***Independent Banker***

**Portfolio: Innovation Station**

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[hed] Strengthening human connections

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Community banks are feeling the impact of the Great Resignation just like other industries, but with some significant differences. Innovations in technology, organizational culture, talent acquisition and retention are key factors in helping community bankers reengineer a workplace environment that revolves around human connection.

During the pandemic, many community banks introduced interactive teller machines (ITMs) to provide customers with a “branch-in-a-box” experience. Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans opened the door to additional innovations, highlighting community banks’ technological advancements and commitment to their customers.

This kind of technology, combined with accelerated innovation and lessons learned during the pandemic, also helped community banks to develop best-of-breed work environments that extend beyond the walls of their branch offices. As community bankers re-envision the future of banking and talent management, they should consider what technology to put in place, which positions lend themselves to remote work and how to monitor workflow and performance.

For example, in a remote workplace culture, conversational evaluations and interactions between managers, supervisors and subordinates must be more routine and intentional. You won’t be colliding with staff in the hallways, so you need to constantly evaluate what people are thinking and how they’re feeling. You should also conduct temperature checks more intentionally and frequently, because distance changes our ability to read, understand and influence behavior.

From the recruiting side, community bankers may have to find and acquire talent beyond their immediate communities. During the pandemic, many professionals realized that they could move and work from anywhere. And if their current employer doesn’t allow such liberties, they will seek out an employer that will. This is a massive paradigm shift for many bank leaders. There must be real purpose in rethinking how, when and where to build your workforce.

Also, keep in mind that the under-35 demographic is more accustomed to job hopping than their older counterparts, so consider creating a plan that builds resiliency in the recruiting, retaining and structuring of jobs, planning two or three years out.

As we advance, we will need to be more open-minded and authentic about recognizing and incorporating professional and personal needs in the way jobs are structured. Remote work, work-life balance and mental health care—issues highlighted during the pandemic—will continue to play out in today’s workforce. We must be genuinely willing to embrace and address these issues.

Community banks are the lifeblood of communities, but people are the lifeblood of community banks. Let’s not get lost in the technology and forget about human connections as we reengineer a workplace culture that positions us for success both now and in the future.

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