

BCU: Elevating Employee Engagement Through Diversity, Inclusion, and A Culture of Belonging

Serving over 250,000 members in the United States and Puerto Rico, BCU has been listed as one of the top 100 workplaces by the Chicago Tribune for 6 years. When employees are asked about what makes BCU a great place to work, they often highlight the benefits package, incentives, and the free food that can be found throughout the building on any given day. But the key component that makes BCU an **extraordinary** place to work is the company culture. Using Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) as a method to elevate employee engagement, the Human Resources (HR) and Talent Management (TM) departments have made it a priority to integrate practices that positively shift the way employees feel at work, interact with one another, with members and the community they serve. Their approach of moving beyond checking D&I boxes and learning to demonstrate the value of individuality, has guided the organization to be a leading example of pushing boundaries to achieve a culture of belonging.

Putting Words into Action: The Power of Leading Inclusively

Diversity and Inclusion is often defined in terms of traditional differences, like race, gender, sexuality, etc. HR and TM at BCU recognized that these traditional D&I conversations lacked consideration for the variety of talents, strengths, opinions and experiences that come with each unique individual. To expand this conversation, maintain the standard of mutual respect, and maximize the cultural competency of all employees, TM with the help of a vendor, inQuest, introduced 'The Power of Leading Inclusively' training program in 2017. This 3.5 hour live experiential training brings employees together to challenge and discuss biases, diversity, and inclusion in a safe space. It was initially rolled out to all BCU leadership and in 2018, they began providing the training to all BCU employees. BCU believes everyone is responsible for behaving, encouraging, and leading in an inclusive way - personally and professionally.

In order to meet this goal and look toward the future needs of BCU, TM had a team member trained under inQuest to be an in-house trainer of The Power of Leading Inclusively. They are also working with the vendor to roll-out a webinar version that will give access to employees at the other 49 BCU branches across the U.S. Remote sessions are set to begin in 2019.

This training helped BCU employees have a clear understanding of unconscious bias, diversity, and the importance of inclusion in the workplace. Each session begins by creating a safe space for courageous conversation, then evolves into intentional self-examination, and ends with actionable behaviors that can be applied right away. The response was overwhelmingly positive and the impact gave new energy to leaders and teams alike.

"I found the training enlightening, informative, and well executed...I think everyone found something they could take back from the experience and practice in their professional and personal lives." – BCU Employee

Elevating Resources: Employee Resource Groups

Committed to making sure that every employee is represented with not only the space but the resources to become **extraordinary**, within the organization lies Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Entirely run by employees, these groups play a vital role in ensuring an inclusive environment at BCU where all are valued, included, and empowered to succeed. They provide mentorship, skill enhancement, and leadership opportunities so that every employee can advance their professional development.

- **Inclusion Network:** The Inclusion Network was created to propel the goals of the D&I strategy, but to also help foster a sense of belonging among employees. It is composed of a group of BCU employees across various departments and organizational levels.

They believe in cultivating the diverse talents and perspectives in the workplace and communities. By doing so, they are nurturing an inclusive environment where individuals are valued and empowered to reach their fullest potential.

With momentum in full tow, BCU began to see the evolution that comes from thinking beyond the box. Employees began looking to leverage their differences and build communities in the organization in non-traditional ways. Two unique ERGs formed as a collaborative outcome from their new way of seeing each other's worth.

- **Service Superheroes:** All BCU employees participate in CliftonStrengths assessments to identify and understand their Top 5 strengths. This is integrated into much of the fabric of leadership, teamwork, and performance. This ERG aims to create an encouraging and safe environment for one to learn, refresh, and build upon one's unique talents and strengths. Through this ERG, employees are given opportunities to build their network, connect with a mentor, and boost their development ultimately leading to extraordinary service.
- **Point Pros:**
Being particularly savvy of the SharePoint platform, the credit unions intranet, the Point Pros help and empower employees by leveraging their technical skills. They strive to increase technical competency, share knowledge, inform and educate each other while transforming business processes.

Demonstrating Respect and Value: Cultural and Awareness Events

Passionately promoting mutual respect and belonging at its core, the credit union has multiple initiatives to reinforce the message that every employee has and deserves the right to be authentic at work. Since 2017, the Inclusion Network has focused on creating opportunities and adding value to an already great workplace by highlighting several cultures and increasing awareness throughout the year. The momentum and impact has been electrical.

BCU began celebrating African-American History Month, and Women's History Month with a series of activities, trivia, and employee highlights from across the organization. The opportunities to celebrate and learn about each other sparked new connections and lively conversations. And if there is anything we love more than a little friendly competition, it is feeding each other. For two years now, 'Sabrosa Fest', a celebration of Hispanic Heritage, is one



of the most active and celebrated events with participants from all cultural backgrounds. It is an opportunity to showcase a dish, provide some cultural insight, and share a little family history. It is always hosted primarily in our Vernon Hills Headquarters office, but the energy and excitement could not be contained to just Illinois. Sabrosa Fest has also been embraced by BCU branches across the United States, including employees and members in our Puerto Rico branches.

With great cross-cultural support and involvement witnessed at 'Sabrosa Fest', this past year employees were encouraged to participate in a multicultural celebration titled 'A World of Flavors'. This was an event to showcase and celebrate the many diverse cultures within the organization. Employees were invited to bring a cultural dish of their choice with any cultural history, or items to share with others. Employees at remote locations were also encouraged to participate by either hosting the event at their own branches or submit a recipe and it's sentiment to their culture. Everyone who participated, at remote locations and locally, were entered into raffles to win Ancestry.com DNA kits.

In support of LGBTQ employees, members, and relationships among company partners, the credit union celebrates Pride Month. For the past two years, Pride Month has been honored with a series of events to activate employee engagement and present a supportive environment, as well as promote kindness and love. In 2017, HR and TM provided employees with 'pride' kits that held guided educational activities surrounding the LGBTQ community. Taking the initiative beyond headquarters, these kits were also sent to BCU service centers across the United States and Puerto Rico.

To celebrate Pride Month in 2018, the credit union championed the statement, 'Love Always Wins'. With great enthusiasm and participation on the company's intranet, employees finished the phrase, "Love is..." This allowed employees to learn about their colleagues, as well as discuss and reflect on different



interpretations of love. The month wrapped up with a bang as the credit union collaborated with company partner, Baxter Healthcare, walking in the Chicago Pride Parade. In 2019, the organization hopes to collaborate with our company partner, Target in efforts to strengthen membership engagement in remote branches and to build on the sense of community with BCU partners.

Maintaining the Conversation: Advancing D&I in the Credit Union & Talent Development Industries

Honoring the notion that leaders must demonstrate what belonging looks like, BCU has committed to placing Diversity and Inclusion at the forefront of conversation in the Credit Union Industry. At the 2018 Illinois Credit Union League (ICUL) 88th Annual Convention, a TM representative from BCU presented during the "Diversity & Inclusion for CU Boards, Staff" segment as a panelist to bring awareness, highlight best practices, and activate discourse around understanding and embracing D&I as a collective in the industry. BCU's TM continued this discussion at the ICUL DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Dialogue event later in the year, by facilitating conversations around challenges, navigating bias and building equity among executive boards and talent acquisition in the workplace.

This past year, BCU's journey of revitalizing their culture and promoting belonging was the focal point of an article from The Association for Talent Development. The article titled "D&I is Far More Than Checking Boxes", used the credit union as an example of what it means to redefine D&I and how an organization can move forward with action to achieve a more engaged, productive, successful, and loyal workforce. When asked what belonging feels like, BCU TM Program Lead, Anjoli Walker told ATD:

"My relationships are more meaningful and productive when I can leverage my strengths and experiences. I don't want a seat at the table just because I'm African American. I hope my leadership sees and values my whole package, including me being an African American woman. And once I feel that my leadership knows and values me, that's where I know I belong. Then I'm going to be able to deliver my best for my leaders and my organization".

Engagement Speaks Volumes: Analyzing the Impact

To evaluate the D&I strategy and understand how employees feel, TM at BCU conducted an engagement survey and found that 92% of employees believe that BCU valued diversity and feel that they have the opportunity to give their best at work.

“It's great to come to work every day at a company that fosters a culture of employees feeling welcomed, respected, and heard.” – BCU Employee

BCU has made tremendous strides in ensuring that every employee feels a sense of belonging and acceptance. But HR and TM believe that there is more work to be done as the D&I conversation in the Credit Union industry is just beginning to take flight. With employees feeling uplifted, excited to engage and eager to get involved, BCU won't fall short of enhancing its diverse, inclusive, and **extraordinary** culture in 2019.