

# Branch Manager's Letter

*strategies for branching excellence*

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## The Hallmark of Leadership

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I had to make a tough call on a situation at school for our daughter. I was worried about what other parents would think about my decision. When I shared my conflict, a friend offered me a bit of unsolicited advice. She said, "Good for you! You are the parent, and parenting is not for the weak!" Without her encouragement I may not have stayed true to my conviction.

Like parenting – leading, supervising, and managing others is not for the weak. When a leader isn't trained and coached to stay on course with tough choices, they will often stall or ignore what needs to be addressed. Acting on and handling tricky situations is part of a supervisor's job. If a person in a leadership position is untrained and unprepared, they become the weakest link in the management team. Their overall performance is diminished, a poor reflection internally to coworkers and externally to customers.

Leading a team can be a rewarding experience but it is a path full of twists and turns. One of the most stressful parts of leading is dealing with personality conflicts or poor performance. Organizations need to invest in their leadership so they can handle sticky situations. Most often, defining moments in a career are how a leader deals with a very difficult issue. It is vital that both new and seasoned leadership receive on-going training. It is a

wise investment for now and the future.

For example, when your organization launches a new software system or asset-liability model, the first priority is to provide training to ensure everyone learns how to navigate and operate the new system. The training is the insurance policy, it ensures the investment will be protected against mistakes and failure. Why wouldn't we look at leading and managing in the same way? When we promote someone to a supervisor or management position, they must be given the tools to become a successful leader. Otherwise, we are helping them to fail.

### Hiring for Leadership

Hiring the right fit for leadership positions in your organization is the first step. Careful selection of people to lead is the key. Because let's face it, managing people is not for everyone. Hiring leadership plays the most important role in creating the culture you want for your branch and organization. Leaders hold the key to engaging employees and helping them live out the mission and core values of your organization. Those that hold leadership positions must be chosen carefully. The wrong person in a leadership role can have a lasting negative impact on your entire organization. Failed leadership can lead to an increase

in disengaged team members, a higher turnover of staff, and loss of customers.

Hiring and promoting the right candidates into leadership roles is only the start. We need to surround our leaders with the right coaches and mentors and support them with training and development to pave the road for success.

Help develop masterful leadership in your institution by using these best practices:

**★ Hire the right people and train them well!**

Some people are destined to lead others, some are better team members than leaders. You want leaders that make the right decisions now and in the future. It is up to you to invest in their development.

**★ Set the expectation by acknowledging that developing people is not an optional task.**

You have a significant responsibility to help each of your team members maximize their potential. Developing your people is the single most important activity and responsibility for any manager. Powerful, right? It should be! When we turn our focus from our own personal aspirations to growing our people, everyone wins. The approach will look vastly different for each individual team member. There is no cookie cutter solution and successful leaders understand this.

**★ Consider yourself a coach/mentor instead of the boss!**

Don't put yourself on a pedestal with that new title. The view from anywhere else but that seat is not very attractive. Coaches and mentors are much more successful in developing their people. The difference between a coach and a boss is that the coach comes across as being humble, encouraging, and REAL. It's easy to see which one would be the most effective leader!

**★ Identify your "Directors of Fun" and engage your employees.**

Successful leaders know who the "Directors of Fun" are within the workplace. It's the little daily things that can make or break a culture...that fuels and engages the team. Identify who can take this to the next level in your branch/institution.

**★ Interview and hiring practices.**

The interview is the place where our candidates always have on their Sunday best. So, how do we really identify who is the best fit for our team? Have we trained our managers and supervisors how to hire for the right fit? Asking the right questions is only part of the equation – the key is knowing what to listen for when the candidates respond with their answers. Reading between the lines can tell

us if this person will be a team player and much more.

**★ Onboarding experience**

We spend a lot of time and money trying to create the best customer experience as possible, right? Have we examined our onboarding process with the same passion? Instead of focusing on how to do exit interviews (which is still important), have we thought to do a "60 days on the job" interview? Look at your onboarding process and how you can enhance your institution's first impression or the experience of working in your organization. Be open to constructive feedback and most importantly – follow-up!

**★ Get your hands in the clay.**

Leaders must model the attitude, the work ethic, and the standards they want to see in others. You have the opportunity and obligation to show people how to lead. What others see in a leader is more impactful than what they hear the leader say. Modeling compassion, empathy, and caring is the convincing evidence followers need from a leader to commit to the culture of the bank.

Successful leaders know on-going training is crucial to effective leadership. Managing different generations brings its own set of challenges but when we focus on the individual strengths and the unique skills people bring to our teams, we begin to break down traditional generational biases.

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Guide to Improvement – Coaching and Training Guide – Personal Development – Team Meeting Guide – Best Practice Guide – Trainee Development

A comprehensive guide for practical ideas, tips, and proven methods for building Branching Excellence

Join the conversation on LinkedIn – Branching Excellence Group

Bringing out the best in others is a win all around. It will free up time for the important things, and it creates devoted staff, raving customers, and future leaders.

*Interaction Training was founded in 1983 by Honey Shelton with the purpose of creating and delivering extraordinary professional development. Honey has now hand-picked her successor in continuing this legacy. Vicki Kraai was*

*appointed the new owner/CEO of InterAction Training in 2020.*

*Vicki's 25+ years of financial services experience started at the family bank in rural Nebraska, serving as a teller and eventually becoming CEO. Her many years of banking include credit card lending experience where she was a member of the management team that launched the Cabela's credit card program. She has a passion for developing people for success in*

*the financial services industry. Attendee's value Vicki's highly engaging "been there, done that" approach to all facets of her training and speaking engagements.*

*Vicki and her team offer training programs, workshops, webinars that are highly valued by banks, credit unions, state bank associations and credit union leagues.*

*Reach Vicki at 531-500-2149 or [vicki@interaction-training.com](mailto:vicki@interaction-training.com).*

## Combatting Check Fraud

**A**tering checks to rob someone of their money is nothing new. However, it's been widely reported that check fraud is increasing at an alarming rate. Crooks are continually updating and perfecting ways of committing fraud against unknowing victims. Keep your staff and clients aware of scams and ways to protect against them.

### Stolen Checks

Since check orders are usually mailed directly to clients, stealing new checks from a mailbox is one way to obtain a check. Other ways to obtain a check could include directly from a business to which a check was written, from the owner via house burglary, or through the mailing system itself.

When presenting a stolen check that was blank, the crook must forge the account owner's signature. Therefore, signature verification can work against the crook and is the first line of defense.

Signature verification includes reviewing the handwriting comparison:

☑ **Height** – Compare the difference between the heights of lower- and upper-case letters. For example, one signature shows

upper case being twice the size of lower case while another signature reveals a difference in height.

☑ **Slant** – is a constant and unique characteristic of anyone's signature, look at each letter and not just the signature in its entirety.

☑ **Spacing** – between letters, first and last name usually remain constant, regardless how much space someone has to write in.

☑ **Pen lift** – is an uncharacteristic break between letters for places where the forger may have lifted the pen away to see how to make the next letter.

☑ **Ink blots and dots** – can occur when the forger lifts the pen and then puts it back on the paper to start the next letter, leaving a little round dot at the start of the letter.

☑ **Criminal tremor** – is a noticeable vacillating in the writing when a forger is trying not to lift the pen (thereby avoiding ink blots). This can be detected by looking closely enough to see little waves in the lines connecting the letters of the signature. This happens because most people can't hold their hands perfectly still when they pause. *Reminder:* Some people have a natural tremor when writing, so, never evaluate based on this characteristic alone.

### Check Washing

Check washing is a popular way for criminals to obtain money. Using this method (removing the ink from a check) can side-step forgery because the crook is using a stolen check that has been completed by the account owner. Therefore, the signature is real which means

### Bring Out the Best in Others

“One of the most important things you can learn as a leader is how to bring out the best in others. When you successfully bring out the best in people, you empower them to have a successful career and positively impact their lives.”

👉 Vicki Kraai, InterAction Training, CEO 🐾

signature verification won't help. If a crook has done a very thorough job of check washing, it can be nearly undetectable.

Here are some ways to detect this type of fraud:

★ **Handwriting** – if you notice a difference in the writing of the amounts and the signature, it could be suspect.

★ **Amount** – if the amount is unusually large or just below reportable amounts, it could be suspect.

★ **Fake ID** – is used because most crooks want fast easy cash. That means showing up in person, on a busy day, in a busy lobby or drive thru. Combat this by asking for more than one form of ID.

## Printed Checks

Some criminals counterfeit checks by simply printing them. Sometimes these checks can be nearly undetectable.

Combat printed check fraud by checking:

• **Paper** – is it flimsy or regular copy paper or on security paper?

• **Ink** – does the ink set in the paper or on top of the paper, is it smudged?

• **Edges** - a telltale sign is if one of the check's edges is not perforated.

## Signals of Deception

Criminals that want fast cash via check can be identifiable by...

→ **Behavior** – professional criminals are usually soft spoken, well-mannered, and exhibit no signs of nervousness. They may talk about the weather or compliment your outfit – all to encourage a comfort level. If criminals' sense that you could be intimidated, they may become demanding. They hope you do the transaction quickly, skipping procedures just to get rid of them.

→ **Appearance** – can be deceiving, professional crooks especially, are not going to come in looking homeless and disheveled.

→ **Hardship stories** – are being used by many criminals more now than ever. They will play on everyone's sympathy because of the pandemic or a personal tragedy. They are planning on more people being giving and on you overriding procedures.

→ **Split deposits** – are often the way crooks try to hide the fact they aren't who they pretend to be. Don't assume they are the person just because they are depositing more

than they are taking back. The type of transaction performed with a check should be irrelevant. You still need to check ID and verify the signature.

## What to Do

If you suspect an altered check has been received:

→ **Remain calm** – you could be mistaken. Follow your institution's protocol at all times. Even if you are positive there is a fraud afoot, don't over react by activating the alarm system.

→ **Excuse yourself** – politely and take any checks, pieces of paper, and identification to your manager immediately. When in doubt, get more than just your opinion. You can put yourself and your institution into a very difficult situation by making accusations.

→ **Maintain possession of all documents** – criminals will usually get the message and leave when they see that you won't immediately process an item. So, by taking the documents for a second opinion you're protecting your institution, the client, and your community by taking a counterfeit item off the streets. In addition, you've provided investigators with a concrete piece of evidence along with the security camera images of the criminal and vehicle.

## Free Tools and Resources

Free Tools and Resources from [www.interaction-training.com](http://www.interaction-training.com)

**One-on-one guide:** This guide serves as an excellent tool for starting one-on-one conversations with your direct reports and identifying areas of growth and opportunity.

**Teller Self-Assessment:** This is a very popular tool to provide tellers the opportunity to do a self-assessment. It serves as a way to customize on-going training and development in their role as a teller.

**Employee Needs Chart:** This serves as a great tool to get to know your direct reports individually. If you want to know what motivates your people – just ask them!

→ **Cooperate** – with your security team by writing down everything you remember about the person and/or vehicle (just as you would in a robbery).

## Help Clients

Too often it is your clients that come up against fraudulent activity. Help them understand the steps they can take to protect themselves:

- ◆ Use online payments whenever possible.
- ◆ Use checks when absolutely necessary. And watch their account carefully until the check is cashed.
- ◆ Reconcile accounts frequently (more than once a month).
- ◆ Purchase safety checks and or specialized pens for writing checks.

◆ Protect business clients by offering them security checks for their business, especially those that include a hologram, reactive paper, and/or imbedded fibers.

◆ When sending/receiving checks by mail - deposit payments into mail boxes just before a pickup, retrieve mail frequently, or hold mail for pickup at the post office.

# Managing the FACE of Your Institution

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When your customers think of your institution, they most likely think of the person who interacts with them in the lobby, on the phone, in the drive-thru, or through your ITM customer call center. Most customers don't know (or care), who the branch manager, President, or CEO is. The truth is, there is a huge responsibility on your tellers and front-line staff, as they are largely responsible for the institution's reputation. This makes them your most important asset!

## What's Expected of a Teller?

As a Branch Manager, you spend a great deal of time training for skills such as balancing teller drawers, counting cash, and performing debits and credits. These are all very important and necessary skills. But often we fail to see the value of professional maturity training. Your front-line staff are viewed as experts by customers. As managers, we need to invest in ways to help them manage the customer experience too. How they handle daily interactions with customers is extremely important (co-workers too).

Professional maturity relates to how one acts and reacts on the job. Professional maturity communicates that you are focused, trustworthy, and can manage your emotions. It's also about developing behaviors that are appropriate for those we are serving. We need to ask ourselves – Is my behavior appropriate through the lens of who I'm serving?

## Components of Professional Maturity

### Appearance

We need to see everything through the lens of our customer. Above and beyond the dress code of your institution – What message are we sending to the customers

we serve? Who should we be dressing for? Can we be trusted to take care of their money based on our appearance?

### Communication Skills

What we say sends a powerful message to those we serve. Non-verbal cues can send an even stronger message. Your tellers and front-line staff face “defining moments” daily – Have we trained them on difficult conversations and situations? What are the best practices to calm a customer rather than fuel a situation?

### Attitude

Have we set expectations in terms of the attitude we expect from our branch staff? Can our customers see “attitude?”

## Cultivate the Right Culture

“Our employees spend most of their waking hours at work rather than at home – do you want a culture that fuels you or sucks the life out of you?”

☞ Vicki Kraai, InterAction Training, CEO ☞

## Good Work Habits

Confidence and reputation play an important role in building good work habits. Are we setting appropriate standards for reputation and expectations? Does it carry forward into social media outlets? Are we training our staff correctly on this?

Managing and training the face of your institution should not be taken lightly. Your customers have too many choices to provide banking services. So, we must compete on the experience we deliver. As the Branch Manager, you are responsible for the reputation that your branch or region exemplifies. Make sure your team is trained on creating positive first impressions and

customer interactions. Ask yourself, do we want to be a McDonalds or Burger King? Or would we rather be a Chick-fil-A? We have the opportunity to deliver a Chick-fil-A experience to customers, if we choose to do it. It starts with training everyone on creating a positive customer interaction.

## Recognizing Financial Problems

**M**any people are facing financial problems due to the pandemic. It is imperative that your staff can recognize financial problems, not only for clients, but for themselves as well. These are some warning signs of financial problems and some suggested solutions toward financial wellness.

### Problem

Working a second job to cover basic needs and pay debt.

### Solution

This is fine for the short-term, especially to pay off debt or working less hours due to the pandemic. If it is a long-term issue (more than a two or three years), review spending/debt and make a budget.

### Problem

Not taking care of self or family (i.e., not going to the doctor or dentist, buying unhealthy food)

because you don't think you have enough money.

### Solution

Make a budget and put your family, food, clothing, and shelter into perspective. If you are sick, take advantage of your company's healthcare plan. If you don't take care of yourself (start with healthy food). Ask yourself, 'Who will provide for your loved ones if you are unable to work?'

## Professional Maturity

Verbal Communication – Make sure you choose a positive way of conveying a message, especially in a sticky situation.

Situations that call for the teller to act with the highest degree of professional maturity:

- Requesting ID
- Turning down a customer request
- Explaining a policy or regulation to a customer
- Answering questions pertaining to pricing or fees
- Interaction with an upset, angry customer

These are all defining moments! Our customers have a choice, we need to convey professional maturity at all times!

*🌸 Vicki Kraai, InterAction Training, CEO 🌸*



### **Problem**

More than 20 percent of your monthly income is making payments on unsecured debt.

### **Solution**

Try not to carry long-term debt other than a mortgage or a car loan. Get credit cards, lines of credit, and other debt paid off ASAP.

### **Problem**

Frequently at or near your credit card limit or are only able to pay the minimum on credit card debt.

### **Solution**

Use credit cards for emergencies only. If you have multiple credit cards, pay off the smallest first. Then put the payment you were making on the smallest credit card toward the next smallest credit card debt.

### **Problem**

Paying bills late or using credit cards to make payments on your mortgage or other credit card debt.

### **Solution**

Make a budget and stick to it. Live within your means. Get a financial advisor\* or credit counseling service\* if you cannot figure out how to manage your money. The cost of a professional now could give you a lifetime of financial wellness.

*\*Note:* It is strongly advised to thoroughly investigate any credit counseling service or personal financial advisor before signing documents or making agreements.

## Hiring for Competencies

Here are 13 competencies to look for when hiring new employees:

### **1. Service Orientation**

Makes the effort to listen to and understand others (both clients and coworkers). Anticipates needs, giving high priority to customer satisfaction while at the same time balancing the needs of the organization.

### **2. Work Standards**

Sets high goals or standards of performance for self/team and is dissatisfied with average performance. Seeks executional excellence in everything one does. Lives by organizational values. These values are respect,

teamwork, common sense, enthusiasm, honesty, efficiency, and fun.

### **3. Initiative**

Proactive, a self-starter that takes action to achieve goals beyond what is required.

### **4. Judgment and Decision Making**

Commits to an action after developing various courses of action that are based upon a mixture of analysis of factual information, experience, and judgment. Takes into consideration resources, constraints, and organizational values.

### **5. Analysis and Problem Solving**

Identifies critical issues using appropriate information, determining the causes and possible solutions to the problem.

### **6. Learning Agility**

Understands and applies new, job-related information in order to continuously improve one's performance.

### **7. Energy/Action-Oriented**

Maintains an optimal and consistent activity level, full of positive energy. Allocates one's own time efficiently, handling

### **Make it Simple**

“Sometimes the best choice is simply to ask the customer what they would like for you to do. You can't always do what they ask, but don't hesitate to solicit their input on the solution!”

🦋 Vicki Kraai, InterAction Training, CEO 🦋

multiple demands/tasks and competing priorities.

## 8. Teamwork

Actively participates in and facilitates team effectiveness. Takes actions that demonstrate consideration for the feelings and needs of team members. Is continuously aware of the effect of one's behavior on others.

## 9. Leadership Style/Influence

Uses appropriate interpersonal communication styles and methods to motivate and direct team members towards achieving

individual and team goals. Can change behavior to fit tasks, situations, and individuals involved.

## 10. Development of Self and Others

Develops skills and competencies for self/others by planning effective developmental activities (i.e., formal and informal performance feedback, training, coaching, special projects, etc.) related to current and future organizational needs.

## 11. Information Monitoring

Sets up individual and team performance measurements.

Collects, tracks, and communicates actual results to desired results.

## 12. Stress Management

Demonstrates a balanced performance under pressure or opposition by implementing effective coping mechanisms for one's self.

## 13. Technical Knowledge

Uses and builds technical knowledge on the job to deliver outstanding client satisfaction.

Recognizing that no one person possesses all these attributes at a superior level; look for those that complement your team.

### Benefits of Subscribing to Branch Manager's Letter (BML)

Here are some reminders, tips, and ideas about how BML can be used to benefit everyone at your institution!

- ➔ Reprint in the employee newsletter\*
- ➔ Post on the intranet\*
- ➔ Gather similar issues or articles together to do training sessions
- ➔ Choose a relevant article to discuss in each branch or manager's meeting
- ➔ Use scripts from BML as learning tools and to practice during meetings
- ➔ Use articles for individual or team discussions or coaching sessions
- ➔ Use an article to broach a difficult subject, behavior(s), or current issue at the branch. Sometimes just reading an article out loud to your employees may help facilitate resolving an issue.

**\*Please remember you must cite Branch Manager's Letter (BML) as the source when reprinting or copying and usage is restricted to the subscriber's institution only.**

We appreciate our subscribers!