Building a strong culture
Jay Toups, Retail Management Resources

This article is part two in the newsletter series on “Culture Building”. It is hoped that this, coupled with the ongoing webinar series, will offer an effective guide to culture building. The previous article discussed the reasons to build strong internal culture and its positive effects. This article will explore the necessary steps in building and maintaining the culture. Once it has been defined, communication, training and monitoring will ensure that the culture will grow and prosper. All are crucial elements to building a strong culture.

The old axiom “You do not know what you do not know” can be effectively applied to communication within a company. Most companies need to significantly improve communication. Tonya Slawinski, Ph.D., president of Support Solutions Inc., stresses the importance of communication in an effective working environment.

“Communication is an ongoing process rather than a static event,” says Slawinski. “Employees have a high tolerance for change if kept in the loop. When communication breaks down, rumors run rampant and will directly impact productivity, focus and ultimately the finances of the company.”

The National Business Research Institute released a study in March 2014 identified poor or nonexistent communication as the number one complaint from employees in the workplace. Because banking regulations and customer behavior are constantly changing, banks must improve their company communication or else be unable to adapt to the evolving industry.

People need messages to be communicated to them in multiple forms in order to grow in understanding and for the message to take root. Multiple reinforced messages lead to proactive action. The forms of communication must be both verbal and written. Fortunately, most organizations have at their fingertips the necessary tools needed to improve communication quickly and easily: people and technology. A frequently missing component is a team member assigned responsibility to manage companywide cultural communication.

- Plans for communicating the culture should include:
  - On-site Executive Management visits
  - Scheduled communication
  - Training
  - New team member orientation
  - Newsletters
  - Regularly scheduled email updates
  - Planned messages for team meetings
  - Webinar updates
Without a clear plan, communication efforts will fall short. An integral part of the plan is teaching the team how to execute the mission, vision and values of the company.

Employers can no longer assume their team believes or understands how to achieve the mission, vision and values of the company. Each member of the team has a history that could conflict with the company’s goals. Even experienced employees need training. The team must be instructed on how to become successful within the defined culture.

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation released a study last August concluding that there is an average 91% retention rate among well-trained team members. Furthermore, for each retained employee the company achieves on average a $2,200 increase in incremental revenues. The numbers speak for themselves.

The focus of the training should be on technical and soft skills. Although on-the-job training is cost effective, it tends to perpetuate bad habits or outdated procedures that lead to internal problems. Banks must develop a skills-based training plan by job position.

Soft skills are a frequently overlooked area of training. Most cultural development will include soft skills. Below is a list of training that will help build a positive culture:

- Defining the Bank’s Culture
- Team Building
- Interpersonal Communication
- Leadership Skills – Coaching and Motivation
- Exemplary Customer Service – Reactive vs. Proactive
- Relationship Building
- Business Etiquette

Training is an ongoing process. Do not forget that the team is the company’s most valuable resource. Invest in the team and they will give a solid return on the company’s investment.

The last piece to the puzzle is a monitoring process. Consider the management phrase, “Inspect what we expect.” This has never been more relevant. Ideal behavior and actions are defined through communication and training. Monitoring will allow the reinforcement of good behavior and redirect behavior that does not fit into the culture.

Monitoring should come from an optimistic point of view. If the company monitors from a “Got You!” point of view, it will create a negative environment, increase employee turnover and decrease employee action. No member of the team wants
to look over their shoulder all the time.

Monitoring takes two primary forms: inspections and critical measurements.

Key Elements of Inspections:
- Conducted on-site; planned in advance
- Surprise visits rewarding good behavior
- All members of management required to participate
- Always positive and upbeat

Types of Critical Measurements:
- Customer Retention
- Employee Retention
- Accuracy over Errors
- Employee Surveys
- Customer Surveys
- Management Assessments

Building an inspection process will help the team members know exactly what is expected of them by continuously defining and reinforcing the vision of success.

In conclusion, building and maintaining the culture requires a focused effort. The goal is to create an enjoyable and productive work environment for all team members and draw customers to the bank. The end result will generate increased revenue and an uptick in employee retention.