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Really Excel: How Building a Coaching Culture
Transformed Employee Engagement*

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When People Really Matter, Organizations Really Excel: How Building a Coaching Culture Transformed Employee Engagement

Sue Bock and Carollyne Conlinn

Integrating a bona-fide coaching culture into an organization to support a shift from “managing performance” to “coaching for performance” so that coaching is understood and practiced at all levels and becomes a way of being takes BOLD leadership and vision – and patience! This article tells the story of how Kootenay Savings Credit Union, a regional credit union in the southern interior of British Columbia, Canada, identified the need for and engineered a profound shift in its organizational culture using coaching over a five-year period. In a phased implementation, Kootenay Savings, working with Sue Bock of Bock and Associates, and with the support of Essential Impact Coaching, Inc., shifted its organizational culture from managing performance to coaching for performance that resulted in a dramatically higher level of employee engagement. The authors explain the process and tools used to implement this shift to a coaching culture and to measure its impact on the organization. They also share the lessons they learned along the way.

LEARNING HOME TRUTHS AND CHOOSING A NEW PATH

Kootenay Savings Credit Union (Kootenay Savings) offers a full spectrum of financial services to thirteen branches through the East and West Kootenays in the southern interior of British Columbia, Canada. A series of north/south-oriented mountain ranges and valleys traverse the region from west to east. It is 250 miles of forest, rock, rivers, and lakes from the head office to the farthest branch. With a combined population of some 150,000, the Kootenays are rugged, largely rural with small towns. The largest city in the region has 10,000 people. Kootenay Savings is headquartered in Trail, B.C. (population 7,237, according to the 2006 Census). Forestry, mining, fishing, agriculture, and tourism are the main industries in the Kootenays. In this economic landscape, Kootenay Savings is a major presence with CDN\$850 million in assets, 41,000 members, and 270 employees. It also owns insurance and wealth management subsidiaries and operates a community foundation.

Prior to 2003, Kootenay Savings’ main objectives were building sound infrastructure, solidifying business practices, and increasing member acquisition and community responsibility. It was one of the largest employers in the Kootenay region and was viewed as stable and growing. The HR practices were generally sound but lacked specific strategies to individually connect and support employee relationships and performance. The culture was a top-

down leadership model with a unionized frontline staff. In 2003, the new President and CEO, Brent Tremblay, was promoted from within. Over the following two years, Brent assembled his senior team and began shaping his vision and legacy. This management change was the first stride toward shifting the vision and culture of Kootenay Savings.

What really matters?

In 2005, a significant employee feedback initiative reinforced the call for change. The results of an Employee Opinion Survey (EOS) delivered an unsettling and overarching message to the new senior team: their employee group experienced a lack of trust and connection. With 250 employees at the time, 24 out of 154 survey items were rated unfavorably by at least 30% of employees. This was a serious and transformational moment for Kootenay Savings. The feedback represented five key areas for development and change:

- Management effectiveness;
- Career development and training;
- Communication;
- Performance management; and
- Organization image and change.

The results triggered not only a commitment to explore coaching as a tool for systemic organizational change, but also added another key area of focus to support their financial bottom line: *Employee engagement*. Employees were calling for engagement. They wanted a more inclusive, transparent, and respectful workplace where employees mattered and loyalty was recognized. As a result of the 2005 feedback, Kootenay Savings began its journey of cultural discovery and change.

The coaching model

In reflecting on the journey, the process created by Bock and Associates mirrors the framework and model outlined by the four principles of the Excelerator Coaching System^{®1} which formed the basis of the coaching development adopted by the organization in subsequent years. The Excelerator Coaching System describes coaching as “a specific style of dialogue that can lead to a change in the hard-wiring that governs the way our brains think”² which change and shape new behaviors. That same outcome occurred for Kootenay Savings as they shifted and changed their thinking over the last five years and new behaviors emerged.

The Excelerator Coaching System is based on four principles: *Engage, Enlighten, Empower, and Excel*, with each principle having a key purpose in the coaching conversation.

The results of an Employee Opinion Survey (EOS) delivered an unsettling and overarching message to the new senior team: their employee group experienced a lack of trust and connection.

¹The Excelerator Coaching System[®] was created by Carolyne Conlinn, MCC, and the team at Essential Impact Coaching Inc.

²Excelerator Coaching System®, Coaching Context, Page 1.3

- The *Engage* principle defines the process for the client and establishes the relationship.
- The *Enlighten* principle creates space for curiosity and establishes focus for the conversation.
- The *Empower* principle identifies barriers and resources, and explores alternative courses of action.
- The *Excel* principle boasts action planning, success, and celebration.

PHASE 1: ENGAGING THE CLIENT

Phase 1 of Kootenay Savings' cultural shift began with a proposal titled, the "Career Development Initiative" (CDI). The CDI embodied the *Engage* principle of the Excelsior Coaching System that was designed to establish rapport and an authentic connection to the client.

Using the Employee Opinion Survey (EOS) as the baseline and focus, this phase included further research and development as well as a heavy emphasis on relationship building. Bock and Associates initiated and participated in many focus groups with the senior group, the employees, and a newly formed advisory group. The goal for Phase I was to understand what *really mattered* to the employees and ultimately understand and connect the words behind the EOS data. As consultants taking a coach approach, we were committed to enrolling the employees to assist us in creating a solution or solutions that would reflect their true needs and thinking. We wanted to create a system and process that was user-friendly, effective, and timeless.

The main characteristics identified for improvement during our conversations with the employee groups in the discovery and introductory phase were:

- Bolder leadership;
- Stronger working relationships;
- More effective communication;
- Meaningful performance feedback; and
- Career planning, training, and education choices.

With the desired outcomes declared and a sense of urgency emerging from the advisory group and senior team, the next step was to outline and define the strategy required to realize the vision. Through a team effort, the purpose, process, and measurable outcomes were defined. The solution for success was stronger employee engagement; the mechanism for success was executive coaching. A communication plan was designed with the advisory committee and launched by the CEO. In his message to employees, he asked for their trust and willingness to step into the "unknown territory" of coaching to create the results Kootenay Savings said they wanted: to be the best employer in the communities they serve.

[Employees] wanted a more inclusive, transparent, and respectful workplace where employees mattered and loyalty was recognized.

PHASE 2: SHOWING WHAT COACHING CAN DO

Developing a process for coaching for performance

The next step was to introduce coaching and leadership potential to the organization – to *Enlighten* Kootenay Savings about the power of a coaching culture. The approach was to model a new way for supervisors and direct reports to talk to one another by introducing a customized coach-approach to performance and career planning. Feedback from employees during the focus groups indicated that the performance review process was an ineffective *event* that occurred yearly with no results. They felt the focus was primarily day-to-day, how-to items and tasks, rather than more meaningful topics. It was proposed that the annual review become the means and opportunity to establish a safe place to build dialogue, understanding of performance and organizational expectations, as well as employee interests and career aspirations. The unstated goal was to build relationships.

The biggest challenge in this process was to find a way to support supervisors to feel confident using this new approach. Technically, there was no resistance, but emotionally, supervisors felt lost with regard to *how* to do these reviews differently and effectively. They were comfortable with the old process of checkboxes and surface conversation with no accountability for actions. What was being asked of them was to *talk with* their direct reports. Their goal was to find out what mattered most to their employees; what was working and not working; and if or what they wanted their future to be at Kootenay Savings.

This new framework, entitled the “Performance Development Planning” Process, or PDP, was designed to allow supervisors to take a coach-approach to performance and career development with their direct reports using a new tool. The PDP initially combined three key components and later evolved to include benchmarks and measurable targets for each role:

1. The Performance Development Planning Process form itself, which documented the conversation, the outcomes of the assessments used, and the actions that would follow as a result of the PDP coaching session;
2. An internal Credit Union technical assessment from CuSource; and
3. An external profile assessment, titled Profile XT (PXT), from Hiring Smart Canada.

The internal assessment formally provided data on the employee’s technical performance. It allowed the employees to assess their technical knowledge and skills against their current role, and evaluate themselves against future roles in the organization. Supervisors were also required to assess the employees’ ability and skill level through the assessment system, which provided a *gap* analysis – the gap being

The goal for Phase I was to understand what really mattered to the employees and ultimately understand and connect the words behind the EOS [Employee Opinion Survey] data.

the difference in employee and supervisor assessment results. This tool provided supervisors and employees with a comfortable place to begin conversations, exploring how the supervisor's results aligned with the results of the employee. It also added the value of a *fit* analysis: "Is this role a good technical fit for the employee?"

The external profile assessment revealed consistent, in-depth, objective insight into an individual's thinking and reasoning styles, relevant behavioral traits, occupational interests, and match or fit to their specific role or future role in the organization. This opened the conversation about *why*, not *how* an employee behaves a certain way. For example, someone uncomfortable in a busy, customer-facing role might rank low in *sociability*, and so be a weaker fit in the position than someone scoring high in that category. The ranking and gap analysis from this assessment is intended to help a supervisor open up a conversation. A coach-approach-based dialogue supports the employee to better understand what they need to do differently to increase their effectiveness, and to help them build an action plan to address the specific area for growth and development.

As mentioned earlier, the goal of the PDP Process was to elicit conversation and build relationships between a supervisor and a direct report. It was designed as an open format, providing a structure and a framework on which to build a meaningful dialogue. By design, it excluded checkboxes or subjective comments; supervisors and employees had to willingly participate in order to complete the process successfully. Questions were open-ended and invited description. "Tell me about what's working well in your role?" or "Tell me what's not working well in your role?" They made it possible to share thoughts and self-evaluations in a meaningful and empowering way.

Parallel to the coaching and Performance Development Planning Process training with the supervisory staff, the rest of the employee population received information sessions to introduce and demystify coaching, and to address any concerns they might have about the new PDP process. The goal was to set the stage, teach employees how to be *coachable*, and increase buy-in to the new process. It was critical that we were clear that the purpose of the PDP Process was for growth and development. We also reassured employees that the results of the assessments would only be used to assist them in developing their own action and career plans.

After the Performance Development Planning Process training with all 45 of the supervisory staff, each supervisor was engaged in 1:1 coaching to support their delivery and application of the process with each of their direct reports. The focus was to develop coaching confidence and assist supervisors with the ability to identify what they were doing well and what they would do differently next time. This marked the onset of shifting towards a culture of *coaching for performance*.

The solution for success was stronger employee engagement; the mechanism for success was executive coaching.

PHASE 3: SPREADING COACHING THROUGHOUT THE ORGANIZATION, BUILDING STRONGER LEADERSHIP

Phase 3 began at the end of 2007 and continued through 2008. During this time, coaching spread through the organization, with every manager and supervisor trained using the Excelerator Coaching System. The goal was to support a different way of working with each other – from day-to-day walk-about to formal one-on-one coaching – in order to build stronger bench strength across the whole organization. This phase continued and expanded the *Enlighten* principle.

Building on the momentum of the initial PDP, a new Performance Management process, including further metrics and benchmarks for all employees, was simultaneously integrated into the organization by the HR department. It would be congruent with implementation of the next Phase of CDI: to expand the “coach-approach” beyond the current system into the day-to-day managing and mentoring of employees. The first level of the Excelerator Coaching System was introduced to the management and supervisory groups. The International Coach Federation (ICF) has accredited this three-day coaching skills development, which leads to a future option for certifying internal coaches at the professional level. Forty-five employees participated in strengthening their skills, and grew more confident coaching in the day-to-day work being done throughout the organization. Supervising staff would now be expected to take a coach-approach to management and leadership.

Building stronger leadership

At the same time that we expanded the coach training to the management and supervisory groups, the Senior Executive Team also did the Excelerator training, as well as a 360° assessment at the end of 2007, to further develop their leadership skills. Using the Legacy Leadership® assessment survey, the CEO and his five Vice Presidents put themselves “on the line” and asked their board and boss, their direct reports, colleagues, and customers to rank their performance and set expectations. The results offered profound opportunities *and* called the senior team to action. The individuals on the Senior Executive Team had specific challenges to focus on with respect to their peers as well as their direct reports. All members of the team indicated a strong desire to receive more coaching. In early 2008, they engaged in a leadership development process to assist them to build their group vision, values, and leadership commitments. Through the Legacy Leadership® Institute,³ the senior team began to craft their team vision, roles, and objectives. They defined working agreements, established decision-making criteria, and common goals that set the stage for more intentional, focused, and cohesive efforts going forward. 2008 was also a year

A coach-approach-based dialogue supports the employee to better understand what they need to do differently to increase their effectiveness, and to help them build an action plan to address the specific area for growth and development.

³Legacy Leadership® Institute is a model created by Dr. Jeannine Sandstrom and Dr. Lee Smith of CoachWorks International.

of self-discovery for each executive. One-on-one external coaching reinforced the learning and assisted the CEO and each vice president to define their individual action plans to ensure accountability and success with behavioral changes and identified goals.

Measuring improvement

At the same time as the work being done by the Senior Executive Team was taking place, the second EOS results were unveiled showing the first signs of improvement (see Table 1 below). The results indicated positive shifts were taking shape in the organization and employees were responding to efforts being made by the senior and supervisory teams. The organization was beginning to see the possibility of success as they began to discover their internal strengths and resources.

Worth noting in the chart below is the 18% increase in how employees viewed the organization (attitude toward management and vision) and how they were embracing change. Also worthy of note is the 13% increase in management effectiveness. Obviously, frontline employees were experiencing management differently – thinking patterns were changing and new sense of connection was being felt between staff and management.

The individuals on the Senior Executive Team had specific challenges to focus on with respect to their peers as well as their direct reports. All members of the team indicated a strong desire to receive more coaching.

Table 1. Employee opinion survey comparison, 2005-2007

Dimension	2005, % Favorable	2007, % Favorable	Overall % Increase
Management Effectiveness (initial EOS focus)	46	59	13%
Career Development & Training	58	68	10%
Communication	57	68	11%
Performance Management	55	57	2%
Organization Image & Change	64	82	18%

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PHASE 4: CONSOLIDATING CHANGE

Phase 4 moved Kootenay Savings into a more practical phase, providing opportunities for the many initiatives and activities to root themselves in the organization allowing the employees to further develop confidence and consistency in their new skills, knowledge, and behaviors. The Senior Executive Team once again completed their second 360° process and realized results similar to those from the 2008 EOS, indicating an increase in their effectiveness as well as an increase in internal and external trust, and communication. This corresponds to the *Empower* principle in the Excelsior Coaching System.

The employees had turned a corner – the blinders were off and the *elephants* in the organization all had names! Now was the time to capitalize on the successes and push forward to embed the new culture further into the fabric of the organization. The Career Development Initiative, the many coaching strategies (including the Performance Development Planning Process), and the leadership initiatives were now beginning to be interlaced throughout the organization. Managers and supervisors were taking some ownership.

Leveraging the opportunity and the success of coaching to date, an Internal Coaching initiative was created and integrated into the organization to reinforce ongoing coaching at the management and supervisory levels. Supported by Bock and Associates, the first group of internal coaches was established. Six individuals from diverse departments within the organization were invited to form a coalition team to become the champions of coaching within Kootenay Savings, named the Internal Coaching Team (ICT), Cohort 1. These individuals were selected based on interest and influence within the organization. This team engaged in further development, integrating a customized coaching and mentorship program, and the second level of the Exceleator Coaching System. Their main purpose was to maintain the momentum and focus of the coaching initiative within the organization by demonstrating the power of coaching to their colleagues.

We needed this team to *coach the coaches* by providing reinforcement and support to the rest of the management team as they coached their employees. They expanded their coaching offerings and held short, technical reviews and coaching demonstrations at regular quarterly meetings with the full management group. This ongoing exposure to coaching and short development sessions for the full management group reinforced the overall message that coaching was not going away, and that coaching was the *new way of being*. The results from the 2008 Employee Opinion Survey again demonstrated remarkable improvements in the five main areas of focus (see Table 2 on next page). The data demonstrated a consistent improvement in performance, trust, and employee engagement.

Also noted in Table 2 are some of the additional indicators that shifts were being felt elsewhere in the organization. Acknowledging that coaching cannot be credited solely for the changes being experienced at Kootenay Savings, coaching has become the common thread that weaves through the various organizational and leadership initiatives. Larry Holm, Vice President, Human Resources, articulated how coaching works throughout the organization at the 2009 Prism Awards Ceremony:

Every employee is involved in the coaching process – all 250 employees are provided with Performance Development Planning where they identify what's working well and what's

This ongoing exposure to coaching and short development sessions for the full management group reinforced the overall message that coaching was not going away, and that coaching was the new way of being.

not. Through a coaching process, they create individual and employee-centered action plans that promote growth, development and effective performance.

Table 2. Employee opinion survey comparison, 2005-2008

Dimension	2005, % Favorable	2007, % Favorable	2008, % Favorable	Overall % Increase
<i>Initial Focus</i>				
Management Effectiveness	46	59	65	39
Career Development & Training	58	68	78	35
Communication	57	68	71	25
Performance Management	55	57	62	13
Organization Image & Change	64	82	87	36
<i>Additional Improvements</i>				
Sales and Quality Service	57	63	68	20
Job Content & Satisfaction	72	77	80	11
Teamwork	66	74	75	14
Supervision	63	70	74	17
Decision Making	50	59	57	14
Work Organization/Environment	73	81	74	1

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Examples of additional and tangible benefits from coaching include the increase in formal and lifelong learning. Again, through the coaching dialogue during the performance management process, employees noted they were now feeling *more valued and supported*, resulting in increased engagement in education and training. Between 2005 and 2008, the numbers of employees engaged in formal training or education increased 104%.

The second tangible shift was the overall employee satisfaction rates which also grew from 61% in 2005 to 72% in 2008. One of the main contributors to the significant improvement was that employees had been consistently shown over the last number of years that *they mattered*. At the beginning of the Career Development Initiative, there was resistance, skepticism, and a belief from some employees that the whole *coaching thing* was just another flavor of the month.

However, by ensuring that all supervisory staff engaged in strategic planning, by integrating coaching throughout the organization, and by implementing a new performance management system, employee recognition programs, and investments in education, the employees of Kootenay Savings had received solid proof that the efforts were genuine, and the CEO and senior team was committed to being the employer of choice by 2011. Tara Briggeman, Employee Development Advisor and Member of the Internal Coaching Team, described the change in a 2008 communiqué: “I feel like the company values me, which is happening to me because of the coaching. I feel that it doesn’t matter who you are or what your title is; each of us matters.”

Obviously, frontline employees were experiencing management differently – thinking patterns were changing and new sense of connection was being felt between staff and management.

Kootenay Savings also used coaching to enhance daily performance and problem solving through a coach-approach to their day-to-day communication and management. Supervisors no longer *rescued*, but rather encouraged, employee problem-solving by empowering their employees to create their own solutions and results. Supervisory staff was strongly encouraged to leave their offices for purposeful walk-about. The effect of the walk-about was to connect with direct reports and further build relationships. By being actively attentive to their direct reports, they were able to observe and provide timely and specific feedback on good quality work being done and assist where challenges were occurring; 87% of KSCU employees felt their supervisors or someone at work cared about them as a person.

In another organizational communiqué, Jenny Jones, Deposit Service Advisor, detailed the benefits she experienced from working in a company where the coach approach was woven into the fabric of everyday interaction:

I really liked the introduction my coach uses: "What has been good about your day?" or "What is really working for you today?", then the question, "What challenges or problems have you had?" These questions quickly clear up the need to unload. They open the door for me to solve my own challenges in a safe environment with the support, guidance, and experience of my coaching partner." 2009 Internal Employee Communiqué

At KSCU, 94% of its employees have a good understanding of the organization's vision and 88% know what's expected of them at work. These are hallmarks of satisfied employees as identified by the Gallup organization in their 1999 book, *First, Break all the Rules*. The change to a coach-approach, along with the technical and ProfileXT assessments and tools used during the PDP process, allowed employees and their supervisors to have open conversations about future employment goals, as well as what was expected of them at work. The environment was shifting from *having a job* to *creating a meaningful career*. Awareness of the importance of job fit in building champions, increasing employee satisfaction, and achieving organizational success was beginning to surface.

Expanding coaching to sales

With the overall organization's coaching confidence and level of proficiency building within the Excelerator Coaching System model and ICF competencies, Kootenay Saving's marketing division set out to extend the level of satisfaction and excellence beyond the employee experience to the member, or customer, by introducing another layer of coaching to the organization.

As a means of combating the turbulent and competitive challenges of the marketplace, Kootenay Savings expanded their coach training to include sales and service coaching, a technique used to set and meet financial and performance targets for customer-

Examples of additional and tangible benefits from coaching include the increase in formal and lifelong learning.

facing employees. While sales coaching does not include specific ICF competencies developed in the Excelerator Coaching System, it nicely supports and dovetails with the framework to increase the employees' capacity to develop a *coach-approach and presence* in all areas of their work. Although there are differences in the two models, the employees find themselves drawing on many of the similarities, including the principle of *Empowerment*, where the coach facilitates the development of others versus rescuing and directing the actions. This is yet another example of *coaching for performance*.

PHASE 5: TRACKING AND CELEBRATING SUCCESS

The final principle of the Excelerator Coaching System is *Excel*, "To achieve results beyond what was imaginable at the outset." As 2010 unfolded, it became clear that it was the first year of excelling; pushing beyond what was considered impossible, building solid, self-sustaining internal expertise, and seizing the potential succession and growth opportunities emerging out of the efforts of four outstanding years of commitment, persistence, and vision. At Kootenay Savings, the fruits of the shift to a coaching culture became more fully visible, as well as a sense of settling as performance and expectations found a place of equilibrium. Going into 2010, the Senior Executive Team and HR department recognized that a plateau was beginning to form as noted in the 2009 EOS results (see Table 3 below).

Supervisors no longer rescued, but rather encouraged, employee problem-solving by empowering their employees to create their own solutions and results.

Table 3. Employee opinion survey comparison, 2005-2009

Dimension, Initial Focus	2005, % Favorable	2007, % Favorable	2008, % Favorable	2009, % Favorable
Management Effectiveness	46	59	65	78
Career Development & Training	58	68	78	76
Communication	57	68	71	72
Performance Management	55	57	62	66
Organization Image & Change	64	82	87	88

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Clearly, the confidence and bench strength in the organization was solidifying. In Table 4, you will see a steady shift in the succession to management, with 100% of eight management positions being filled from within the ranks. This was a great moment worth celebrating. Employees were building careers at Kootenay Savings.

Based on these results the organization had reached a level position on the change continuum. Many of the initiatives integrated in 2006 through 2009 were coming to fruition and employees were now fully engaged in the day-to-day delivery of the new strategies.

Table 4. Management positions filled internally

Year	# Management Positions Posted	# Positions Filled Internally	% Filled Internally
2007	2	1	50%
2008	5	4	80%
2009 YTD	8	8	100%

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Maintaining momentum

With a coaching culture firmly integrated and thriving, the obvious question emerged: “How would the organization continue advancing the coaching momentum and at the same time manage the changed level in expectations and the growth surfacing throughout the organization?”

The results from the senior team’s third 360° Legacy Leadership feedback assessment revealed similar results to the above table. A new level of realistic ranking was occurring; performance results and expectations results were now in alignment with each other for the very first time. It was a strong indicator that the thinking in the organization was changing. These assessment results indicated an alignment among raters, from the board to the staff, in thinking. Expectations of the senior team were no longer unrealistic and the performance markers now matched or closely matched expectations. This was clear evidence that vision, values, communication, and accountability was occurring from the top to the frontline of the organization – everyone was referencing the same touch points.

Another factor related to the above shift could also have been the integration of a second level of feedback that was introduced in late 2009 to the middle management group. This group of approximately 50 key supervisory staff also went through the exercise of a 360° feedback assessment, called CheckPoint 360°™ from Profiles International, measuring management and leadership competencies. Building experience with these tools is a fundamental and basic component to good leadership. A supervisor’s key role is to provide effective feedback; these tools ensure non-judgmental feedback that ensures opportunities for growth and development. With so many employees now receiving feedback and being held accountable for results, the natural conclusion would be a swing towards a more realistic set of targets and expectations.

For the remaining part of 2010 and into 2011, Kootenay Savings will be focusing their efforts on strengthening their feedback loops, further intensifying their sales and service culture, and expanding their internal expertise in the performance coaching and leadership arenas.

[Sales coaching] nicely supports and dovetails with the framework to increase the employees’ capacity to develop a coach-approach and presence in all areas of their work.

A second cohort of internal coaches is halfway through its second level of the Excelerator Coaching System. Their colleagues from Cohort 1 are coaching them internally, and Bock and Associates are providing ongoing skills development and mentoring. External coaching audits for both cohorts are being conducted regularly to ensure quality and consistency, and soon, many of the members of Cohort 1 will receive their ICF accreditation. The Legacy Leadership model is being integrated through an internal HR initiative, and many of the management team members will be participating in that training in the first half of 2011.

Industry recognition

The four years of effort at Kootenay Savings did not go unnoticed outside the organization. Kootenay Savings received the 2009 International Coach Federation, Vancouver Chapter, Prism Award for its success in integrating a coaching culture. This award both recognizes the significant efforts of businesses that have integrated coaching into their organizations and celebrates those that have achieved tangible, bottom-line benefits and other organizational impacts through their commitment to professional coaching as a leadership strategy.

This was a great achievement for Kootenay Savings, which CEO and President Brent Tremblay summed up at the 2009 Prism Awards ceremony:

We are building a coaching culture – we are taking it right to the core. The Senior Management Team is being coached; all management staff has been trained to coach; the Internal Coaching Team continues to work towards their ICF certification by coaching the coaches; we are coaching at all levels ... this is the way of our future.

In August 2010, I Love Rewards recognized Kootenay Savings as one of North America's 50 Most Engaged Workplaces™. I Love Rewards is a leader in results-driven employee rewards and recognition solutions. This annual award recognizes top employers that display leadership and innovation towards engaging their employees. A panel of judges evaluated each applicant on how they measured up to other organizations based on the Eight Elements of Employee Engagement™. They include: communication, leadership, culture, rewards and recognition, professional and personal growth, accountability and performance, vision and values, and corporate social responsibility.

Brent Tremblay underscored the significance of the I Love Rewards award: "We are extremely pleased to be recognized in this way. There is a direct relationship between employee satisfaction and member satisfaction, and employee engagement is a key strategy of Kootenay Savings. Our employees are critical to our success and we value their contributions."

By incorporating coaching into all aspects of their work, coaching is no longer just a tool or application to learn but a 'presence of being' that weaves its way through the day-to-day communication and the effective development of others.

Perhaps even more telling than the external awards and internal measurement is Kootenay Savings' performance during the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009. The credit union remained committed to its program for investing in its people and was one of few financial institutions that prospered in that period, increasing assets from CDN\$597 million in 2005 to \$749 million in 2008 and \$835million in 2009.

CONCLUSIONS

Through *bold leadership* the President and CEO, Brent Tremblay, and his senior team, continue to strengthen the coaching culture as a means of supporting ongoing and healthy employee engagement, setting progressive strategic goals and developing legacy leaders throughout the organization. As a result of *clear vision and commitment* to their employees, this organization continues to break new ground and create solid results. By incorporating coaching into all aspects of their work, coaching is no longer just a tool or application to learn but a 'presence of being' that weaves its way through the day-to-day communication and the effective development of others.

Kootenay Savings is an organization that now *walks its talk*; where employees matter, where they build strong working relationships and develop long-term careers. We assess that coaching taking place throughout the whole organization, from the CEO to the front line staff, promotes superior performance founded in self-generating responsibility and accountability, and is a perfect fit with the organization's core values.

Lessons learned

The best learning process also teaches. The authors took away several key lessons from their experience in partnering with Kootenay Savings to shift to a coaching culture, where coaching is understood, practiced and expected at all levels of the organization. The very name "culture" suggests its amenability to cultivation, a familiar process that requires understanding, focus, patience, and a supple attentiveness to change.

In reflecting on the journey, the authors remind those who undertake culture change to stay the course. Ensure that you stop along the way to see if you are still moving in the right direction and recalibrate as needed, enrolling employees in the feedback. Don't underestimate the timeframe it takes for the shift to a coaching culture to take root. It is something that is cultivated, not imposed. It is not a flavor of the month, and it requires ongoing commitment.

Support from senior management is critical but they do not have to be the champions; find the early adopters, then leverage their commitment and vision. It is far easier to start where there is enthusiasm and build from there, rather than trying to have everyone fit the new mold right away. As change starts to occur, listen

[F]ind the early adopters, then leverage their commitment and vision. It is far easier to start where there is enthusiasm and build from there, rather than trying to have everyone fit the new mold right away.

for and celebrate wins. Be mindful that employees' expectations increase along with the success. And look for surprises in addition to the outcomes you expected. As you measure the results you achieve, translate them wherever possible to strategic outcomes that demonstrate that coaching is an investment, not an expense.

RESOURCES

Legacy Leadership Institute, www.legacyleadership.com
 Profiles International, www.profilesinternational.com

REFERENCE

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■ ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sue Bock, CEC, PCC

Phone: 250-364-2401

Email: sebock@shaw.ca

Founder and President of Bock and Associates, Sue is a Certified Executive Coach and associate faculty member of the Executive Coaching Graduate Program at Royal Roads University. Sue specializes in building coaching cultures with engaged workforces, bringing clients more 25 years of experience in education, HR strategies, coaching and leadership development. A board member of the British Columbia Games Society, she is also a past Second-vice Chair of the British Columbia Chamber of Commerce.

Carollyne Conlinn, MBA, MPH, MCC

Phone: 604-930-1230

Email: carollyne.conlinn@essentialimpact.com

Website: www.essentialimpact.com

A founding partner in Essential Impact Coaching, Carollyne is an entrepreneurial executive coach who draws on 30 years of corporate experience to create programs for effecting profound change in individuals and organizational cultures. Her Excelsator Coaching Program™ is core curriculum in the Graduate Executive Coaching Program at Royal Roads University, where she is a lead faculty member. Carollyne and her team have created systems which introduce and evaluate coaching with managers and leaders who want to create a coaching culture. She was recognized as the 2009 Canadian Coach of the Year by Coaches Canada at the annual ICF conference.

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