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## Education is Fundamental – But Don't Leave Out the "Fun"

In my previous blog, I wrote about the importance of education, training and certifications for all bank employees. If you have not already read that article, you can access it [here](#). So let's start with the premise that your institutions has or is making an emphasis on employee education and are further baking specific education / training / certification elements into each team member's annual review. Great! That creates a financial incentive for this human capital "maintenance" called education to occur. Good for the employee and definitely good for the institution.

Well, except for one thing ... most banking related education is ... boring. I'm sorry, but it's true, our industry is just generally boring. I don't care if the topic is BSA compliance, understanding the latest ACH rule changes or learning about what's next for faster payments, nearly all presentations in our industry are spectacularly unexciting. It's easy fix though, right? Just get all of the presenters to create and deliver engaging presentations, regardless of how little the topic itself assists in doing so. I can assure you that it's just not that easy.

Back in the early days of Goldleaf Technologies, I started teaching classes on ACH. The focus was assisting community banks that had previously never originated ACH files to understand how to successfully do so starting from scratch. This was a full day, in-person seminar, literally 7 hours of classroom instruction. The vast majority of the material that needed to be covered was as dry as a cow skull baking the high desert. I was determined to find a way to spice up the class and to make it interesting enough to keep the attention of the bankers so they could learn the needed material. I started taking "mental coffee breaks", showing goofy pictures and making parodies (we would call them memes today), pictures and short videos that poked playful fun at banking in general and payments in specific. And it worked. The Creating a Successful ACH Program became one the most highly rated seminars available in the industry.

I started encouraging some of our other employees to create similarly fun presentations and within a few months we became known as the 4 horsemen (OK, we called ourselves that, I'm not sure anyone else did). Each of us were highly sought after as speakers at conferences. All because we were engaging, keeping attendees interested and having fun while we were imparting high-quality educational content. I used to say all the time, I am not sure how

entertaining we were but we appeared downright hilarious compared to the other “experts” in our field. Maybe you have someone like that on your staff who conducts fun, interesting internal education. If so, lucky you. But finding someone who can deliver great education is worth looking for and is worth the investment.

Here are some other ideas that I find to be helpful in making educational events more fun:

- If the meeting is in person, get a big wad of dollar bills and put those in your pocket. When you get to the first open question there is usually a general pause as no one wants to be the first to speak. You gently encourage them to respond. When someone offers up a response you immediately take the wad of ones out of your pocket, walk up to the person and peel off two \$1 bills and hand it to them. You say, “Thanks John, I appreciate your enthusiasm”. I guarantee that will get a reaction from your audience. As the training goes on, periodically stop to ask questions and give out more \$1s. Vary it up, if someone answers a question from the back of the room, I would ball up the \$1 and throw it at them. If someone would offer up a response that I thought might need to be augmented, I would rip a dollar bill in half (aghast, defacing a federal bank note!), then ask if anyone knows the other part of the answer, and give that person the other half. All of it is in good fun and I have done this consistently over my career and have never not seen this payoff in making the session more fun.
- Add a little self-deprecating humor, especially if you are a senior officer. There is no value in ridiculing others but when we tell stories about ourselves, it makes the whole mood lighter. If you have kids, grandkids, pets or just generally stay aware of life occurring around you, you can relate a quirky or outright funny story that can generally augment the content you are presenting.
- Remember that comedy is often based on violated expectations. Something is presented that is off from what it should be and the last, not aligned part is what makes it funny. If you study humor, you will find that a lot of humor comes in the form of a 3-part series of things, where the 3<sup>rd</sup> thing doesn’t align with the first two and becomes the joke. For example, if I set a premise that there is a process to enjoying a good bottle of wine: 1) Take the label off the top of the bottle, 2) Open the bottle to allow it to breathe, 3) If it doesn’t look like it is breathing properly, give it mouth-to-mouth. Hopefully you got at least a chuckle out of that. But regardless, it illustrates the violated expectation. The 3<sup>rd</sup> step is clearly not what you would have expected to come after the first two. Bonus that it played off the word “breathe” to switch to a totally different subject, juxtaposing the act of CPR to opening a bottle of wine. You get the idea ...
- Irony also works. One of my favorite comediennes is Paula Poundstone. I love her scratchy voice and halting delivery of the punchline. One time I heard her talking about checking into a hotel and the desk clerk asked her, “Do you have a floor preference?” and she responded, “I.... would like a floor! Apparently they can just hang you from the ceiling!” Well, I think it’s funny. So applying this technique to banking, you could say, a customer is making a deposit and the teller says, “Would you like this deposited into your

account?”, and the customer says, “Yes, was there someone else’s account you were thinking of?” The joke is the word play, and it’s not trying to belittle tellers in any way but poke fun at the terms and phrases that are so common for us bankers that can mean something else to customers (and every other non-banker human on the planet).

It is also true that the traditional method of consuming education is very light on the entertainment scale. A typical banking presentation may have some graphics but are often text laden and audio, video or other engagement elements are rarely present. Certainly, those consuming education of any generation would appreciate more engaging content. But especially so if we are talking about younger employees, particularly those that identify as young millennials and Gen Zs. This is the gaming generation and thus creates a great opportunity to merge the education and gaming elements into a killer training program. I am sure there are numerous companies that provide this type of education. While I was at the ICBA conference, I met just such a company called Lemonade LXP (<https://www.lemonadelxp.com/>). Their primary focus is to provide engaging education to frontline staff that empowers them to be better sales advocates for the bank’s services. They claim that FIs that use Lemonade LXP get 12X voluntary participation in training, with a 25% better rating of product knowledge by employees. And that drives a whopping 91% increase in digital product recommendations.

How does Lemonade LXP get these amazing results? By the gamification of the educational experience. They have literally created a game out of learning about the institution’s services. Even better, the players are sharing the same game across the enterprise, allowing for natural competition to assist in driving educational goals.

As many of you know, I am a HUGE proponent of gamification and how it will manifest itself in banking services. So much the better if your institution is using gamification for meeting your internal education goals now and experiencing the power of game play as a reference for how you might consider expanding gamification in the future.

FNBB has no affiliation with Lemonade LXP, but if you make contact with them I would be interested in knowing your thoughts and plans about implementing gamification in your organization.

Even if you don’t go all in for gamification, you can still have a focused effort on making education a priority and making all education fun. A 2015 study by the University of Warwick’s Centre for Competitive Advantage found that happier employees were more productive by 12 to 20%. Dale Carnegie famously said, “People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing”. Regardless of where you are on the org chart, but especially if you are part of the CSuite, you can make a conscious decision to make fun an integral element of your organization. And all of your in-house education elements are the best place for you to start this fun ball rolling.

P.S. – I have a lot of ideas of how to make work fun in general and to have fun in educational events in specific. Some of them are even good. If you would like to get some insight on a specific event you are trying to spice up, shoot me an email at [dpeterson@bankers-bank.com](mailto:dpeterson@bankers-bank.com) and give me a thumbnail of what you are looking to achieve. I may have an idea that could bring some much needed fun into your bank.