

Webster Bank Improves Employee Engagement by Focusing on Ways Employees Can Succeed in Their Jobs

THE PROBLEM

For Jeff Brown, the moment of truth came when he looked at the way his business was communicating with current and prospective employees.

Like many other well-respected organizations, “We were telling them 50 ways they could get fired, but we weren’t telling them how they could succeed or why they should care,” says Brown, chief administrative officer of Webster Financial Corporation and Webster Bank, one of the nation’s leading regional commercial banks with more than \$17 billion in assets. “You can’t expect great customer service from people who aren’t engaged.”

FULL STORY

Webster had grown by acquisition and needed a common culture and vernacular to achieve its corporate mission. So, Brown started researching training and development companies, stopping with *Disney Institute*. The year was 2007, and Brown had been hearing from other companies that *Disney Institute* offered training on Disney’s approach to business practices such as leadership, people management, customer service, and brand loyalty. Brown had just assumed responsibility for Webster Bank’s shared services division, which included communications, human resources, IT, procurement and other operational departments. He thought *Disney Institute* might be a good fit for his team.

“I could hire any number of consulting firms to develop a tool or give us tips on how to improve customer service and employee engagement,” Brown says. “What drew me to *Disney Institute* were the practical applications—the people at Disney live and breathe this every day. Most people have been to Disney or interacted with Disney in some way. There’s no question that Disney knows customer service.”

“It gave the programs credibility,” he adds.

Starting the Journey

Once he decided that *Disney Institute* was the right fit for his organization, Brown recruited several other executives from

Webster Bank to travel to the *Walt Disney World* Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., for a day-long executive overview. The two-day trip included visits to backstage areas of the theme parks, where *Disney Institute* consultant Scott Milligan demonstrated ways Disney remains in constant communication with front-line workers.

“Jeff observed our Cast Members in action and was intrigued about how we kept them so engaged in their jobs,” Milligan explains. “We explained that everyone at Disney has a common purpose—to make people happy. This common purpose unites us and keeps us focused on why we come to work every day.”

Brown said the tour and the meetings with Milligan and other members of the *Disney Institute* team helped dispel fears that a bank would not have anything to learn one of the world’s best-known entertainment companies.

“There was a lot of skepticism at first,” he says. “There were a lot of questions about how Disney could teach a bank to be better at business. What we quickly realized is the synergies between our two companies were actually quite strong. What we were trying to do with our organization is what Disney has been doing for years and years.”

Brown and his colleagues left Florida excited and ready to begin a full-scale training program for their employees. They gathered a group of about 25 employees and sent them back to *Walt Disney World*® Resort for a two-and-a-

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half-day workshop covering quality service and leadership. The feedback from that group was extremely positive, Brown says.

"It was amazing how quickly they were able to implement the concepts and principles they learned into their own jobs," he says.

Taking It to the Executive Level

About a year after the initial program with *Disney Institute*, Brown felt it was important to begin engaging his executive team as well as the board of directors at Webster. Milligan and team traveled to the company's headquarters in Connecticut and delivered a half-day program, which was initially met with mixed reactions, Milligan says.

"Many executives are accustomed to consultants who come in, drop a few catch phrases and quick-fixes and then tell you how to do it," he explains. "That's not how *Disney Institute* works. We are thought partners. We help clients understand where there might be opportunity then develop an action plan using Disney best practices as a resource.

"We know this methodology works, but it's very different from traditional professional development, so it can be met with skepticism," Milligan adds.

Once the training was complete, however, the board of directors and executives were fully supportive of the initiative.

"Disney is so similar to Webster Bank in how its history and heritage shapes everything the company does," Brown explains. "It didn't take long for our leadership team to understand the value *Disney Institute* brought to the table."

Milligan and team departed Connecticut knowing they'd be back.

A Long-Term Relationship

Once the executive team and board of directors became engaged and involved in the *Disney Institute* training process, Brown had a lot of work to do. He needed to begin implementing real change within his organization, and showing results.

"For a long time we referred to it as the 'Disney initiative' but we realized that if we were going to really change our culture, we had to make it our own," he says.

The team developed the Webster Way, a culture by design, complete with standards of excellence and a new approach to recruiting and retaining employees. The website was revamped to be more friendly and inviting, and to include a lot more information on the company's heritage and history. The new-employee training program was overhauled to focus more on company culture, helping new hires understand their role and purpose within the organization. The team also adopted Disney's 'purpose versus task' model, which discourages employees from looking at their jobs as just a set of tasks, says Milligan.

"Every Cast Members is responsible for keeping our theme parks clean, for example," Milligan explains. "A clean park makes our guests happy, so if one of us sees a piece of garbage on the ground, we pick it up and throw it away. We don't wait for custodial to take care of it."

After the Webster Way was implemented, Brown began administering employee satisfaction surveys. The most recent survey, administered in 2010, showed a marked improvement over 2008.

"We were hoping for an average score of 79, which was ambitious," Brown says. "We actually came in at an average score of 81, just shy of the top percentile. Our vendor said we were the only bank they surveyed that showed an increase in the last two years."

Subsections of the survey were even more positive. Areas such as internal cooperation and teamwork showed dramatic increases, Brown says.

Disney Institute's Milligan continues to work with Webster Bank, traveling to Connecticut once or twice per year to deliver programming to new employees, as well as refresher courses to those who have previously participated.

"I could do all the classes in the world but there's no way I could bring the same value that Scott and his team offer my employees," Brown says. "There are no gimmicks with the *Disney Institute* training. We get exactly what we need to make real, positive changes within our organization."