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Pajama parties. One-month paid sabbaticals. All-expense paid weekend getaways. Pat McNamara, president of Apex Public Relations in Toronto, spoke to PRWeek about the importance of staff perks and why things would have to become really ugly before she'd ever consider scaling back the aforementioned incentives, as well as why goodbye lunches are overrated and where she sees an opportunity to save money.

Apex is known for its employee incentives. What are some of the biggest?

We have two big programs. At year five, an employee receives an extra five days of vacation plus \$5,000. We call it five-for-five. And for an eighth year anniversary, the employee can take a one-month paid sabbatical. I had two people take that last year. I am a big believer in rewarding people for staying. Too many people have big lunches and goodbyes for people, and I never quite understood why an agency would do that. Of course we are sad when someone leaves, but not enough agencies reward people for staying.

Have you thought of scaling back such programs because of the economy?

We would have to be in a very bad situation to cut back on these things. As an agency, you've had good years, and you've had good years because of your staff. Some of those good years should make up for the bad ones. I don't think agencies should cut everything. Yes, they should take a look and perhaps cut those nice-to-haves. But look, we're still doing an annual company retreat. You need to take care of your people.

So where should agencies scale back?

There are other ways to cut back on things. Maybe offer smaller employee rewards. If you win a new piece of business, for instance, you should celebrate it, but that doesn't mean you should go out and have a big, expensive dinner. Maybe just share some beer in the boardroom. People just want to be recognized, and particularly in an economy like this when they may want to release some stress and have a little fun too. They may be worried about other things in their life, perhaps a spouse's job, for example. So one day a year we have pajama day, where everyone in the office comes in their pajamas. We have prizes for the best outfit and make waffles in the kitchen. The point is it's not expensive, and it helps keep everyone's morale up.