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This week, The Industry Campus continues its series featuring Corporate Training and Education Award winners by taking a look at Silver Hill Financial's training program.

Training Program Case Study: Silver Hill Financial

Silver Hill Financial received Honorable Mention recognition for the Corporate Training and Education (CTE) Award for Best Overall Corporate Training Program - Less Than 1,000 Employees. So what makes Silver Hill Training and Resources (STAR) stand out among other training programs? This week, *The Industry Campus* interviewed Brian Wallace and the training staff to present to you a case study of this innovative program.

Company Name: Silver Hill Financial

Learning Initiative: Silver Hill Training and Resources (STAR) program

Staff Size: Seven

Staff Contact: Brian Wallace, Training Director

Program Details

Company Info: Headquartered in Miami, with regional offices in Boston, Chicago and Las Vegas, Silver Hill Financial is a nationwide commercial real estate lender that offers financing to borrowers through a network of mortgage brokers and correspondents across the country. The company's innovative, residential-style program uses flexible underwriting criteria ideal for strong commercial borrowers seeking loans for \$100,000 to \$1,000,000. For more information on Silver Hill Financial, please visit www.silverhillfinancial.com/ or call at (888) 988-8843.

Target Audience: Internal new hires and current internal employees and external mortgage originators, brokers and correspondents

The Challenge(s)/Obstacles: To really understand why training is so important to Silver Hill Financial, you have to understand the company and its product. Its product is new to the industry and unique to Silver Hill. They employ a commercial underwriting process

that no other company in the industry uses, so employees must understand the related procedures and criteria to effectively and successfully perform their jobs.

"We have grown extremely fast, and so has the popularity of our unique underwriting process," says Brian Wallace, training director, Silver Hill Financial. "Recruiting was a challenge, and we offered first class training as an incentive, and providing that training took a lot of work. We work in a fast-paced environment, and we had to have the training keep up with the company, doubling our efforts across the board to deliver it."

Another challenge was training new hires that were new to the mortgage industry. Not only did they need to be training on the basics of the industry, they needed to be trained on the company's internal processes.

"In addition to the training for new hires, we had to provide support and training for the existing staff," says Brian. "There were a few folks here before the training programs were implemented, so they had to be brought up to speed."

The Solution: "The solution was establishing a premier training program with the right amount of personnel with the right lesson materials with the right execution," says Brian. "One of the most impressive things about Silver Hill is the senior management's commitment to education. When the company began back in 2003, training was one of their top objectives. As our niche product is completely new to the industry, training is the key to the company's success."

Implementation Process: There were several phases and plans for execution of the training program.

1. Dealing with the unique underwriting process: Silver Hill's streamlined process applies a unique method of underwriting commercial loans by underwriting the strength of the borrower, not the property. As a result of this process, the mortgage originators and correspondents had to understand the program in order to operate. The underwriting process is a critical element of all training diagrams, manuals and courses geared to focus on that aspect of the program.

2. Support and training for existing staff: "First, we implemented an e-learning platform and rolled out the triage initiative," says Brian. "The Triage Team set out to train existing staff to give them the same advantages offered to new hires through New Hires Program."

3. The program as a whole: Silver Hill took the following steps to create effective training programs:

- Formed a team of professional development experts focused on five distinct channels:
 - Sales
 - Operations
 - Administration
 - Leadership support
 - eLearning
 - Each division has manager and trainer support personnel

4. Train the Trainers: "A lot of emphasis was placed on making sure our trainers were fully qualified and skilled in training the many people taking courses," says Brian. "The company has invested a lot in our trainers to develop a successful program."

5. Department branding: "The STAR logo makes us very easy to identify in our corporate culture," says Brian. "The logo appears on shirts, flyers, letterhead, and other materials; the employees know what STAR is and what we are taking about."

6. Created a three week new hire training program: Known as the Learning Center, the three week, new hire training program was developed to swiftly increase the knowledge of new staff. This first initiative was necessary to keep pace with the growth of the company.

7. Training external partners: "Because of the uniqueness of our commercial lending program, training our external partners was critical to our success. Our business partners [customers] deal mostly in residential mortgages and this target usually shies away from small-balance commercial loans, because they think the process is too complicated for the income potential. Our program employs a completely different process which is very similar to the residential process they are already familiar with. Getting the word out on this and explaining the program has always been a top priority. On our website, mortgage originators can access 'Learning Modules' to help them learn how Silver Hill's underwriting process works," says Brian.

"Annually, there are 250 free Silver Sessions across the country for our target audience. These sessions provide a general overview on our unique program and in 2006 we will be rolling-out three specific modules on sourcing, marketing and the Silver Hill process." In addition, Silver Hill makes efforts to help develop their customers through tried and true practices. This is accomplished through a partnership with one of America's most sought-after motivational sales speakers, Todd Duncan. The company sponsors half-day instructional seminars featuring Duncan's strategies for propelling mortgage careers to new levels. Originators and brokers who attend this special Silver Session and workshop will learn how to effectively grow their business by practicing High Trust Selling, a field-tested system for complete sales, life, time, and business mastery.

Benefits of the Program: As a result of their notable growth, Silver Hill hires many new talented employees, and they must train them quickly and effectively. "It gives us a competitive edge by bringing fresh perspectives and new ideas to the table. Not everyone comes from the mortgage business, and we come together on this unique program and make it work." Regardless of experience, new hires go through the three-week Learning Center program and learn industry specific and company specific knowledge and processes.

The training program has been a huge benefit to Silver Hill's recruiting efforts. "We give employees the knowledge they are seeking, and this level of training is a benefit that many companies do not offer," says Brian. "And it helps us with our recruiting in this tight market. It's a win-win situation for everybody."

Measurement/Results: Silver Hill conducts regular evaluations after each class or module, and uses the data to enhance the programs to make them better with each offering.

"It's very exciting to see where training has been and where it's going. Gone are the days where you can stand in front of a class and call it training. You need to get the students' attention. We don't call it training; we call it 'entertraining'. The evaluations pull a lot of weight for us on how we can make things better. Our surveys are much longer than normal, but they are very thorough."

Lessons Learned:

1. The STAR team was built, the infrastructure is in place and the training is rolling out.
2. We effectively implemented the following training programs:
Management training - a joint venture with the University of Miami, using their expertise to provide management and leadership training
New hire training
Employee orientation
eLearning platform
System support
Call center training
Operations training
Remote access training
Sales training
Leadership training
Many process and procedures modules

"We brought in industry professionals to train the trainers," says Brian. "And it paid off with big dividends, allowing us to deliver the best training program in the mortgage business."

Feedback: The company has received the following feedback from internal staff:

"Silver Hill Financial's STAR team is among the finest anywhere. Their dedication, hard work, and unwavering commitment throughout all of our growth challenges were instrumental in meeting our aggressive goals. The STAR team extended themselves time and time again to ensure that our training program effectively captured and communicated Silver Hill's unique residential-approach to commercial lending."

- Joanna Schwartz, Managing Director

"I believe that training is an investment not only in productivity, but in retention and long-term job satisfaction of our people. A well trained sales team is one of the few sustainable competitive advantages that a mortgage company can create in today's marketplace. It is to this end that the STAR team was created. The strength of this

training team is the key to the successful sales careers which are the foundation of our success as a company." - Mike Boggiano, Senior VP, National Sales Manager

Advice to Others: Brian suggests that once your training program is implemented, there are several things to develop to stay effective:

1. You want to follow an organized, 10 step course development process. Silver Hill trainers spend half their time developing content and half their time delivering content, creating more well-rounded employees.

2. Ensure that employees receive the most from the program. Silver Hill publishes weekly training schedules, offers internal incentive programs, and comprehensive online resources.

3. Address a range of employee needs from personal development to successful selling. In the first year, Silver Hill developed programs for all departments, hitting employee needs right off the bat.

4. Stay current and well-educated on current terminology and techniques.

5. Spend time at events such as MBA's Trainer's Roundtable. Interact with your peers in non-work and non-threatening groups to share ideas and strategies.