

# Zealot Profile

## Linda Clark-Santos

### Washington Mutual Inc.

Senior Vice President,  
Talent Acquisition &  
Organizational Capability

*As a senior vice president of Washington Mutual Inc., Linda Clark-Santos oversees what the company calls its “brand experience” for both customers and employees. Founded in 1889 as a building and loan association to help Seattle recover from its great fire, Washington Mutual has always prided itself on customer service. In the last two years, the company has grown from 25,000 to 50,000 employees, and with \$242.5 billion in assets, it is the nation’s seventh-largest financial-services institution. As Ms. Clark-Santos, who has a Ph.D. in educational administration from the University of Idaho, explains, her job involves helping to create a culture in which employees and customers have the same positive experience of the company.*

**“People have an impression of us before they join us, and that experience is usually reflected in our brand. In many companies, there’s an incongruity between the culture internally and the face it shows to the world. On day one of employment, you start to experience the culture and the brand promise within the company. We’re reengineering all of our internal touch points to make sure that our employees experience the same values and behavior we’re offering to customers.**

“The way to develop a strong organization is to develop leaders. The kind of development we offer frontline people who deal with the public is different from what we offer senior executives, but the idea is the same: You’ve got to be able to see beyond your purview and see the bigger picture. You’ve got to see that you’re an integral part of the team and not just the hired help. That starts with the interview process. We don’t just go to the top schools and pick the cream of the crop. You have to get the right person in the door to sustain the values and culture that help us grow the business. If you

ask the right questions and listen carefully to the answers, you can find out if this is someone who embraces change.

“We’re also refining the brand experience of the customer. We just released a new set of commercials. In one of them, a guy — a little pudgy — is standing in a long, nasty bank line, and these well-dressed people walk through a door near him. He goes to the door and sees chandeliers, and people all dressed up, waiters with glasses of champagne. The waiter offers him some, and he says, ‘Hey, this is really something for just a regular guy.’ The waiter’s face drops and he scowls and says, ‘You’re just a regular guy?’

“We target the kind of customer most banks studiously try to avoid. They’re trying to automate the process so they don’t have to talk to these people. They’re not big customers.

“We’re reengineering the entire business. For example, we’re rewriting our letters in keeping with the brand. The ‘adverse action’ notice usually says things like, ‘It has come to our attention that you are overdrawn and we will be taking action...’ Now we’re going to say, ‘We’re wondering if there is something we can do to help.’

“We’re ambitious to do things better and not stay with the status quo. We try to do good things in our communities; we’re fair; we treat everyone with respect. Our CEO is a real human being. We’re very caring. Those are our brand attributes. We are really focusing on trying to sustain a great culture with a great service orientation. One of the challenges in a high-growth company is how to hang on to that; I’ve seen company after company lose it. We’re determined not to let that happen to us.”

— Interviewed by Michael Ryan

