

Unique Management Services

Making the Right Calls for Team Members

By Rebecca Patrick

At one time or another, many of us have had an overdue library book or DVD. If the delinquency gets out of hand, you may hear from Unique Management Services/Unique Integrated Communications (UMS), a collection agency for public libraries in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

More than two decades ago, Lyle Stucki and Charles Gary founded UMS, located in Jeffersonville, with this straightforward premise: to help return long overdue materials back to libraries so patrons can borrow again. Today, UMS serves over 1,700 public libraries. From the start, owners also made sure to foster an inviting, engaging environment for staff.

Integrity, inclusion, caring

“Integrity is instilled in our culture, and we recruit for that culture,” says president Nicole Atkins, who has been in that role for five years and with the company for 16.

HR manager Kenes Bowling, who is the “oldest guy” there, believes this integrity and its byproducts characterize what’s special about UMS.

“We are all on the same page – to be of service to each other and our customers. There is a high level of trust throughout the organization. It starts with the ownership; they do the right thing, the right way. Honesty is a huge component of our character. It leads to a feeling that we are in a place that we can trust and to which we can belong.”

The sense of camaraderie is reinforced by the lay of the land. You will find no offices, even for leadership; it’s only open space with cubicles for the 90 full and part-time staff members.

For Patricia Berger, a contact specialist in the call center, it’s like night and day from a previous employer.

“Here, even the daytime people know me and say ‘hello’ (as the shifts change). You feel like you are part of the team.”

To Kris Burns, an answer center supervisor, that translates to valuing his input.

“I remember one time when I was working on a project with our leadership team and threw out an idea and basically was told, ‘Go work

on something, bring it back and we’ll take a look at it,’ ” he begins.

“Innovative thinking and thinking through problems are highly encouraged. It feels like you are being heard and considered.”

As Bowling puts it, “I feel what I do counts. I know what I do matters – it matters internally and to my customers. I’m part of helping make this thing work.”

Above all, the company makes sure to take care of its own.

“The owners have a real willingness to help employees. They are very open-minded and very caring. How employees are treated is very important,” Atkins offers.

She cites a significant, tangible example. The owners bought and renovated a house nearby that now features different apartments. Several families from UMS, who previously were having trouble making ends meet, live there and pay low rent.

Perks small and large

Like with many companies on the Best Places list, there are a lot of little things at UMS that add up and show employees they matter. Case in point: Several times a year management cooks breakfast or lunch. At Christmastime and for a summer picnic, employees can invite their families to the festivities.

Other efforts are directed at trying to inject a little fun into the workday. There are various decorating competitions, for example, during the Kentucky Derby and Halloween.

“Around Super Bowl time, we have a dip-off where people get to try different dips; we give awards and prizes for that. They love it,” Atkins states.

The relaxed dress code, she says, also really appeals to staff, many of whom are students.

One larger benefit Berger really appreciates is the quarterly attendance bonus for part-time employees who continually show up. The way it works is for every 200 consecutive hours that part-time employees – the call center workers – are in the office, they receive either a paid day off or extra money.



A friendly tug-of-war at the annual summer picnic, where employees can also invite their families to join the fun.

Berger typically elects to receive extra days off for her good attendance, using them for a week’s vacation around the Kentucky Derby and then at Christmas.

“It’s great. Not many people who work part time get a vacation,” she recognizes.

Education matters

UMS also places a high value on schooling and professional education.

The company will pay for an employee’s college degree at a state school “when it makes sense for that employee and for the business,” according to Bowling. The better the employee’s grades, the more UMS pays. A “B” average or higher nets 100% tuition covered, while a “C” grade receives 75%.

Continual training and personal growth are also emphasized.

“Every employee has an annual professional-personal development plan. We take a look at an employee’s near-term goals, long-term goals and any job changes or further skill development that may be required,” Bowling explains.

“Specific objectives are then developed to help the employee be the best he or she can be. Sometimes it’s highly related to the job and sometimes it’s only loosely related.”

UMS chooses a charity each Christmas. The Dare to Care drive, collecting food and money for those in need, is met with much enthusiasm.



He mentions an employee with a heavy accent who wanted to be a little more fluent with the English language, and she’s now in tutoring sessions with a linguist.

“It will be helpful for her on the job but not essential, but it’s something that will help her grow individually,” Bowling remarks.

Ron Kinzel, manager of operations, is currently working on his collections certificate, taking courses for free.

“Six times a year I’m in seminars. You have the freedom to direct your own plan. If you can show how this (training) would benefit the company and you personally, they will assist you in getting it,” he stresses.

“I graduated college with a music degree and took a part-time job here. (UMS) has really rewarded my efforts to be a good employee.”

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