

CASE STUDY SERIES »

WaFd Bank

Adopting Check-Ins to change culture

WaFd Bank, founded in 1917 in Ballard, Washington as a Savings & Loan Thrift, is now the second largest bank headquartered in the Pacific Northwest. A full service consumer and commercial bank, it has grown to include over 200 branches and 2,000 employees throughout eight U.S. states.

Over the past few years, their business model has been changing. Their business objective is to be a highly profitable digital-first bank delivering friendly personalized attention and customized expert advice to clients — all while adapting to remote work opportunities and maintaining their corporate values of integrity, teamwork, ownership, service, simplicity, and discipline.

THE SITUATION

Accelerating digital transformation

WaFd is proud of its long history, but change is inevitable and necessary in any business culture. Even before the global pandemic hit, WaFd was undergoing a gradual culture change. These changes only accelerated with the advent of COVID-19 restrictions. They recognized that one change they needed to make was to do away with the antiquated annual performance review and develop a culture of real-time performance coaching and alignment of performance objectives. WaFd knew that new HR approaches and tools could help with this.

StandOut represented a natural fit for an organization wanting to create a strong sense of connection between team leaders and team members, helping leaders understand their team's strengths and how people were feeling about their work,



~ \$20B in
Total Assets



Branches in
8 U.S. States



2,100 team
members



93% Glassdoor
approval rating

“We needed to get people to lean into the purpose of StandOut, which is improving everyone’s communication experience. Then StandOut came out with these videos that answer a lot of the questions. They remove the fear factor for leaders and employees.”

Julia Thomas, WaFd VP, Senior Universal Training Manager & **Lisa King**, WaFd SVP, Chief People Person

week by week. However, WaFd also knew that for these new practices to be successful, they would have to be willingly adopted by employees.

“Employees were skeptical when StandOut first was launched” says Ronda Tomlinson, WaFd SVP of Learning & Development Group. Some team members found the StandOut questions quite personal for the workplace. The focus on ‘what do I love, what do I loathe, and do I add value?’ initially created suspicions and caused people to be less engaged with the StandOut tools. Meanwhile, team leaders who were already having production meetings with their teams had trouble seeing the value of StandOut, asking, “how is this different?” and “Why are you adding one more thing for me to do?” StandOut adoption initially lagged behind targets.

THE SOLUTION

“Make this WaFd”

WaFd knew that they had to make StandOut more than “just another thing to do.” So they doubled down on ensuring that StandOut was integrated into the culture, in a way that resonated with their people.

It started by putting frontline leaders through the StandOut Team Leader program, to help them build awareness of the value of Check-Ins and taking a strengths-based approach to leading their teams. They piloted an Adoption Workshop to generate ideas for how to address their users’ journey with this new approach in a way that felt authentic to WaFd. And, perhaps most impactfully — they showed cartoons.

Cartoons? It turned out that the videos StandOut includes as guides to Check-Ins were instrumental in answering employees’ questions and removing the fear factor that comes with a new way of doing things. WaFd’s learning team put together a package that helped people see the benefits of using Check-Ins. Their efforts made a world of difference.

They’ve gone from 26% of the organization using StandOut to 75%, building a common understanding of strengths language and concepts. And in one year, they drove the percentage of people regularly checking in from 40% to 54%, with 68% of people actively using StandOut. This growth has laid the foundation for the organization to build a strong future by embracing a strengths-based approach to change.

THE RESULTS

WaFd was able to speak in a more powerful way to support leaders, teams and individuals across the company — both tenured and new associates — by rallying around a culture of connection and strengths.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

- Regular Check-In usage moved from 40% to 54% YOY.
 - Employees using StandOut increased from 26% of org to 75%.
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