Independent Banker
September 2023
Portfolio

[tag] Innovation Station

**[hed] How curiosity leads to innovation**

[byline] By Charles E. Potts

[body]

The foundation of innovation is rooted in curiosity and asking questions like, “How do I do things better? How can I make this experience more user friendly? Why is the market shifting? How do I take advantage of it?”

Fortunately, the service orientation of community bankers is born out of that same spirit of curiosity. How many times have you asked your customers what they need or how you can serve their needs? Asking these questions is crucial to improving the customer experience and ultimately ensuring lifelong relationships.

When it comes to cascading questions that lead to solutions, that service nature goes hand-in-glove with the spirit of innovation. The constant desire for improvement—enhancing solutions for the sake of customer and community betterment—is what makes community bankers natural innovators.

And because iron sharpens iron, ICBA has been focusing on creating spaces where community bankers can come together and share time, energy and experiences with one another. Establishing opportunities for collaboration, dialogue and ideation with other bankers, fintechs, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and regulatory agencies enables a more organic approach to innovation that benefits the industry. It channels curiosity into a setting that transforms ideas into solutions.

That’s the vision behind our new Innovation Center in Atlanta, where banks and fintechs can assemble with representatives of the larger financial services community to collaborate and learn from one other. It’s a place where community bankers can roll up their sleeves and get to work—transitioning from ideation to tailored offerings through shared knowledge, best practices, demos, whiteboarding sessions and more.

**[subhed] Get involved in ICBA innovation activities**

We invite you to join us for this new experience. This fall, we will be holding our official opening for the center to serve as the “welcome home” for all community bankers. We’re also working on innovation programming for the fall in advance of the kickoff of our sixth ThinkTECH Accelerator cohort, which will be focused on data analytics and small business needs. Our ThinkTECH alumni showcases will feature companies from past cohorts and our Preferred Service Providers to remind bankers of the problem-solving solutions that already exist. And we’re continuing to develop educational programming through our “Demystifying” webinar series in concert with Community Banker University to further community bank innovation knowledge.

These events, and future events at the center, will be accessible both in person and via livestream, so visit *<i>icba.org<i>* to register and learn more.

While the dog days of summer may be over, things are just heating up at the Innovation Center. We invite you to get involved in upcoming events and visit us in Atlanta to help advance community banking. Because innovation is about asking the right questions and then acting on them. Community bankers, with their service mindset, are ideally poised to do just that.

*Charles E. Potts is ICBA’s executive vice president and chief innovation officer.*

[ends]