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This Bank "Captures" Employee Engagement

Feb. 24, 2009 – When it comes to supporting a program to generate employee engagement, Allana Lazeroff, senior vice-president, manager of cash management and deposit services, Genesee Regional Bank, Rochester, N.Y., is an enthusiastic manager.

"This is a project I took on," Lazeroff said to ABABJ, doing so, in part, to explain her hands-on role despite a non-HR title. And yet, she connected the dots simply to convey her enthusiasm for the web-based employee engagement software from nearby Brand Integrity. She likes it so much, she said, because it is designed to take the conceptual aspects of strategy and brand and make it more real in an everyday sense.

Phrased differently, it helps employees on all rungs of the corporate ladder see what behaviors support the abstract ideals. It also tracks rewards for when they behave accordingly.

Part incentive support, part knowledge management system, the Brand Integrity web tool has helped the fast growing, small business-focused \$160 million assets community bank—which was founded in 1996 and runs with two branches and 36 employees—grow up wired.

The bank is using the tool as part of a broader engagement, culture, and customer experience management program notes CEO Phil Pecora.

"Internally, the program (and site) is branded 'Catch me if you can'," he explained.

Lazeroff, who is also a member of the bank's Experience Advisory Team, which meets monthly to "dish" on progress—and additionally takes part in shaping the bank's hiring, onboarding, and orientation practices—says that the tool is designed to let employees document each other's daily efforts to "provide an experience."

So, if Mary sees Joe in an act of extraordinary customer service, (say, conducting research to straighten out an issue) Mary would log in to the site, and write up a quick synopsis of what happened and why it was effective.

"These write ups don't have to be long," said Lazeroff, "but the idea is to be vivid and convey a sense of what brand concept the behavior supported."

The FaceBook-style interface is intuitive and fun to work with, said Pecora. Employees who nominate others earn points for doing so if the nominees are approved (and

approved nominees also get points.) These points get tallied and converted to real rewards: gift cards at Amazon and several national retailers.

The admittedly jaded *ABABJ* reporter immediately wanted the real dirt. Doesn't Mary get a little peeved over time if Joe fails to reciprocate by mentioning her fabulousness? To this competitive New Yorker, the idea of trumpeting somebody else's accomplishments seems nice but, maybe, too ideal. "It hasn't been too much of a problem," said Lazeroff happily. Since everybody that participates has the potential to earn points the tool has been well received. Besides, in the two years that it's been used, the tool has tended to encourage everyone to be on his or her best game.

"The bank has had turnover and we have our challenges like everybody else," acknowledged Phil Pecora. "But the tool makes it easier to track what we're doing well and celebrate that, while also giving us a basis for problem solving."

He said that the bank has worked with Brand Integrity for about six years. (It started out with Genesee as consulting engagement.) In a way, the bank served as a key beta customer as the tool was being developed.

Interestingly, engagement goes beyond customer relations, even to "behind the curtains" operational employees. Those working in all areas of the bank can be nominated for an act of living the brand. "If someone acts on an idea that improves efficiency, then they are providing an experience in keeping with the brand," Lazeroff said.

Some of the brand statements the bank uses to drive behaviors include "acting as a trusted advisor," "making a difference," and "growing Rochester business relationships" (a senior vice-president who worked long hours on a community golf outing to bring together bankers and business notables received recognition via the system), and "adoption of innovative operational strategies." BJ

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