Bank of Holland hones career-oriented culture

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THE BANK OF holland

GRAND RAPIDS — Compared to many banking organizations, The Bank of Holland would be considered small, but by creating a culture of learning, the organization has been able to successfully recruit and retain top talent out of college.

"(Students) are generally career focused. I think a lot of them are very understanding of the fact that, long-term, a well-balanced career is going to get them further than a short-term type fix. We do compete with other banks. We don't pay the highest rate in the market in terms of people coming into the bank — we can't compete at that level sometimes," said Paul Anema, the bank's vice president of human resources. "The tradeoff is when we can offer them a well-rounded career and aggressively promote them internally. It's a neat culture to work in because of that."

A well-rounded experience is highly valued at The Bank of Holland, which puts a heavy emphasis on education. Every employee has an individual learning plan that addresses their needs. Senior management finds ways to fill the knowledge gaps of employees and reviews their learning plan with them.

For special recruits, the bank has what it calls its Professional Development Program. The three-and-a-half-year program recently graduated its first class.

"The Bank of Holland is trying to create a unique culture in the banking environment. This program is an integral part of that culture. We want people who bank with us to have a very intimate person-to-person experience," said Anema. "What this program is designed to do is tap into the colleges — and we try to get the cream of the crop out of the colleges — and try to get the students to understand we want to offer them a career and not a job. That career is focused on getting a well-rounded experience in banking."

The program puts its PDP candidates through rotations in the various financial areas such as credit, loan documentation, retail and cash management, lending, loan review and compliance, mortgages, operations and administration.

"As the bank continues to grow, we want them to be in position for those opportunities in a sales position, management or supervisory position. We're having a good, high success rate for that."

COURTESY THE BANK OF HOLLAND

Paul Anema, center, speaks with The Bank of Holland employees Rachel Swearingen and Dustin Hopkins as part of the bank's Professional Development Program.

PDP candidates can be placed in any one of the bank's four locations: Holland, Grand Rapids, Traverse City and Petoskey. The candidates work closely with senior members of the bank and the community to prepare for leadership roles.

"Not only does it give them a wide perspective with respect to the knowledge and skills and the experiences they're going to have, but it gives them a wide degree of knowledge in terms of meeting clients and customers right up front as they go on visits with our experienced staff. It also gives them a wide degree of experience in terms of range of management in the company," he said. "These candidates get the opportunity to be mentored by senior members of the bank or members of the community who are in positions of leadership."