

Mountain America Improves Morale, Member Service with Web-Based Survey Tools

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By Marc Rapport - CU Times Technology Correspondent

WEST JORDAN, Utah – Management at Mountain America Credit Union is promoting workplace morale with a bit of technology and by being “active” listeners.

Mountain America (www.mtnamerica.org) is using the Active Listening system from Allegiance, a Web-based application that lets the credit union collect feedback anonymously from its approximately 675 employees from anywhere they may be.

“One of the cool things that’s come from this so far is that we’ve been able to correlate satisfaction from our members with the satisfaction of our members,” says Marshall Paepke, vice president of human resources for \$1.6 billion Mountain America. “We can show that loyal employees translate into loyal members because of the service they receive.”

Professor Gary Rhoads, a customer retention and loyalty expert at Brigham Young University, created Allegiance (www.allegiance.com) in April 2000 after consulting with Fortune 500 companies showed him that many organizations do a poor job of creating dialogue with customers, employees and partners.

Providing for that feedback gives organizations valuable, actionable information as well as improves employee morale, says Greg Heaps, vice president of sales and marketing at Allegiance.

By collecting feedback in real time at multiple points of interaction, and offering extensive reporting capabilities, accountability and responsiveness can be ensured, Heaps says. The company also offers whistleblower and mystery shopper tools, all in an ASP mode.

Mountain America gathers feedback from members and employees using a variety of offerings in the Active Listening system, including one it calls Employee Pulse, which each month asks one-sixth of the CU’s employees for their input on various topics.

“That way we’re not making decisions based on old data,” Paepke says. “We really do keep our fingers on the organization’s pulse that way.”

Another survey tool, called Active Voice, is used to solicit employee feedback anytime on anything of concern, a kind of electronic suggestion box.

“We had an employee recently make a suggestion about a new card product that would fill a gap in our product line, something that we hadn’t really considered. Now we’re looking at how to implement it,” says Kristina Anderson, the 200,000-member credit union’s corporate communications officer.

Knowing what matters to employees also helps the credit union better manage their concerns, Paepke says, pointing to a benefits survey conducted the past two years as an example. Employees were asked whether they would prefer to pay more for the same coverage or to change the coverage, and how much more they would be willing to pay.

“It helps HR not sit here in a box making decisions that are the wrong decisions,” Paepke says, adding with price that Mountain America has gone four years without raising health care costs to the credit union, other than adding people, while maintaining a system where, for example, employees with five years or more pay \$72 or less a month for HMO coverage.

Of course, there are some things that can’t be changed, such as hard-to-please members.

"We don't know how you can change that, so instead of focusing our resources and energy on making sure we have only reasonable member coming through the door, we focus on our employees," says Paepke, the HR vice president.

Ways to create a warm working environment are one result, as is the ability to predict turnover and help maintain continuity while keeping an eye on specific concerns, such as a particular manager or how locations or age groups of employees are faring.

"What we're really tracking in these surveys is the stress and passion of the employees," Paepke says, noting that Mountain America is consistently ranked as one of the top places to work statewide and nationally. "We're trying to fire the passions and lower the stress, and the more we do that, the more engaged and loyal our employees will be, and the more satisfied our members."

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