***Independent Banker***

**Portfolio: Leadership at all Levels**

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[tag] **Leadership at all Levels**

[hed] **Aligning training with strategic goals**

[byline] By Lindsay LaNore, ICBA

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The workplace is in constant flux, business goals are growing and employee preferences are evolving. Aligning these factors is critical to a community bank’s success, and a great way to start doing that is by ensuring your professional development programs support your strategic goals.

Yes, it’s essential to satisfy annual training requirements but, as one CEO recently remarked, we need to grow our own community bank leaders. And that means digging a little deeper into what is possible.

Aligning learning to goals promotes better employee performance and satisfaction, which, in turn, encourages retention. As we approach budget season, this is a great time to think about how effectively we can allocate resources for training and development. Do the homework now so that when you begin the next year, you’ll be ready to go.

[subhead] **Mark your direction**

To fine-tune your approach, start by assessing where your community bank is headed. Articulate the bank’s goals clearly, along with the elements for which each team is responsible. Goals that are too broad, while providing flexibility, don’t always provide clarity. Are you aiming to increase revenues, launch new products, reimagine the digital banking experience or adopt more efficient processes? And who is responsible for each goal?

Follow that by making the bank’s strategic priorities clear to department leaders and managers, so that they can select training opportunities that support them and their teams. Part of this process is asking team leaders to identify workforce needs and skills. In previous columns, we have addressed how to evaluate skills gaps, and this is where that analysis comes into play. If you are a human resources leader or training manager, you need to be “at the table” with executive leadership to fully understand your company’s goals.

[Subhead] **Pass along the knowledge**

Once you’ve established those goals, teach the skills. This will most likely include a combination of internal and external resources. Variety in learning can be a positive differentiator in a training program. Balance learner ambitions and business goals and motivate the employee by talking about why this learning is important.

If everyone involved understands what it is going to take to be successful in learning, the more likely we are to hit our targets. So, set metrics to make sure the training is working. Consider before-and-after assessments, completed by both employee and manager, to establish whether the learning goal has been met or if more training is required. Follow up with regular check-ins to ensure the plan is on course and adjust if the strategy changes.

All too often, training programs are misaligned with company goals—or they don’t go far enough, leaving employees wanting more. Adopting a professional development plan that not only satisfies the mandatory training requirements but also acts as an ally to your bank’s strategic priorities can be a game changer.

**Lindsay LaNore (**[***lindsay.lanore@icba.org***](mailto:lindsay.lanore@icba.org)**) is ICBA’s group executive vice president and chief learning and experience officer.**

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