SunTrust

REALIZED IT.

INVESTING IN TALENT YIELDS BIG GAINS

BANKING ON A FUTURE WITH MORE ENGAGED LEADERS

SunTrust Bank is the flagship subsidiary of SunTrust Banks, Inc., and provides deposit, credit, trust and investment services to a broad range of retail, business, and institutional clients. Throughout its successful history, SunTrust has relied on its leaders to negotiate turbulent financial times. In recent years, amidst the recession, all eyes (and interest) were focused on the front lines.

“As we entered 2009, none of the economic experts knew where the bottom would be. It was clear that the stresses on the banking system were unlike any our leaders had encountered,” says Mary Slaughter, chief talent officer. “We needed to support all of our managers—not just the top 20 or even the top 150. We had thousands in supervisory roles, all of whom needed to cope with uncertainty and ambiguity.”

While many industry peers were tightening development budgets, SunTrust recognized the need to invest strategically in its people. “Our executives understood the consequences of not developing our people,” says Candace McDonald, group vice president/manager of learning delivery.

The bank’s investment in its frontline leaders was underscored by multiple needs, beginning with “teammate” (all SunTrust employees) engagement. “There was tremendous professional and personal pressure affecting all levels of the organization,” says Slaughter. “Banking’s reputation was severely tarnished, and while our teammates were uncertain about their own future financial health, they also had to reassure equally concerned clients. Caring for all of our teammates and fostering client loyalty were our primary points of focus.”

Future talent was also a consideration. Despite soaring unemployment immediately following the recession and the bleak short-term outlook, SunTrust executives knew the economy would rebound and top talent would be in scarcer supply. They wanted to create a competitive leadership brand that would continue to attract and retain the right people.

To address these needs, SunTrust’s HR team launched Manager Academy to develop the skills of its frontline leaders.

ABOUT SUNTRUST BANKS, INC.

> SunTrust Banks, Inc. is one of the nation’s leading financial services holding companies, with assets in excess of $172 billion (2013).

> Its flagship subsidiary—SunTrust Bank—has 1,500 retail branches and 2,800 ATMs located from Washington, D.C. to Florida. Other subsidiaries provide mortgage banking, asset management, securities brokerage, and capital market services.

> SunTrust employs more than 26,000 people.
Manager Academy was the vehicle we built to breathe life into our people strategy,” says McDonald. This three-day development program was rolled out at the beginning of 2009. Designed for first- and second-level managers, Manager Academy offers six courses from DDI’s Interaction Management®: Exceptional Leaders (IM: ExLSM) Series: Communicating for Leadership Success, Delegating with Purpose, Building and Sustaining Trust, Coaching for Peak Performance, Boosting Business Results, and Motivating Others.

The courses, which feature highly interactive learning activities, develop the leadership behaviors critical for effective management interactions. With the help of DDI-trained facilitators, managers evaluate their own skill sets and learn new and better behaviors to coach and engage teammates. “At SunTrust, we are passionate about developing talent, particularly our people managers and client-facing teammates,” says Slaughter.

“One of the interesting things about Manager Academy is that the concepts are foundational to management, yet they are not simple to execute,” says Dale Cook, vice president/training manager. “They are really quite complex and take training and practice to master.”

Each year, SunTrust’s HR team engages mid-level managers to identify direct-report participants for the next sessions of the Academy. This creates a positive dynamic from the outset; both leaders and their managers are immediately on board and committed to the leaders’ development. And, once leaders register to participate, their managers are automatically enrolled in Supporting Manager Development, an online overview of Manager Academy. In this course, managers learn the tools and rationale for championing their reports before, during, and after they complete the Academy curriculum.

In preparation for the program, participants complete a self-assessment and pre-work activities. They attend classes over two consecutive days, after which they break for two to three weeks before reassembling for the third and final day of instruction. In this interim period, participants have an opportunity to apply their newly learned skills back on the job. They work on action items and share their insights and course takeaways with managers and team members. Once training wraps up, the new “graduates” can access a dedicated website with course and reference materials for follow-up.

Manager Academy is offered quarterly at multiple locations. Each session accommodates approximately 20 frontline leaders drawn from retail, commercial, and functional areas. Says Deborah Tomaras, training specialist, “We deliberately coalesce mixed groups. We want them to develop a common language so they can really communicate in a way that strengthens their relationships with teammates, one another, and with their managers.”

“As facilitators,” adds Tomaras, “we create a safe environment, in which to build relationships with teammates fairly quickly. We let them know that these courses are here for them, and that they should really look at what they want to get from them. The fun for us is helping them get the skills that get the results.”

Each course ends with participants formulating a personal plan of action. They identify one or two items that they wish to work on and share with their managers.
A “MUST-TAKE” FOR MANAGERS

Feedback from Academy participants speaks to the program’s impact on the organization. “What I liked most about this course was that I could take what I learned and use it immediately! The tools I gained were helpful and instant,” said one participant. Another commented: “I took away the skills and competencies necessary to achieve my personal goal of becoming a stronger, more effective leader. The training was so impactful and beneficial.”

“When I read how the leaders are successfully using what they’ve learned, I know the content is driving purpose and engagement,” says McDonald.

Feedback confirms that seasoned leaders also benefit from the Academy experience: “Being a 25-year veteran of SunTrust, I have been through a number of training sessions. This class should be a ‘must-take’ for all new managers. I wish I would have had this much earlier in my managing career because I think I would be a much better manager now.”

In addition to kudos from many of the 2,000 graduates, Manager Academy consistently earns high marks from participant surveys. Most recently, participants provided an overall program score of 4.7 out of 5. More than three-quarters of respondents “strongly agreed” that they were “able to practice and apply new skills as part of the learning experience.”

“Another way we measure our effectiveness is via our annual engagement survey,” says Slaughter. “We believe our investment in management and leadership development has significantly contributed to our 16 percent increase in teammate engagement over the last two years.”

“DDI has been an awesome, professional partner and has significantly contributed to the success of the Academy,” says McDonald.

Since 2009, the visibility of the program has grown, resulting in a greater diversity of participants. What’s more, leaders already confident in their existing skill sets are now interested in becoming even better leaders.

“What has made Manager Academy successful through the years is that we work closely with our senior leaders whenever there’s a cultural shift in the organization,” says Cook. “We then bring our facilitators together to operationalize those changes via Manager Academy. While we don’t change the course materials, we do tweak how we position and connect to them. We maintain that important connection between Manager Academy and our organizational values and direction.”

This connection was key to the successful launch of a major new corporate initiative—more than three years after Manager Academy opened its doors. “We wanted to move from a very successful vertical operation to a culture that ‘delivers the whole bank,’” says Slaughter. As part of this transformational change, the senior management team championed a new emphasis on results, client service, and collaboration. The shift is embodied by the company’s new purpose statement—Lighting the Way to Financial Well-being.

“After several years up and running, Manager Academy proved adaptable enough to support our new focus and redesign in 2013. When you consider all that we didn’t know about the future in 2008, it’s pretty incredible that we were able to create a leadership program that is as relevant today as it was when we started,” says Gerard Borda, vice president/leadership development.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Partnering with DDI to develop more than 2,000 of its frontline leaders, SunTrust has realized the following results:

> Engagement surveys revealed a 16 percent increase in teammate engagement over the last two years.
> On a post-training survey, participants rated the overall program a 4.7 out of 5.
> Feedback from participants shows that they are applying the skills on the job and feeling more confident and capable in their roles.
ABOUT DEVELOPMENT DIMENSIONS INTERNATIONAL:
For over 40 years, DDI has helped the most successful companies around the world close the gap between where their businesses need to go and the talent required to take them there.

Our areas of expertise span every level, from individual contributors to the executive suite:

- Success Profile Management
- Selection & Assessment
- Leadership & Workforce Development
- Succession Management
- Performance Management

DDI's comprehensive, yet practical approach to talent management starts by ensuring a close connection of our solutions to your business strategies, and ends only when we produce the results you require.

You’ll find that DDI is an essential partner wherever you are on your journey to building extraordinary talent.