to take a chance, and be prepared to lose your monetary investment. But, at least in a state-run Lottery such as in Colorado, players win something. Even if it’s just a pleasant day in a park or a hike down a scenic trail that, without Lottery support, might never have been there.

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