



CASE STUDY

KEEPING CUSTOMERS
IN FOCUS



Banking & Financial Services Industry



ProfileXT

Visionary Bank Keeps Customers in Focus



AT A GLANCE

CHALLENGES:

- Retain more highly qualified, motivated professionals of the highest integrity
- In 2008 they were experiencing 50% turnover
- Productivity was being impacted and more importantly, the level of service being provided to customers was impacted

SOLUTIONS:

- Begin working with the ProfileXT®
- Utilize top performing Customer Service Reps to build a benchmark for hiring
- More structured training & follow up with ongoing coaching

RESULTS:

- Increased effectiveness with CSR's, creating opportunities in other areas
- Accomplishing the goal of a customer-centric culture
- Reduction in turnover by 31.22%!

The Background

With a philosophy that its employees make their organization unique, leaders at a US bank set out in 2008 to reduce turnover among the employees that were the first to see arriving customers and the last ones to say goodbye to those leaving.

Bank leaders call these employees Customer Service Representatives. They often serve in a teller role while performing many other duties. So "customer service" more aptly describes the vision that leaders have for them and the vital role they play. And from 2008 to 2011, turnover among this hands-on group has dropped from 50 to 18.78 percent.

Two things that make success and growth possible at this bank are customer-centred values and a forward-thinking attitude. Also helping leaders attain their goals is the ProfileXT, an assessment that is proving its worth in pre-hiring, coaching, succession planning, and other areas.

The bank, which specialises in customers, opened in December 1967 in a temporary building—a home—in a small Wisconsin town. From the very first, its vision was to get to know its customers well enough to understand and meet their needs while providing excellent customer service. That goal continued when a couple, farmers actually from central Wisconsin, purchased a majority of bank stock in 1983.

Now their two sons lead the bank as Chairman of the Board and Executive Vice President. Its locations stretch from central and northern Wisconsin to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and its primary business is commercial customers.

Over the years, the organisation has maintained a steady presence in the communities it serves. Its unswerving mission is to satisfy customers' needs through the delivery of flexible products and "exceptional customer service from a team of highly qualified, motivated professionals of the highest integrity." This is the message that the Senior Professional in Human Resources and Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Development heard repeatedly when she first arrived at the bank. Early on, the HR executive explored the institution's character through employee interviews. "I

THE INCREDIBLE CORE VALUES:

- Customers
- Community
- Excellence
- Ethics
- Employees

found that our strength is customer-centric and our goal is to deliver exceptional customer service," she said. The bank's centre of focus is "Incredible." From having "an Incredible day," to "Incredible" customer service, and "Incredible" interest rates, the organisation makes being "Incredible" part of every day. Their "Incredible" core values encompass customers, community, excellence, ethics, and employees.

Although that's the mission of many organisations, the difference between this organisation and other banks is that this bank's goal is to give the customers what they need—instead of merely selling products. "That is different from traditional banking, and it sets the bank apart," the HR

executive said. "How we service our customers is a value-added mindset rather than just one of pushing products. We make a profit by understanding our customers on an ongoing basis. Commercial customers are our primary business, but we have extended that philosophy to our consumer line as well."

Challenges on the Front Line

This bank defines Customer Service Representatives, or CSRs, as front-line employees who set the tone for interaction within the lobby of a bank, whether a customer arrives to cash a cheque or conduct more extensive business.

"It's how they greet the customers when they walk in the door. It may be a five-minute transaction, or it may be a business meeting with a personal banker." The interaction that follows involves knowing something unique about the customer.

The bank's leaders focused on CSRs because they make the first impression on a customer, they are often the primary delivery point for service, and they are often the last person customers see when they leave. "How a customer is treated—outside of what the transaction is—is extremely important. The first impression is the lasting impression. CSRs must have the technical attributes necessary to do their jobs, and the personal attributes. And that's where we have seen the gain—understanding what those personal attributes look like."

The longer our CSRs are with those banks, and the more they learn about our customers, the more they are instrumental in developing a relationship

“It is not just a pre-hire tool; it also has a coaching element. From onboarding, training and delivery, we know what works and what does not, and we can close the gaps more quickly.”

In 2008, turnover in the CSR position was at 50 percent. It prevented the professional development of the CSRs into the kinds of broader customer service roles that are crucial in serving and retaining customers. “When that job turns over, it’s not just lost productivity but a service impact to our customers. That’s hard to put a figure on,” the HR executive said. With her encouragement, leaders chose the ProfileXT to address the turnover problem over an assessment they had been using, which did not connect with the bank’s needs. The senior executive showed leaders her analysis of what was happening with the existing assessment, which did not rank or score employees individually or evaluate attributes such as Thinking Style. She knew that Profiles’ assessments, which she had used at another company, would perform the functions the bank needed. “We look for something different,” said the HR veteran. “PXT identifies what works well and intertwines with the style of the organisation.”

Meanwhile, bank managers and executives found much more than just a selection tool that helps with turnover. “It is not just a pre-hire tool; it also has a coaching element. From onboarding, training and delivery, we know what works and what does not, and we can close the gaps more quickly.” Those parts of the PXT provided another selling point.

Acceptance and Success

The organisation’s top leaders found acceptance for the new assessment among CSRs when the Human Resources department, with the help of Profiles’ International, showed employees the value of the PXT. They focused on turnover and illustrated how the PXT can help employees advance their careers. “It came down to how well we educate our managers and use our CSRs,” according to the HR executive. “When we started creating the benchmark, the manner in which we approached them was to say, ‘For high performers, you set the example. Would you be interested in doing the assessment?’ Then we shared the results with them. We were investing in them.”

Because people in the position often do not see that kind of investment, the CSRs were delighted, recalling a conversation with a CSR who wondered where she could go in the organisation. “I sat down with her and said, ‘Here’s what I see.’” Recognising the investment of the organisation in them, personally, made them feel valued.

Thus turnover dropped from 50 percent in 2008 to 18.78 percent in 2011. Overall turnover was 11.88 percent. Past figures showed CSR turnover to be about 20 percent higher than overall turnover, said the HR veteran. “We have increased our effectiveness with CSRs. We have opportunities in other areas.”



KEY TAKEAWAY

By understanding an individual's attributes, offering training that fits their style, and working with the Customer Service Reps through coaching, the bank has been rewarded by not only lowering turnover, but also increasing customer satisfaction.

A combination of factors is responsible for the shrinking turnover in the CSR role:

- **How the bank assesses individuals.** "We understand what we need as an organisation and how people fit that."
- **Training.** "We are creating a much more structured approach in training CSRs—understanding their learning style."
- **Coaching.** The PXT coaching tool is shared with managers so they can use it with employees.
- **Closing the "guessing gaps."** The PXT gives leaders a good feel for the role they are trying to fill.

"We are using the right assessment and using it combined with structured training, and then our follow-up—ongoing coaching and refresher training follow-up and keeping people focused on things relative to service delivery."

Customers notice a difference in service. Some of the responses she hears in focus groups are exactly what leaders strive for: "My bank treats you as a person and not just an account." Or, "It's not like walking into a bank." Often, small touches add up to big results: A fireplace, a newspaper, coffee—and the CSRs on the front lines, knowing their customers. "They talk about things other than the reason the customer is there. It's also their effectiveness in a transaction, and how they leave that customer. For example, if a customer talks about his children leaving for college, our CSRs might say, 'Have you thought about a prepaid debit card?'" Instead of pushing a sale, they are saying, "Here is something that may help you."

Leaders now are shifting the responsibilities of the CSR role into a sales position, with the help of Profiles Sales Assessment. "We want to find and foster people who are comfortable in sales. We identified that the CSR has to be more than a transactional position." With a goal that all of the bank's employees take on a sales role, leaders see the CSR position as a key differentiator of how they conduct banking business.



“It’s not just a pre-hire tool. You can reuse the assessments. You can establish a benchmark and line that up with other positions. It helps with succession planning,”



The organisation is also using the sales assessment for CSR succession planning, and would like to expand that to different tracks, such as a retail track, an operational track and its other business lines, such as wealth management, commercial, mortgage and insurance.

The bank accomplished its goals while maintaining a customer-centric culture. Bank leaders also noted that the CSRs helped the bank generate revenue during a time that other banks were showing losses or folding. At the same time, the bank dropped an incentive program to reduce expenses. “We eliminated it after the first quarter this year. It was interesting that our referrals have increased even without that incentive. It’s a telling statement. It shows that the CSRs are more internally motivated. They won’t turn down the paycheck, but they recognise that we need to be here for our customers long term. We had to make difficult decisions and our CSRs are delivering at a higher level than when they had the incentives.”

What Comes Next?

Because PXT is not “a once and done” assessment, executives are finding ongoing uses for it. “It’s not just a pre-hire tool. You can re-use the assessments. You can establish a benchmark and line that up with other positions. It helps with succession planning,” noted the HR leader.

Since the CSR position is a key starting point in the organisation, the bank can build on that foundation to create success in other areas. They can also use the foundation to retain the talent they have, which promotes both organisational and employee growth. If you grow your own employees, they will know all the aspects of the business and have a stronger commitment to it.

Now the bank is using the PXT with the mortgage division. Leaders hope to expand it to other areas. “As we have started to use PXT more broadly, people are seeing its added value. Trust in the tool is accomplishing what we need to accomplish.”