

## IDEA EXCHANGE: Engineering an attitude shift

Rewriting  
a bank's "script" to break  
"institutional" thinking

By Steve Cocheo, executive editor and digital content  
manager

It's one thing to take charge as  
CEO and say that "the buck stops here, my door's open" But it's another to realize--as an  
employee stands before your desk awaiting a decision--that there's a long line  
behind him, and a number counter outside your office that says, "Now serving ..."

That was one conundrum facing  
Trey Maust and Jeff Sumpter, co-presidents and CEOs, at Lewis & Clark Bank,  
Portland, Ore., three years ago. The two had opened the de novo bank's doors in  
2006, assembled the beginnings of a team, and gotten things up and running. But  
they couldn't get rid of the chain of command attitude that had "a string of  
people coming through our doors all day long," says Maust.

Getting past bankerly genes

Lewis & Clark Bank's

"Book of Purpose"

How do you get employees to think differently, yet naturally? You talk to them a lot about their work, and then you distill things into a guidebook. Portland, Ore.'s Lewis & Clark Bank did this a few years back and Co-President and CEO Trey Maust says it made a big difference. Download excerpts [PDF] from the book .

Part of the problem was "heredity," if you will. Maust and Sumpter set out with the mission to hire experience--indeed, paying more for it. The snag was that when you hire good, experienced bankers, you get, well, bankers. Bankers typically grew up in a culture with clearly defined lines of authority, and an understanding that decisions need to be okayed up the line.

Hence the line at the door.

But there was more to the issue than just a time drain, Maust explains. He and Sumpter don't particularly revel in the "banker" stereotype. In the bank's marketing materials these days, staffers are called "bankpreneurs," and Maust admits that he would rather be considered an entrepreneur who chose banking as his business than as a banker with an entrepreneurial attitude.

And the duo wanted to instill that attitude in their experienced staff--bringing about a cross between the traditional and the independent.

"I believed we needed to stop thinking about the bank as an institution," says Maust. "We are running a business, and one that is constantly under pressure to perform more successfully in an increasingly challenging environment. It is incumbent upon

us to remove limitations and find a better way, through incremental or transformational improvements in each aspect of our business over time."

But how do you take good traditional bankers, with good skills, and push them to make decisions on their own and think more like entrepreneurs?

Empowerment.

Throwing the book at them

Maust belongs to several entrepreneurial organizations, and he heard management guru Simon Sinek, author of *Start With Why*, who asked, "Why do you do what you do?"

That's when it struck Maust that what his people needed was a better understanding of what the bank stood for and what he, Sumpter, and the experienced board of directors hoped to accomplish.

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Maust wanted to engage Sinek for his bank, but the consultant has come to concentrate more on speaking than on active assignments. Instead, Sinek pointed Lewis & Clark to an associate, Janine de Nysschen. A former intelligence officer for South Africa during the Nelson Mandela years, she is now a management consultant herself.

The bank's staff went through discussions and exercises that de Nysschen facilitated to help define the bank's values. These came together, in the end, as "freedom", "synergy", and "success."

The solution to the line into the CEOs' offices was straightforward. Maust says formal steps for reaching decisions without top management involvement were instituted, providing bankers used to structure and procedure with just that--a setup that resulted in them making the decision, not the boss.

"It sounds funny to think that you have to put it down into a process," says Maust, "but it made a world of difference."

### Defining the culture

This was part, but not all, of the cultural shift Maust and Sumpter wished to accomplish. To solidify the three facets of Lewis & Clark--freedom, synergy, and success--the bank put together what it calls its Book of Purpose. Drawing on images and other material from the two explorers whose

names the bank uses, this is a short, inspirational book designed to get people on board with the bank's mission. The original employee group that received de Nysschen's training received the book, put together under the Marketing Department's direction. So do new hires. [Excerpts of the book, in PDF form, are available here.]

"The book functions as both an internal branding piece and a roadmap for how we approach decisions and process improvements," says Maust. The roadmap elements--the skeleton of the decisionmaking process referred to earlier--are: understand the landscape; explore the possibilities; set the course; be resourceful; and go beyond.

"These are all part of our daily lexicon now," Maust says. "I can't think of the last time I heard someone say, 'What should I do?' or 'But that's the way we've always done it'." We've broken outside of that box."

#### Cashing in the chips for change

Lewis & Clark, at \$121 million-assets today, is a much smaller company than de Nysschen usually works with. Maust wanted that perspective, and also valued the fact that she had never worked with a bank before.

"That was important to us," Maust explains. "The only way to think outside of the box is to not care what everybody else is doing--to take a fresh look at things."

The consulting service--and the branding campaign that followed it somewhat later--weren't cheap. But Maust says the money spent on cultural shift "was completely worth it, because it lasts for years." The bank paid for it by devoting money that would have been budgeted for traditional marketing and advertising.

This approach to banking is what appeals to Maust, an accountant by training and past experience. Even in working with customers, he gets antsy with the traditional.

"We like to be able to work with a business owner for the long-term growth of the company," he explains. "If we were just selling them products and services, that would be a boring job for me."

#### Young bankers to speak at ABA National Conference for Community Bankers

Trey Maust, co-president and CEO at Lewis & Clark Bank, will be one of several young bank leaders speaking on a panel discussion at the 2013 National Conference for Community Bankers, Orlando, Fla., Feb. 17-20. ABA's Stephanie O'Keefe, executive vice-president of communications, will moderate the panel. Maust was part of an ABA BJ young banker roundtable discussion that appeared in print and as a podcast. [Click here to read or listen.](#)

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