



# Bank's Adult Education Program Helps Teammates Succeed and Serve Clients

By Ken Carrig

It is no secret that technology is changing the way people manage their money — and that banks are at the forefront of this trend. Tools such as online banking and mobile deposit are making it easier than ever for clients to track their spending and stay in financial control, whether from the

convenience of their home or anywhere with mobile service. However, a lesser-known consequence of this move toward technology for day-to-day banking needs is how it is reshaping interactions in bank branches.

Today, the average client visiting a SunTrust branch comes with more sophisticated needs. A person can now deposit a check remotely, but often still wants in-person meet-

ings to ask more complicated financial questions. One of the ways we are responding to this trend is

through the Professional Banking Operations and Leadership Program, or PATHways, a 36-credit certificate program that provides teammates with a deeper understanding of finance, the banking industry and our company.

SunTrust's purpose is lighting the way to financial well-being and, like other purpose-driven companies, accomplishing this begins with our teammates. The inaugural class of 32 students graduating from PATHways in 2014 represents the bank's efforts to invest in our people so we can more effectively deliver on our purpose. Creating this program involved an intensive process to custom design a curriculum that uniquely met our needs.

## Creating a PATHway

We realized early in the PATHways process that we needed a partner who could turn our ideas into a coherent curriculum — and which provided third-party credibility. Bellevue University, an established institution recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* for its online education programs, was a natural fit

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and helped us structure courses that cover a wide range of banking topics, from marketing to banking operations and leadership training.

A guiding principle for PATHways from the beginning was flexibility without sacrificing quality. We wanted to be sensitive to teammates balancing work and life demands. However, we also wanted an academically rigorous program that would inevitably require a substantial time commitment.

The result was a program of 12 classes that takes about two years to complete. Each course is six weeks long and all assignments can be completed on the student's own time. By taking one class at a time, which is how most students choose to complete the program, enrollees are able to fully immerse themselves in a particular subject area. Enrollment occurs on a rolling basis with new groups created every two months.

An added benefit is that the credits can be applied toward a bachelor's degree at Bellevue University if students want to continue their studies.

### Key Success Factors

When we introduced PATHways in 2012, it was one of the first programs of its kind in the banking industry. Today, enrollment has grown from 38 to 120 students and interest continues to build. For companies looking to make similar investments in their employees, three things proved to be key factors in the program's success.

First, we partnered with an organization that shared our values and vision for the program. Bellevue University is committed to providing superior online education to its students, and brought that passion

and experience to the partnership. Through a close working relationship, we developed courses tailored to SunTrust and which uniquely prepared teammates to serve our clients better.

Second, we wanted to cultivate working relationships across the bank that would help and empower teammates to solve business challenges. PATHways courses require students to work in groups so that they have opportunities to practice their leadership skills and work collaboratively toward a common goal. These are important skills within the banking industry and directly relevant to the situations teammates encounter at work.

Finally, we wanted to make it accessible to all teammates. SunTrust's tuition assistance program covers 75 percent of the program's cost, and any teammate willing to apply and do the work required of the program is welcome to participate.

For human resources leaders, the right investment in employees is the ultimate win-win scenario. Not only do programs like PATHways build loyalty, but they also allow people to be more successful in their current job. For a service company like SunTrust, this directly impacts the bottom line. When our teammates have a richer understanding of the full range of services we offer and how they can help people achieve financial well-being, we can better compete for the business of clients and prospects. **BN**

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SunTrust's PathWAYS program graduated its inaugural class in 2014. Among the 32 students were, from left: Darren Stavely, Jeremy Jones, Melissa Shepperson, Adam Boutillette, Kevin Harris and Kimberly Steudtner. The 36-credit program, a collaboration with Bellevue University, takes about two years to complete. Each course is six-weeks long and all assignments can be completed on the student's own time.

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