

## The Value of Employee Feedback

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I've never been the quiet type. I've always had lots of thoughts and plenty to say. In grade school my teachers often wrote "talks excessively in class" on my report cards. This was my first taste of feedback, and it wasn't the good kind. I quickly realized the value of the feedback loop.

I've generally always been vocal. If my words didn't reveal my thoughts, my facial expressions usually gave me away - and that's still true to this day (although my filter has gotten better).

In the workplace, this can be useful because I'm not scared to make a suggestion on process improvements. However, not everyone is a social extrovert ready to provide their feedback. Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, a feedback loop is essential in life and the workplace. Feedback allows you to make necessary adjustments when others see an opportunity for improvement.

In a credit union, there's no better person to provide feedback than those on the ground doing the work. Employee feedback allows leadership to gauge the climate of the credit union and make adjustments accordingly. It also promotes empowerment amongst employees and makes them feel like their ideas and opinions matter.

Credit unions, at the very heart of their existence, are cooperative institutions working for the greater good of their members. Success is nearly always a collective effort, which is why feedback is so important, and this is something the \$571 million Direct Federal Credit Union in Needham, Mass., recognizes. Direct created an app called the "DirectThinker," which allows credit union employees to provide feedback to leadership through an app installed on each employee's computer.

Kristen Johnson, director of marketing for Direct, said the idea for the app came to fruition because the credit union was trying to foster a culture of innovative idea generation, involve employees across the credit union in its strategic planning process and empower all employees to voice their opinions - no matter what the topic may be.

Johnson said, "DirectThinker is set up to mirror our strategic plan. When an employee goes to submit their idea to the app, they first must choose which focus area of our strategic plan the idea falls into. This helps reinforce our strategic plan to employees and helps them directly correlate how their idea will better the credit union. The idea is then submitted and reviewed by a 'DirectThinker Committee' who reviews each idea and passes it along to the specific senior leader it applies to; the senior leader then responds directly to the submitter."

The DirectThinker app has improved processes at the credit union, which in turn has saved employees' time in their everyday work. For example, an employee submitted feedback on how to improve the member survey process. In turn, the process was dramatically shortened. Another employee submitted feedback saying that members often bring their children to home equity line of credit closings. Now, the credit union provides the children of these members with coloring books and crayons during closings to keep them occupied so their parents can focus on going through all the HELOC paperwork.



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It's these small, often cost-free adjustments that can have so much impact on a credit union's culture and work productivity. Joseph Walsh, president/CEO for Direct, said, "There is no greater competitive advantage than empowering every employee of Direct to submit ideas across all strategic areas of the organization."

Johnson said employees now feel more empowered to provide ideas and feedback, and appreciated when they receive feedback directly about their idea. He added it has helped contribute immensely to alignment efforts across the organization.

Rita DellaRocca, Direct's director of first impressions, who is responsible for greeting members, said, "I love that my voice is heard at Direct. With DirectThinker we all have the means to express our ideas and apply them in the credit union strategy."

Johnson said all credit unions and employers should have an employee feedback tool in place.

"We have found that the best ideas come from those who are doing the work every day. The smallest idea may make the biggest impact. It is also beneficial to help see trends in any one area where an idea is coming from. If we start seeing a lot of ideas about one particular pain point, we know that we have to take a step back and look at that pain point in more detail."

Does your credit union have a feedback tool in place? If so, how has it impacted your credit union? Shoot me an email and share your feedback.

