

Making the World a Better Place

An Interview with Will Sutton,
President and Director, The BB&T Leadership Institute, and Executive Vice President, BB&T Corporation

EDITORS' NOTE As President and Director, Will Sutton leads The BB&T Leadership Institute in delivering leadership development and human resources programs and services to corporate clients across the United States and to senior leaders throughout BB&T. The Leadership Institute also works with school systems and emerging student leaders on leadership and financial literacy initiatives. Sutton joined Branch Banking and Trust Company in 1992. After completing the Leadership Development Program, he moved to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where he served in various leadership and relationship manager roles before joining the training department in 1996. He served as manager of the BB&T University from 2005 until 2013. He was also responsible for The BB&T Banking School at Wake Forest University and BB&T's Leadership Development Program. He currently serves on the board of directors for the North Carolina Business Committee for Education and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Project Impact initiative. Sutton is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a B.A. degree in economics and a graduate of the Stonier Graduate School of Banking at the University of Pennsylvania.



Will Sutton

organizations with a leadership development partner that helps create dynamic and effective leaders, the Institute is able to increase employee retention and improve the bottom line.

What was the vision in creating The BB&T Leadership Institute and how do you define the mission of the Institute?

The Leadership Institute started as the vision of our CEO, Kelly King. In a nutshell, he gathered several of us in 2012 and said, "I've got an idea. Not sure what it looks like and I want you to help me figure it out. How do we get our message

of positive and hopeful leadership out to the broadest possible audience?" From there, the Institute was born. We already owned a leadership development firm which we purchased in 1994, Farr Associates, that we had never fully leveraged. We decided to take Farr, rebrand it as The BB&T Leadership Institute, and use it as the platform to execute on Kelly's idea. Our vision is to create a world-class center for developing exceptional leaders, teams and organizations. It is all about making the world a better place.

Will you provide an overview of the key areas of focus and programs for the Institute?

Dr. Jim Farr was a psychologist and that heritage of blending the science of psychology with the art of leadership is still very much the

COMPANY BRIEF BB&T (bbt.com) is one of the largest financial services holding companies in the U.S. with \$230.9 billion in assets and market capitalization of approximately \$37.6 billion as of June 30, 2019. Building on a long tradition of excellence in community banking, BB&T offers a wide range of financial services including retail and commercial banking, investments, insurance, wealth management, asset management, mortgage, corporate banking, capital markets and specialized lending. Based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, BB&T operates more than 1,700 financial centers in 15 states and Washington, D.C. and is consistently recognized for outstanding client service by Greenwich Associates for small business and middle market banking. BB&T and SunTrust have merged to become Truist.

Advancing the quiet revolution of psychological leadership development, The BB&T Leadership Institute (bbtleadershipinstitute.com) begins by identifying client's specific goals and challenges. Its consultants then develop the best approaches to address that client's needs and tailor offerings to individual executives, teams or both. By providing

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thread that gets pulled through all of our work. Dr. Farr was one of the first to do this and actually began this work in the mid-'50s so we've been at this for over 60 years. Dr. Farr's legacy is still very much alive at the Leadership Institute. Our Director of Programs is a neuropsychologist and all of our consultants are required to have an advanced degree in psychology. Our director of research is a social psychologist. Our calling card is self-awareness. We provide leaders with a unique understanding of their strengths and how to leverage those while also understanding what happens when their leadership comes under pressure, whether it's through conflict, stress or other factors so common to high-level leaders. This understanding has profound impact on our participants and many describe the program as life-changing.

We have five key product areas. The first, and our calling card, is leadership development. We offer various programs and personalized executive coaching. The second is team building. We have a process called Team Optimization that allows us to work closely with the executive to improve team performance in whatever area is of the greatest need, whether it is communication, collaboration, conflict, decision-making, etc. Third, we have programs and consulting related to change management. Fourth, we have a proprietary employee engagement process that helps clients unlock the true potential of their employees through an understanding of both their job satisfaction and energy. Finally, we have a talent management function. We want to be able to support the entire human capital system of our clients. Through our talent work we can assist clients with identifying and developing their high potentials, selection and retention strategies, as well as team effectiveness which focuses on having the right people on the bus and in the right seats.

Who does the Institute work with and how broad is its target focus?

First, we work with Truist teammates. We have worked with heritage BB&T senior leaders for four decades and that work will continue in our new company. In fact, we have plans to move our programs further into the company by offering programs to our middle-level leaders as well.

For more than 60 years, we have worked with outside corporate clients helping them increase their leadership capacity through the five core product areas discussed earlier. However, we take all monies we generate along with

additional dollars from Truist and put them back into our communities through our philanthropic work. We offer the same high-quality leadership development programs that our corporate clients receive to K-12 public school principals as well as student leaders. To date, over 1,000 public school principals have experienced our flagship program, Mastering Leadership Dynamics (MLD), and it has been 100 percent free of charge. The corporate price for this 5-day program is \$8,450. Our educator guests enjoy the same curriculum, accommodations, and meals while they stay at our state-of-the-art campus in Greensboro, North Carolina. In addition, we have partnered with 69 colleges and universities to offer our Emerging Leaders Certification program. This six-hour program introduces students to our leadership model and helps them discover their core leadership strengths while exploring their preferred leadership and communication style. To date, over 9,000 students have completed the program.

How is The BB&T Leadership Institute integrated into BB&T?

We are a subsidiary of the company. We work very closely with our internal Learning and Talent teams to ensure that Truist leaders have access to the best leadership development available in any industry. We are working to ensure that it actually becomes part of the employment brand of Truist. The Leadership Institute is responsible for leadership development of our upper-middle through executive level leaders. In addition to delivering traditional leadership development programs, we provide executive coaching to senior-level leaders and team building programs through our Team Optimization process. With our recent merger, you can imagine our team programs are quite popular right now. We also work closely with our HR partners on teammate engagement. Truist uses our proprietary engagement methodology and we work closely with our internal engagement team on the design, delivery, and consulting related to our annual study and ongoing pulse surveys.

Will you discuss the employee engagement for the work of the Institute?

The Leadership Institute has been an important part of leadership development at BB&T for 40 years. First as a client of our predecessor firm, Farr Associates, and now as the rebranded and expanded Leadership Institute. Over that time, thousands of our own leaders have attended our career and life-changing programs. We are in the process of introducing our

work to our heritage SunTrust teammates, starting with members of our executive leadership team. We worked with the new executive leadership through our Team Optimization process on several occasions and the heritage SunTrust members are in the process of attending MLD (all heritage BB&T members have attended). Our heritage SunTrust teammates have heard about The Leadership Institute and are excited and eager to take advantage of our offerings. As I mentioned, we have done many team building sessions for both heritage BB&T and SunTrust leaders as they bring their new teams together.

In addition, we are a significant differentiator for our commercial and corporate bankers. No other financial institution offers leadership development services. It sends a powerful message to our clients that we care deeply about the success of their company in more ways than just financial success.

How critical are metrics to track the impact of The Leadership Institute's efforts?

It's very important and we dedicate significant time and resources to it. We have our own research and measurement team, led by Dr. Patrick Gallagher. That's one of the differentiators of our work. When we engage with a client, we sit down and discuss their desired outcomes and how, together, we'll measure impact.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead the Institute?

I tell people that it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It is a privilege to work for a company like Truist that believes deeply in the power of leadership and that wants to share that with the world. Our work changes people and by extension, those that they touch. It's rare that we get to hold a position that deeply impacts all of those that are most important to us – our teammates, our clients, and our communities.

What are your key priorities for the Institute as you look to the future?

There are tactical things related to the merger, such as rebranding to Truist Leadership Institute, informing our new and existing teammates about our work and how to position it with clients, executing on the new internal leadership development process, etc. However, the fun part is expanding on our work – creating that employment brand for Truist and a differentiated service for our company and continuing to grow our philanthropic programs with educators and students. That's the heart of our work and our purpose – “To inspire and build better lives and communities.” ●