

Building a Better Branch Manager

Great sales skills are not enough to lead a team to success

By Byron Enriquez

In the mortgage industry, the focus and attention placed on creating new managers is always front and center — from upper management down to loan originators. When originators are asked what they are working toward, the most common answer is: “becoming a branch manager.” When the same question is asked of upper management, the answer usually is: “to promote new managers.”

This makes for a unique situation where upper management wants to promote and individual originators want to be promoted. In theory, this is a good thing. Unfortunately, what happens all too often is that new teams or branches get created by giving seasoned or top-producing loan originators the “manager” title and expecting them to multiply their success.

This top performer is then surrounded by a raw sales team, often made up of new or underperforming individuals who would, in theory, benefit from being around such a talented individual. The hope is that the success trait will rub off on the rest of the team, but more often than not these teams take a long time to develop, if they ever do.

Even worse, while waiting for the magic to happen, the new branch sees a decline in production because these new top-producers-turned-managers are now being pulled in so many directions that they cannot focus enough time on their own production or simply stop producing altogether. Often, when these up-and-coming managers see a drop in their income, they get discouraged and their focus changes back to what made them great. They lose sight of their managing responsibilities, and then we’re back to where we began.

Management skills

So, what is the blueprint for building a branch manager? Are managers born or made? Most importantly, do top producers always make good branch managers?

Simply put, branch management requires a different skillset that needs to be taught and developed. There is no cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach. It is not simply holding sales meetings, tracking results and demanding better performance.

Branch management is about knowing what key performance indicators, or KPI, to focus on and knowing how and when to turn the dial to impact results. It requires an understanding of the psychology and mindset of each loan originator on the team and knowing how to impact their motivational belief systems to lead them toward better production.

In addition, a branch-manager needs a good plan and well-defined goals. This plan, and the goals that go with it, should line up with the plans and goals of the company. A branch manager’s plan and goals cannot be “to be the top VA loan originators in the market,” for example, if their company has never done a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs loan and doesn’t plan on entering that market segment.

Good branch managers also have a strong vision and sense of who they are as individuals. They can then develop their team around that identity and surround themselves with like-minded individuals who share their vision on how to accomplish branch goals.

This identity and vision sets the foundation of the team and can be used as a barometer of performance and as a guide for making decisions. Managers with a strong vision can ask: “How does this choice fit into our vision

or identity?” The vision or identity should inspire and define the course for everyone on the team.

Training skills

Beyond creating a strong foundation for their branches, the best managers will implement coaching and mentoring programs to help develop the skills of the sales team they have built. Good branch managers know the importance of making those around them better. They understand that the growth of the team will be their responsibility and that coaching and mentoring can help the team achieve and surpass their goals.

This is one reason why great originators don’t always make good branch managers. For some, the art of selling has always come easy. To them, it is second nature, and they don’t understand why others can’t just “sell.” Like any other skill, the process of coaching

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needs to be taught and developed, and good branch managers need to understand what motivates each individual under them.

A good coaching program is well-defined and the steps are clearly laid out. Expectations must be set at the outset and checkpoints created along the way where success can be measured. Managers must know how to hold others — and themselves — accountable. A good coaching program will involve product training, sales training, pipeline management and, most importantly, referral development.



Building a better branch manager requires a particular set of parts that are brought together to create success. It requires the right

individual with the right vision and identity, surrounded by a like-minded team with a focus on greater goals. The better managers also must learn how to coach and mentor, know where their focus needs to be at all times, and be aware of what drives the market and how to impact it.

This is not an easy task and not everyone — including top producers — is cut out for this job. It is a job that, when done correctly, can make a huge impact on the company, and not only in the production sense. Great branch managers also help attract new talent, because up-and-coming talent will seek out opportunities to be developed by, and into, great managers. ■