Independent Banker  
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Columns

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[pull quote] “The core success of community banks stems from how well we meet the needs of the people we serve: our customers, employees, stockholders and communities.”

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There’s no doubt about it: Today’s economic environment is tumultuous. All around us, we’re fending off new storms, from big bank failures to compliance hurdles and beyond. But we weather these tempests through our relationship-first focus.

And we demonstrate this commitment to community every day in what we do. For example, over the course of my career, I have worked at several community banks, and when one of them was acquired by a super-regional bank, the whole environment shifted. I had a customer of more than 20 years who owned a commercial excavation group. He had signed a new contract and leased equipment to support it, and then the contract fell through. He continued to pay the lease payments, but that expense without the corresponding revenue made times difficult. He fell behind in loan payments.

The super-regional that had acquired my community bank had an “up or out” policy, and the business had two quarters to fix its standing or they could no longer be a customer. I was forced to cut a relationship with a customer who didn’t fit into a box, and I vowed never to do it again. I left the bank not long after, returning to my community banking roots, where the people, not the policies, matter.

Big banks will outspend us on advertising and locations every day, and focus on flashy products, but they are constantly buying to build a new ship. Community banks, instead, look at their communities and what they need, and then say to their teams, “Here’s what we’re trying to accomplish—get us there. Help us build what we need.”

And therein lies the difference. The core success of community banks stems from how well we meet the needs of the people we serve: our customers, employees, stockholders and communities. Exceptional financial performance is the result of customers whose financial needs are being met and exceeded, employees who are engaged in a positive and inclusive culture, stockholders who support the bank’s mission and communities that recognize and appreciate the value of a local community bank.

So, as you read about our top-performing banks in this month’s issue, I invite you to focus not on the financial results but on the paths they took to achieve them. Find some inspiration from them to enhance what you provide to the communities you serve. Because in a sea of industry change, community banks always can find their due north in community service, and that’s a course we can bank on into the future.

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Quote of the month

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.”

* [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/384067-if-you-want-to-build-a-ship-don-t-drum-up), French writer, poet and aristocrat

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