

Further, there is an exception for inducement grants to new employees because in these cases a company has an arm's length relationship with the new employees. Inducement grants for these purposes include grants of options or stock to new employees in connection with a merger or acquisition. The rule requires that such issuances must be approved by the issuer's independent compensation committee or a majority of the issuer's independent directors. The rule further requires that promptly following an issuance of any employment inducement grant in reliance on this exception, a company must disclose in a press release the material terms of the grant, including the recipient(s) of the grant and the number of shares involved.

In addition, plans or arrangements involving a merger or acquisition do not require shareholder approval in two situations. First, shareholder approval will not be required to convert, replace or adjust outstanding options or other equity compensation awards to reflect the transaction. Second, shares available under certain plans acquired in acquisitions and mergers may be used for certain post-transaction grants without further shareholder approval. This exception applies to situations where the party which is not a listed company following the transaction has shares available for grant under pre-existing plans that were previously approved by shareholders and meet the requirements of this Rule 850(a). These shares may be used for post-transaction grants of options and other equity awards by the listed company (after appropriate adjustment of the number of shares to reflect the transaction), either under the pre-existing plan or arrangement or another plan or arrangement, without further shareholder approval, provided: (1) The time during which those shares are available for grants is not extended beyond the period when they would have been available under the pre-existing plan, absent the transaction, and (2) such options and other awards are not granted to individuals who were employed by the granting company or its subsidiaries at the time the merger or acquisition was consummated. The Exchange would view a plan or arrangement adopted in contemplation of the merger or acquisition transaction as not pre-existing for purposes of this exception. This exception is appropriate because it will not result in any increase in the aggregate potential dilution of the combined enterprise. In this regard, any additional shares available for issuance under a plan or arrangement acquired

in connection with a merger or acquisition would be counted by the Exchange in determining whether the transaction involved the issuance of 20% or more of the company's outstanding common stock, thus triggering the shareholder approval requirements under Rule 850(c).

Inducement grants, tax qualified non-discriminatory benefit plans, and parallel nonqualified plans are subject to approval by either the issuer's independent compensation committee, or a majority of the issuer's independent directors. It should also be noted that a company would not be permitted to use repurchased shares to fund option plans or grants without prior shareholder approval.

For purposes of Rule 850(a), including this Commentary, the term "parallel nonqualified plan" means a plan that is a "pension plan" within the meaning of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act ("ERISA"), 29 U.S.C. § 1002 (1999), that is designed to work in parallel with a plan intended to be qualified under Internal Revenue Code Section 401(a), to provide benefits that exceed the limits set forth in Internal Revenue Code Section 402(g) (the section that limits an employee's annual pre-tax contributions to a 401(k) plan), Internal Revenue Code Section 401(a)(17) (the section that limits the amount of an employee's compensation that can be taken into account for plan purposes) and/or Internal Revenue Code Section 415 (the section that limits the contributions and benefits under qualified plans) and/or any successor or similar limitations that may thereafter be enacted. However, a plan will not be considered a parallel nonqualified plan unless: (i) It covers all or substantially all employees of an employer who are participants in the related qualified plan whose annual compensation is in excess of the limit of Code Section 401(a)(17) (or any successor or similar limitation that may hereafter be enacted); (ii) its terms are substantially the same as the qualified plan that it parallels except for the elimination of the limitations described in the preceding sentence; and, (iii) no participant receives employer equity contributions under the plan in excess of 25% of the participant's cash compensation.

Rule 850(a) and this Commentary will become effective upon Securities and Exchange Commission approval; however, existing plans will be grandfathered. Any material modification to plans in place or adopted after the effective date will require shareholder approval.

The Exchange will preclude its member organizations from giving a proxy to vote on equity-compensation plans unless the beneficial owner of the shares has given voting instructions. This is codified in Exchange Rule 862. Amended Rule 862 will be effective for any meeting of shareholders that occurs on or after the 90th day following the effective date of the Securities and Exchange Commission order approving the rule change.

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Rule 862, Proxies at Direction of Owner

Rule 862. A member organization shall give a proxy for stock registered in its name, at the direction of the beneficial owner. If the stock is not in the control or possession of the member organization, satisfactory proof of the beneficial ownership as of the record date may be required.

Member organization holdings as executor, etc.

A member organization may give a proxy to vote any stock registered in its name if the member organization holds such stock as executor, administrator, guardian, trustee, or in a similar representative or fiduciary capacity with authority to vote.

Procedure without instructions—Instructions on stock in names of other member organizations

A member organization which has transmitted proxy soliciting material to the beneficial owner of stock in accordance with the provisions of Rule 861, and which has not received instructions from the beneficial owner by the date specified in the statement accompanying such material, may give a proxy to vote such stock, provided the person signing the proxy has no knowledge of any contest as to the action to be taken at the meeting and provided such action does not include authorization for a merger, consolidation or any other matter which may affect substantially the legal rights or privileges of such stock.

A member organization which has in its possession or control stock registered in the name of another member organization shall:

- (1) Forward to such other member organization any voting instructions received from the beneficial owner, or
- (2) If the proxy-soliciting material has been transmitted to the beneficial owner of the stock in accordance with Rule 861 and no instructions have been received by the date specified in the statement accompanying such material, notify such other member organization of such fact in order that such organization may give the proxy as provided in the first paragraph of this Rule.