



Improve Sales Without Sacrificing Service... CFCU Knows How!



Community First Credit Union (CFCU) is a \$1 billion credit union with 83,000 members based in Appleton, Wisconsin. Its management team wanted to instill a sales culture without sacrificing its core value of providing exceptional service.

After conducting an extensive search, they implemented CUNA's Creating Member Loyalty™ System of Training, and launched an organization-wide training program.



“We view sales as understanding the members’ needs and then educating them on the solutions the credit union can offer.”

• Cathie Tierney, President and CEO Community First Credit Union

■ THE CHALLENGES

- **Improve** sales without sacrificing credit union’s commitment to service.
- **Create** mindset among staff that inquiring about a member’s finances is actually good member service and can result in new financial solutions.
- **Implement** CUNA’s Creating Member Loyalty (CML) system in an efficient, effective manner to the entire organization.

■ THE SOLUTIONS

- **Launch** the CML system and create an aggressive, continuous training schedule.
- **Ensure** each training session features staff from all levels of organization to demonstrate credit union-wide commitment and build cohesiveness.
- **Generate** systems and processes to ensure ongoing success.

■ THE IMPACT

- **Improved staff confidence,** positive morale, and more staff relationships have resulted from company-wide training sessions.
- **Member satisfaction** has improved while share draft account penetration increased and single service households decreased.
- **Referrals to business lending,** member’s financial services, mortgage lending and auto-buying services are on the rise.



Service is Sales at Community First Credit Union



“With CML, sales is service, and service is sales.”

• ***Minh McKenzie
Vice-President of
Sales and Service
Community First
Credit Union***

Cathie Tierney, president and CEO of Community First Credit Union (CFCU), wanted sales to be stronger at her credit union, but only under one condition: Service would not be sacrificed.

“We view sales as understanding the members’ needs and then educating them on the solutions the credit union can offer,” she said. Cathie wanted this approach to become consistent throughout the organization and to replace the old notion of “sales.” She wanted a program that would boost sales by improving service, and with CML, she found the answer.

The implementation of CML began when Cathie hired Minh McKenzie as vice president of sales and service. Minh had been a sales representative at Wells Fargo, and Cathie always found him to be highly complimentary of CFCU’s service approach. She decided to hire him so that they could benefit from each other’s experiences. “Minh first developed a list of success factors,” Cathie said. “And then he began researching sales and service programs.”

Finding a Solution With the Right Emphasis

As he began his due diligence, Minh steered clear of training programs that focused too heavily on sales. Throughout his career, he had seen other organizations fail at training programs because the service component had been largely ignored. “They’d dive right into sales and push product,” he said.

After an exhaustive review, Minh recommended CML. A number of factors led to his decision. First, the programs are tailored specifically to credit unions. Second, CML certifies the credit union’s trainers, who could then train their own staff. Finally, and most importantly, the system emphasizes service, not sales. “With CML, sales is service, and service is sales,” Minh said.

Many sales don’t occur because of false assumptions on the part of the employee and the member. For example, an employee may hesitate to ask if a member

needs help with investments, assuming it would be “prying.” The member, on the other hand, incorrectly assumes the employee’s silence is apathy.

To remove these roadblocks, the CML system emphasizes the need for “high impact questions,” the kind that uncover the member’s financial needs. With CML, CFCU staff is now trained to listen to answers, and then personalize benefits in response. This approach doesn’t necessarily take more time than a typical member-employee conversation, but it does allow the employee to uncover what a member really wants.

To Build Loyalty, Deliver the Unexpected

This approach creates an “unexpected” level of service that generates loyalty. According to a 2009 National Member Survey by CUNA, loyalty is earned when the financial institution excels in aspects members do not expect it to perform well in. To deliver the “unexpected” to members, CML moves beyond the traditional small talk and polite chit-chat that are often confused with good member service. Instead, the program emphasizes a service-first approach in which staff asks the right questions and discovers the financial needs of their members.

Building loyalty isn’t a task for the CFCU front-line staff alone. CML requires complete organizational buy-in. Right from the start, CFCU showed the organization how committed it was to the program. A meeting with 42 managers was held to present the scope and impact of CML. The system was then introduced at an all-employee meeting with plenty of fanfare. “We wanted to show the employees how committed we were to CML,” Cathie said.

The training schedule was as aggressive as it was all-encompassing. In just a year and a half, McKenzie and a co-worker trained all 325 staff members, including front-line tellers, member service representatives, phone representatives and, most importantly, senior managers. “We moved quickly because we wanted the programs to make as big of an impact as possible,” he said.

Bottom-line Results, Intangible Benefits

The training’s impact was felt in surprising ways. Co-mingling employees from different areas established new interpersonal relationships throughout the credit union. “Because we’re so spread out, it was nice to get to meet people,” noted CFCU marketing director, Amanda Secor. The positive interactions also fostered a sense of teamwork among staff. Back-office staff experienced a new appreciation for their co-workers at the front line, and vice versa.

Amanda witnessed two other intangible benefits. The first from a marketing perspective, CML established a consistent approach to member service and the shared voice created consistent messaging. Second, the training created abilities that could be used both on the job and away from work. “We’ve acquired skills that help us communicate and fix problems,” she said.

Minh echoed the praise, pointing out an employee could use these skills for the rest of their career, no matter where their professional life may take them.

The qualitative benefits were matched by the quantitative ones. After two years, CML has helped the credit union post some impressive numbers.

- **CFCU improved member satisfaction.** The percentage of “very satisfied” members rose from 58.8% (48,804 members) in 2008 to 64.3% (53,369 members) in 2009.
- **Checking penetration increased** from 60.3% (50,049 members) in 2007 to 62.95% (52,249 members) in 2008.
- **CFCU ranked in the 99th percentile for Raddon’s Cross Sold Households index,** the 94th percentile for deposit balances and the 95th percentile for loan balances.



Tierney also noted that CML increased cross sales, which resulted in higher loan and deposit balances. Attachment products for both loans and deposits improved (GAP, pre-paid debit card, home banking, etc.). Referrals to member’s financial services, business lending, mortgage lending and auto-buying services also continue to rise.

Keeping the Drive Alive

The numbers were exciting, but Cathie pointed to the benefits that weren’t as readily quantified. “It’s truly changed our interactions with each other,” she said. Staff is more confident and more understanding of other people’s roles. The system also generated its own momentum. Success stories of CML are part of the credit union lore now. New anecdotes are shared through company-wide e-mails, and every Friday morning, branch managers share success stories over a conference call. (Listen to the podcast interviews at training.cuna.org/cml for examples of McKenzie and Tierney’s favorite stories.)

The training has also continued. After completing the initial round of sales strategies training, managers and assistant managers, along with the senior management that oversee these areas, are completing the Sales Leadership Strategies Training. New staffers also continue to be trained on the approach. “I think it’s our commitment to training that’s kept the program alive and well,” Tierney said.

With all its benefits, CML has moved beyond the credit union’s initial expectations. “It benefits people professionally and personally,” Tierney said. “That’s why we celebrate whenever people graduate from the training courses. People know it’s important.”

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• **Cathie Tierney, President and CEO Community First Credit Union**



Credit Union National Association

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CASE STUDY

CREATING
MEMBER
LOYALTY™
SYSTEM OF TRAINING

Improve Sales Without Sacrificing Service... CFCU Knows How!

- The Creating Member Loyalty™ System of Training offers more than 60 sales and service training modules, and it compliments the human resources, compliance, and technology training already available through CUNA. To learn more visit training.cuna.org/cml, call 800-456-0543, or e-mail cml@cuna.coop.