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NOTHING IS BETTER THAN SOME THINGS

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THIS ELECTRONIC VERSION MAY DIFFER SLIGHTLY FROM THE PRINTED VERSION. Virginia Thrower's column appears on Sundays. You may call her at 881-3154 or e-mail her at ptvoice@aol.com.

Life is full of disappointments. I encountered one this week I got hooked on Snapple a while back, mainly as a tasty way to reduce my consumption of Diet Pepsi, my primary addiction.

The Snapple people won my heart even more when they started their "Win Nothing Instantly" promotion.

Buy their product, twist off the cap and be ensured of winning nothing - or so I thought. It hit me as a refreshing diversion in this era of giveaways.

Underneath the caps of every bottle I bought were a few words to make me feel better about not winning "nothing" - such as "Sorry, no check in the mail (maybe next time)" or "Nothing to lose (you should try again)" or "Nothing to fear (fearlessly go buy your next Snapple)."

It really made me feel like less of a loser; it was easy to win nothing.

Mocking American's obsession for getting something free hit a good nerve for me.

Then came the disappointment. I discovered I was interpreting the contest jingle wrong. I was simply unlucky enough to have not happened upon the truth because, as usual, I never won "nothing"; I only lost "nothing."

It seems you can twist off a cap and find out you've won such "nothings" as no car payment, no rent, no anchovies or nothing but the best stuff on earth (Snapple's slogan) -for which the company sends you money to cover car payments or rent for so long, or enough to buy a pizza or coupons for more Snapple.

A Snapple spokesman said they've received a lot of good feedback because people are taken by the whimsy of it. That's what attracted me, too, but I was more impressed when I thought the whimsy had more to do with being creatively different than being creatively the same.

Snapple is doing what a lot of other companies are doing: seeking ways to up sales. But I find my original perception of how they were doing it more wholesome - and more beneficial.

Providing a chuckle or so a day is good for anyone. Feeding a person's greed isn't.

I don't like the message giveaways send about getting money without earning it or things without paying for them. No wonder people more and more think they deserve anything they want immediately.

Besides, someone is paying.

In that sense, these promotions are much like the coupon trap. If companies didn't pay out oodles for coupon promotions, the products would be cheaper; people would have time to do things more important than clipping coupons; and check-out lines would move faster. But since the practice is entrenched, people have to go through the hassle if they want to make up for the higher prices.

Paying for promotions ups product prices, too. So I'm paying for a few other people to win something.

I hate to contemplate how many people have bought things they don't need to up their changes of winning something they may or may not need.

Legally, of course, every contest has to stipulate that no purchase is necessary - non buyers though can be put through zillions of hoops to enter, and do.

I, like most people, take anything I win for doing nothing - so far that's been a few door prizes at events. And I'd accept any sweepstakes or lottery prize that comes my way. I am human. I enter sometimes.

But I'm fed up with sweepstakes literature - often misleading -clogging my mailbox and companies trying to buy my loyalty through any method other than offering good products and service. I even boycotted Pepis stuff, although I couldn't kick the Diet Pepsi habit - companies can please me by giving me a product I like and save on the other crap.

And I'm not going to get into the frauds that are so easily perpetrated in this free-money climate.

Giveaways have something to do with the American way and the American mindset, and both sometimes get out of hand.

For me, I'll take lower prices and less prizes.

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