

For Immediate Use

September 10, 2007

Rightly or wrongly, banks are not known for their customer service. In fact, they're often chastised in the press and on the streets for their alleged poor communication and non-customer-friendly printed material.

But there are ways of changing the perception, the reality, and consequently, the bottom line, and Australia's regional specialist Bendigo Bank, is proof.

Nationally recognised organisation operating primarily in Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales, Bendigo Bank has more than 345 branches and 4,000 employees, with a reputation for placing a strong emphasis on communities.

Almost 10 years ago the Bank set itself a goal: to improve customer service and sales effectiveness; and to build a culture that promotes diversity. Five years on, the results have been outstanding.

Bendigo Bank is ranked number one, in a customer satisfaction poll of more than 57,000 customers, achieving a staggering 90.3 per cent positive rating compared with the 59 per cent average satisfaction rating of the country's four largest banks. The Bank's 2006/07 financial results have shown a net growth in customers of 13 per cent, net growth in retail deposits of 20 per cent and after-tax profits were up 36 per cent. It is also ranked in the top ten for corporate social responsibility.

But how did they do it?

After Bendigo's focus on communities and customer service made it one of Australia's most respected organisations and fastest-growing banks in the late-1990s, management identified the need to differentiate the organisation from the industry image that banking is controlled by large multinationals. And as the size of the company grew, so did the need for a more formalised training process to reinforce the company's community-oriented values.

Herrmann International Asia (HIA) began working with Bendigo Bank to develop a formal training programme to drive growth in customer numbers, deposits and profits – by delivering exceptional customer service and reinforcing a company culture that supported the communities in which the bank did business.

HIA assisted Bendigo Bank initially with a formal training programme based on the highly validated Herrmann Whole Brain Model, which shows people how to recognise and apply different thinking styles, rather than to merely operate using their natural preferred approach.

Discussing the initiative, HIA's CEO Michael Morgan said the programme was based on the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument™ (HBDI™) - the world's leading thinking preferences assessment tool, to help executives and managers better understand themselves and their staff.

For more than 30 years, Herrmann International has been researching the way we think, and has profiled more than two million people in 20 countries around the world using the HBDI™.

Based on the brain's physiology, it has identified four thinking styles and created a colour-coded four-quadrant model to reflect them:

A – blue – analyser: quantifies, logical, critical, realistic. Often works as an accountant, actuary, engineer.

B – green – organiser: neat, timely, reliable. Often works as a manager or administrator.

C – red – personaliser: sensitive, supportive, empathetic, talkative. Often works as a teacher, trainer, social worker, salesperson, writer, musician or actor.

D – yellow – strategist: risk-taker, visualises, impulsive, breaks rules. Often works as an entrepreneur, artist, strategist, consultant.

-2-

We all have at least one preferred thinking style, more women than men have several, and very few of us are equally dominant across all four quadrants.

The profiles gleaned from the 120-question diagnostic survey helped Bendigo Bank's managers identify better ways to work with one another, and staff.

better results through better thinking

Auckland / Brisbane / Hong Kong / Kuala Lumpur / Melbourne / Perth / Shanghai / Singapore / Sydney / Taipei / Tokyo

Management was so impressed by the results that they decided to roll out the programme through the entire organisation. As staff became more aware of how they and their colleagues preferred to think and approached work, they also became aware and open about their own strengths and weaknesses relating to job performance.

Over the next few years, Whole Brain Thinking moved beyond being a tool to help understand diversity and became embedded into everything the company did.

"The Whole Brain Model was integrated into many of the banks' training workshops, whatever the subject or issues, and became the framework for learning within the entire bank. Everyone from the MD to the mail room clerk developed a clear understanding about how expanding his or her thinking preferences could contribute to the organisation's productivity and bottom line," explained Andrew Stagg, Manager for Culture and Leadership Development, Bendigo Bank.

He added that the objective with the biggest potential impact of the Bank's Whole Brain approach to business was to have its training programmes help the company surpass industry standards in providing superior customer service – something for which the banking industry is not typically known.

"We worked with Bendigo Bank to streamline its customer service approach using Whole Brain Thinking. As a result, the Bank discovered that dealing with customers based on a single customer profile was not only ineffective, but also contrary to its goal of positioning itself as an organisation that was in touch with its local community. The ensuing 'customer intimacy' strategy, to anticipate and address the needs of each individual customer based on their estimated HBDI profile, was a resounding success."

As part of the strategy, the Bank trained individuals to spot clues to help them determine what type of customer they were dealing with, based on their in-depth knowledge of HBDI principles. And once identified, the employees now used their training to respond appropriately, and the practice was integrated into all the company's sales and service training.

"Employee feedback has been almost unanimously positive," said Mr Stagg, and the partnership between HIA and Bendigo Bank has created a culture which uses Whole Brain Thinking principles to support an operating philosophy that backs the Bank's business goals 100 per cent," said Mr Stagg.

As for the future, Mr Stagg said the challenge for Bendigo Bank and HIA would be to sustain this culture internally with its customers through ongoing communication programs and strategy development.

- ends -