Ultimate Software Hits Home Run With Rising Stars Program
New Employees Utilize APA Training Tools

RIS★ING STARS

BY KIKO MARTINEZ

It's the bottom of the ninth inning with the score tied 1-1 and Ultimate Software steps up to the plate. The pitch is thrown and, with one powerful swing, Ultimate Software hits a towering shot toward center field.

Going, going, gone!

The excitement of a game-winning home run is the perfect metaphor to describe what it probably felt like for Ultimate Software when it launched its baseball-themed Rising Stars program in 2014. During the 14-week learning and development program, new employees who will be placed in customer-facing roles, which includes payroll professionals, receive comprehensive training on the company's products, services, and internal systems before they officially go to bat

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for Ultimate Software. Ultimate Software is a Florida-based technology and software company that specializes in talent management software solutions and payroll.

Setting new hires on a path to complete what Ultimate Software calls the "Journey to the Ultimate World Series," employees participate in a number of training components, including structured group learning, shadowing sessions, written skills assessments, and much more. Incorporating a baseball theme (weeks are divided into categories such as "tryouts," "spring training," and "regular season," all of which lead up to the "World Series") makes it even more fun for participants.

During the program for the new payroll employees, Ultimate Software utilizes *PayTrain*®, the APA's web-based payroll training tool, as part of its master training plan. Ultimate Software has been using *PayTrain* for more than a decade for employees studying to take the Certified Payroll Professional (CPP) and Fundamental Payroll Certification

(FPC) exams and decided to incorporate it into Rising Stars when it debuted two years ago.

"*PayTrain* is a critical piece of our training plan," said Solange Lucas, Senior Director of Services Training at Ultimate Software, which was ranked as the No. 1 Best Large Workplace in Technology by *Fortune* magazine this year. "It's a great way for new employees to learn not only the foundations of payroll, but also the most recent payroll changes and best practices. For those pursuing certifications, it's a great way for them to practice and be prepared for those exams."

Lucas, who has worked at Ultimate Software for almost 20 years, developed the idea for the Rising Stars program when she was the company's Director of Customer Support. She wanted to give employees a more in-depth training experience.

"Some folks coming in may not have the industry experience or the exposure to payroll," she said. "This program gives everyone the hands-on training experience where they can practice doing the job before they actually do the job."

Once in training, employees are run through the complete gamut of Ultimate Software educational tools and are tested on their learning capabilities. This includes case simulations and team-building exercises so co-workers can troubleshoot problems and encourage one another's creativity. They are also given the opportunity to participate in formal review sessions with assigned mentors.

"Mentors are the ones shepherding these folks through the entire program," Lucas said. "Trainees have to show their mentors they are able to accomplish things successfully. They go through this checklist and are expected to show that they have absorbed the material."

After 14 weeks, employees who make it all the way through the program are considered graduates of Rising Stars and are placed in a business unit within Ultimate Software based on their passions and skill set. According to Lucas, Ultimate Software has had a 93% graduation rate since the inception of the program.

Ultimate Software employees receive comprehensive training during the company's Rising Stars program.

Andrew Van Ryn, CPP, Account Manager for Customer Support at Ultimate Software, graduated from the Rising Stars program last year. He credits the program for his achievements in his new position.

"I use a wide range of industry knowledge and technical skills I learned during Rising Stars every single day," he said. "I feel the program provided me with the foundation and focus on training so I could be successful in my current role."

Recent Rising Stars graduate David Everett, FPC, who currently works as a Rapid Response Professional at Ultimate Software, adds that the program has given him the tools he needs "to have an educated conversation about the complex situations that arise in payroll." He earned his FPC earlier this year.

"There isn't a moment that goes by that I don't use something I learned through the program," he said. "Gaining that knowledge helped me succeed in my job and provide the best possible support to Ultimate Software's customers on day one." ■

For information on PayTrain payroll training programs, contact Mike Downs at miked@holmescorp.com.