

“The Front Line CEO” by Jeff Rendel, Certified Speaking Professional

A mid-sized credit union CEO friend works the teller line one Friday each month. Lightheartedly, he expresses to me that branch managers won't give him a cash drawer. “Is this really a beneficial use of your CEO time and pay?” I skeptically ask him. “Quite possibly the best,” he replies. “Impressive strategies often originate on the front line. I learn a lot from those who see more members in a day than I might see in a month.”

As CEOs work through this planning season and build plans for 2015, it is important to confer with colleagues who are familiar with members: your front line leaders. This isn't for delegation: this job needs a CEO's claim. Drawing on these associates as an opportunity and supply of intelligence about members' needs and expectations brings understanding to what the CEO needs most from those who know best.

A Mountain West credit union CEO believes that strategy, culture, and the front line are so interrelated that she delineates strategic goals and plans to the branch and support area levels, championing her credit union's front lines as they execute the daily inputs required for strategic success. Even more, member-facing strategies are built from the front lines up. “By consistently listening, deliberating, and acting upon ideas from those who see our members most, we genuinely understand our members' needs. It is chancy to rely upon this information through departments and layers in the credit union. Instead, I go straight to our front line leaders to gain their operating insights to strategic matters,” she explains. “I own this strategic area of focus.”

There is an excellent bonus result that comes from seeking participation and listening carefully to your front line leaders as you design strategy and supporting plans: Your front line leaders will take ownership of their parts in strategic success and help your credit union deliver on your plans for the future. Excellent strategies are only as good as the implementation. Quite often, that execution is based on the everyday actions from your credit union's front line. Learn the most about your members' needs for tomorrow from those who serve your members' needs today.

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Jeff Rendel, Certified Speaking Professional, and President of Rising Above Enterprises works with credit unions that want elite results in leadership, sales, and strategy. Each year, he addresses and facilitates for more than 100 credit unions and their business partners.

Contact: jeff@jeffrendel.com; www.jeffrendel.com; 951.340.3770.