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120 Days To Credit Union Proficiency

An exceptional employee onboarding and training program at Nusenda Credit Union produces an award-winning employer.

BY DAHNA CHANDLER

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It can be challenging for credit unions to develop onboarding and training programs that engage employees, offer career advancement, and increase organizational efficiencies. But [Nusenda Credit Union](#) (\$1.7B, Albuquerque, NM) has found a winning formula to achieve those objectives, earn multiple best area employer awards, and score high marks in member service.



It does all of this and more through a structured-yet-constantly-evolving formal training program that fosters employee excellence and satisfaction while driving business growth.

Core Courses That Build Core Competencies

Nusenda’s training curriculum consists of seven modules — the first of which is the all-important orientation.

“We try to familiarize employees with the differences between working for a credit union and working for a traditional bank or other for-profit institution,” says Michelle Dearholt, Nusenda’s chief human resources officer. “It’s about trying to help them understand the [seven cooperative principals](#) and how we embrace those in our culture.”

The core courses target branch employees but are also available to support professional-level employees. After orientation, employees continue training with courses such as teller training, business fundamentals, lending, and financial product training.

“We have specific tracks for different employees to complete,” Dearholt says.

Nusenda also offers unit-specific classes, such as call center training for its 40-person call

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NUSENDA CREDIT UNION

Data as of 09.30.15

- HQ: Albuquerque, NM
- Assets: \$1.7B
- Members: 155,192
- Branches: 16
- 12-MO Share Growth: 9.89%
- 12-MO Loan Growth: 16.69%
- ROA: 0.69%

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center. This is important because, according to Dearholt, the call center is “a totally different animal” from a traditional branch.

As important as it is to focus on the particular skills employees need to work in different areas, Nusenda also sees the value in helping employees understand the requirements and challenges their coworkers face. Its job-shadow program, Take Your Co-Worker to Work, allows employees to visit distinctly different departments from their own for a half to a full workday. Take Your Co-Worker to Work participants gain a granular understanding of the daily operations of different areas and job functions.

“We use the program to encourage employees’ understanding of how back-office and front-office positions integrate,” Dearholt says. “If there’s a misunderstanding, that’s where it usually happens.”

This understanding is so critical to the onboarding process that the credit union’s training schedule requires new employees in some roles to complete a minimum number of job shadows in addition to their core courses.

120 Days To Achieve Proficiency

To meet the expectations of its members, Nusenda knows it must satisfy its entire client pool — which includes both internal and external stakeholders. That’s why the credit union bases its training program on skill mastery. After all, well-trained employees can meet the needs of branches and the members those front-line operations serve.

In its decade of developing and employing training programs, Nusenda has learned it takes 120 days for employees to become proficient in their role.

We consistently use industry tools and benchmarks to make sure we’re meeting our employee needs and giving them the tools to succeed.

“You can’t bring someone to class for two weeks and expect them to go out to a branch and implement everything they’ve learned,” Dearholt says. “It’s doesn’t happen that way.”

Instead, Nusenda’s onboarding and training curriculum uses a building block method, meaning employees must acquire key skills in core areas and apply those skills in their roles to gain proficiency before returning for the next course.

Branch managers support this method — and allow employees class time away from the branch — because as employees continue in their training, they become more successful at their jobs.

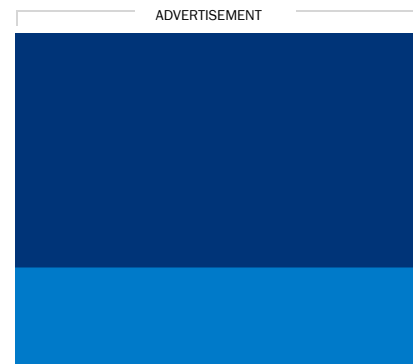
“Our commitment to the branches is that we train employees well,” Dearholt says. “And they return to the branch to apply what they learned.”

But proficiency doesn’t have to be an end to itself. The credit union rewards its excellent employees who apply themselves and their training through its policy of internal promotion. In fact, it has promoted 25% of its employees in the past decade.

A Path To Move Forward

Nusenda offers employees leadership training through resources such as its eight-month, in-house program. The yearly program offers training for up to four employees who have at least two years of college experience and management potential. For new management hires, who must already have a four-year college degree, the leadership training program is a requirement.

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"The trainees learn all of the elements important for leadership in the Nusenda culture," Dearholt says.

And because the credit union requires a four-year college degree for its management roles, Nusenda also offers tuition reimbursement for both part-time and full time employees.

Together, these programs attract top talent.

"We've worked to be an award-winning workplace," Dearholt says. "People are inspired by what is possible working here and feel they receive more training than they have in other companies."

More importantly, well-trained, happy employees lead to members who give the credit union consistently high ranks for quality products and services.

"We attribute our high member rankings to our culture, the knowledge of our employees, and our member focus," Dearholt says.

Moving Toward the Future

Like most employers, changing technology and workforce demographics pose a challenge for Nusenda, which aims to remain at the vanguard of employee training.

"We already provide remote employees with pre-recorded video training and testing after each video module," Dearholt says. "But we recognize some employees want to use more technology to receive training, so we're looking at interactive methods to use for in-house virtual classrooms."

For example, Dearholt says mobile devices could be useful for polling students, collecting employee suggestions, and gauging opinions as well as other professional development activities.

Always sensitive to employee needs, Nusenda wants to be accommodating while it works to maximize employee training and member service.

"We consistently use industry tools and benchmarks to make sure we're meeting our employee needs and giving them the tools to succeed," Dearholt says.

In doing so, Nusenda is taking great strides in achieving its No. 1 objective — member satisfaction.

January 18, 2016

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