

Another article in our series on honorees of the Best Christian Places to Work, emphasizing best practices in organizational leadership.

Investing in Your Employees

By Sarah Loehndorf

BILLIONS OF DOLLARS in loans and transactions have been completed by Evangelical Christian Credit Union (ECCU) in the past 40 years, but Mark Holbrook, president/CEO of ECCU, and vice chairman of CMA's board of directors, says one of its most important investments is in its employees. "You have to be willing to make an investment in good people upfront," he said. "You create an environment where good people want to work, because good people already work there."



Mark Holbrook,
president/CEO
of ECCU

Holbrook explains how they invest a lot in recruiting top talent. Because of this, he says, "we spend very little on making up for mistakes. We're willing to invest, sorting through a lot of people to find the diamonds. In the end, it's all worth it."

A Commitment to Training

"You find great people," he goes on to explain, "and the tide rises everywhere." But still, after the recruiting and employee selection, ECCU invests a lot of time and money on training and management enrichment.

To be an effective organization, he says, a company can't just focus on leadership development; it must also do extensive management training. "You have to be willing to invest in training, the kind of training with a bias toward application," he explains.

ECCU has several ways to help prepare managers for leadership positions. An effective business practice it uses is the "The ECCU Way"—an evolving list of competencies required of the staff. ECCU works hard to give employees the right tools and skills to deal with everything from how to interview prospective employees to how to conduct a meeting.

"You need the right tools in your toolbox," he said.

"You're not required to use every tool every day, but you must master them and have the wisdom to use the right one at the right time."

In recent years, the company has spent more than half a million dollars to train and equip its staff. Currently, each manager or leader receives leadership training, and by 2006 will have completed a newly implemented ECCU management certification system, including a series of mandatory competency certifications.

A Positive Work Environment

ECCU has been a finalist year after year in the Best Christian Places to Work survey. Al Lopus, president of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, calls ECCU an example of the "good steward" from the parable of the talents. "They've been faithful stewards with the people entrusted to their care. Our research indicates their employee turnover is less than a third of industry peers. Lower employee turnover allows them to leverage the value they provide to their customers, facilitating even greater satisfaction and loyalty.

"It's apparent their diligence in creating a positive work environment and their investment in people is paying off.

I believe this trend will continue for ECCU because as Jesus noted in the parable of the talents, 'for to everyone who has, more will be given, and they will have in abundance.'"

ECCU works hard to maintain a Christian business that meets not only its clients' needs but its employees' needs as well. "Ultimately,"

Holbrook explains "the question for us is not how can we find the best candidates, but *why* should the Lord entrust to us his very best?"

Sarah Loehndorf is project manager at Best Christian Workplaces Institute (www.bcwinstitute.com). You may email her at Sarah@bcwinstitute.com.



ECCU's new headquarters in Brea, Calif., where they're creating an environment where good people want to work.

Thanks to Our Section Sponsor!

ENVOY
FINANCIAL
Trusted Advice Along The Way

www.envoyfinancial.org



Al Lopus

CEO/Leadership Section Resource Commission. For more resources on the CEO and senior leader's role, go to CMA's Management Resource Center (www.CMAonline.org/mrc). Email or call the volunteer members of this Section Resource Commission, or contact: Al Lopus, Section Leader (2004-2006) CEO/Leadership Email: alopus@bcwinstitute.com, Phone: (206) 230-8111, Fax: (206) 232-1036 Al Lopus is president of Best Christian Workplaces Institute (www.bcwinstitute.com), Mercer Island, Wash.