

Of Bread Trucks And Underwear

by [Steve Brown](#)

How many bank managers would like to take a prospective new employee for a test run before hiring? One bread company in New York City got an unsolicited opportunity to do just that. One night at 3am, a young man wearing only his underwear stole a truck filled with French bread and whole wheat rolls bound for restaurants and stores. The delivery schedule was on the front seat of the truck and the thief dutifully made the first three deliveries. Things got a little sketchier at that point as the driver tossed loaves out the window while speeding down Lexington Avenue. He then headed for Queens, tailgating a limousine he thought would lead him to his next delivery. The limo driver called the police and questions were raised about the mental stability of the thief. As we see it, the bread company had an opportunity to gain a truly enthusiastic, albeit slightly inconsistent employee.

You don't have to have a bread truck to take a closer look at your employees though. A study last year by Deloitte found that only 11% of employees in the U.S. are passionate about their work and community bankers are no exception. Overall, the study found employers look for workers who can navigate challenges and accelerate the performance of the enterprise - those typically are also the most passionate employees. The study also found that the most passionate employees worked in management (17%) and marketing (16%), but were least likely to reside in customer service (5%) or accounting/finance (7%). Maybe it is time to buy the less passionate in your bank a lunch and tell them they are doing a great job.

We would note that community banks have many attributes that should attract passionate people. In fact, the study found the percentage of passionate employees in a company generally has an inverse relationship to the size of the organization. In organizations with more than 1,000 employees, for example, the level of passionate employees drops to 9% (vs. 13% for smaller companies).

Community banks also have a unique relationship to the markets in which they operate. Personal service is encouraged and most often employees have the opportunity to see projects through to completion. One bank web site we recently found states: Our employees are at the forefront of our commitment to our local communities. Our employees live, work and volunteer within the neighborhoods we serve, they truly know and care for our clients. This sounds pretty passionate to us.

If you are passionate about improving your bank, you may wonder what the characteristics of a passionate employee actually are. They include (1) Commitment to long-range goals and the ability to keep a long term perspective, even in the face of disruption. (2) Embracing challenges as opportunities to learn and grow stronger. (3) The tendency to build strong trust-based relationships essential for collaboration and honest feedback. According to the survey, 45% of U.S. workers demonstrate at least two of the three attributes and that is a pretty good start.

In the absence of taking prospective employees for a bread truck test drive, there are some things to look for when interviewing. First, the interview should feel more like a conversation between interested parties and the candidate should have some strong opinions. Next, the candidate should ask questions and be up to date on the industry and know things about your bank. Finally, they should demonstrate they passionately believe work is fun and they are generally happy people.

Passionate people have lots of stories because they believe in what they are doing, so enjoy the ride as you interview.

As for his part, we know the bread truck thief had an abundance of passion but also probably a few other issues. In an interesting twist, other company drivers were quoted as saying it was the best thing they had seen since sliced bread.

BANK NEWS

Housing

JPMorgan research points out the ratio of median home prices to median family incomes is about 3.15 vs. 4.00 at the peak, but above the 2.86 average of the 20Ys prior to the peak. No bubble yet, but something to monitor for weakness

Data Breach

The Ponemon Institute reports the average cost of a data breach to U.S. companies in 2013 was \$3.5mm, up 15% vs. 2012.

Small Biz

Fradata reports 20% of franchisees own more than one unit, 54% of all franchised units are controlled by multi-unit operators, 69% of multi unit franchisees own three units and 83% own five or less. Community banks targeting loans to franchise owners may want to consider offering a package for multiple loans if the operator is of high quality, in order to garner more business.

New Customers

Community banks thinking of ways to capture new customers may want to try bringing experts into the branches to hold seminars teaching couples how to better manage their money. We say this because CNN Money finds 70% of married couples argue about money and the top five money arguments are about: frivolous purchases (46%), household budgeting (33%), credit card debt (26%), insufficient emergency savings (25%) and insufficient retirement savings (22%) and community banks are well positioned to help (so can sell more services as well).

Economic Growth

The data shows the economy has grown at just over a 2% pace since mid 2009.

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