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Branch Manager's Letter

strategies for branching excellence

What's Inside

Having trouble getting started? Start anywhere, somewhere, and start now!

Virtual Business Development

The pandemic has changed how we do business. Here are some ideas for meeting virtually for business development.

♦ **Have plans and goals** – determine the type of virtual meeting you want to have and what goals you want to meet. A meeting can be informational, presentational, and/or interactive. The more elements you include the longer the meeting will be.
Shorter meetings are better - when word gets around that you give short, meaningful meetings, more people are likely to attend.

♦ **Leading virtual meetings** – if you've never led a virtual meeting…learn more by spending time in other virtual events to get ideas, tips, and new ways to present your information. For instance, see if your local Chamber of Commerce is doing a live event. Did they use a format with a slide presentation? Did they take questions? Did they give examples?

♦ **Set dates, expectations, and limitations** – if you use social media as a place to advertise a free webinar/virtual meeting; ask them to invite others that may be interested in the subject matter, set expectations with your attendees, set limitations – you may need a second session if too many people sign-up.

♦ **Require information from the participant** – by doing so it is more likely they are serious about attending the meeting. For example, requiring their name, email address, and phone number means they are interested in the subject matter enough to share their information with you.

♦ **Recruit moderators** – if you plan to have more than a few attendees be sure to have moderators to avoid problems. Moderators must help with questions, block derogatory participants, and help troubleshoot technical issues.

♦ **Team up** – with another regional branch manager, take turns speaking and be interactive with each other during the presentation.

♦ **Use specific topics** – to target and draw in clients and/or non-clients, such as,

- The Loan Process Made Easy
- Finding the Right Credit Card for You
- Managing Debt
- Home Equity Loans and Line of Credit
- Securing a Business Loan
- Financial Tools to Open Your Own Business
- Pay Less for Debt
- The Secret to IRAs
- Get Out of Debt Quicker

- Living on a Budget
- Protect Your Assets
- How to Get Money for Savings, Retirement, and Investments

♦ **Remember, your competition could be attending** – to support you, get ideas from you, or (unfortunately) try to snag a client or be a negative influence.

♦ **Before hosting a virtual event ALWAYS…practice, practice, practice.** This is especially true if you are hosting an event with another person. Make sure that the subject matter to cover is well-known to each person. Allow for some spontaneity so the presentation isn't dry. The audience will be bored if everyone just reads slides. This is why practice is essential. Use professional business language only.

♦ **Follow-up** – with everyone that attended, even if only to say *thanks*. Acknowledging your appreciation for their attendance and attention leaves the door open for conversations later. Offer to email attendees the slides with key facts after the presentation, another touch point. Some attendees may say 'no' right away, don't give up, they were interested in the subject – try again later. Ask attendees about associates that may be interested in attending a future presentation.

Reasons to Attend

Generally speaking, lunch can be a big reason why a non-client is willing to meet and hear your ideas. Some prospects may be tired of online meetings and thus they aren't inclined to attend "free" sessions.

So how do you get people to meet with you virtually? Provide added incentives to tempt prospects to attend. Here are some ideas:

❖ Team up with a local business that is willing to donate a gift or prize. They get to advertise and attract your audience to their business and you have an incentive to offer too. For example, a printer may be willing to donate a printed t-shirt or a box of business cards, in return you can say the session is sponsored by the company. Include information about the printer's business via presentation slides and in follow-up emails.

❖ Use "gifts" for important one-on-one sessions that would have been a luncheon meeting.

❖ Use "prizes" when you invite a number of people to attend. Prize drawings throughout the presentation makes participants pay more attention. Prize drawings at the conclusion of the session will make attendees stay to the end.

❖ Make an offer to a business partner (current client) to contribute a prize and get endorsement of an established relationship too. Offer to return the endorsement or sponsor a virtual meeting in return. Have the business partner host a break and talk about their business and how doing business with your institution has helped them.

❖ Engage local small businesses that suffered a long-term shut down. For instance, salons, fitness centers, artisans, and other owner/operator businesses.

Consider reaching out to those who are not clients – something could develop while working together. They will be much more likely to think of you in the future if you help them out now.

International Travelers

Help your clients that travel outside the U.S. be prepared!

Many countries favored by U.S. travelers have reopened their borders. Of course, the situation is still fluid and anyone traveling should be up-to-date on requirements and border closures. But it was just last spring that many travelers became stranded outside the U.S. Some experienced; lack of cash in ATMs, credit card problems, and their "cash" ran out quickly.

If you learn of clients who are planning international travel make sure they know about the importance of wiring money. Depending upon how far and wide they plan to travel, wiring money may be their only option.

So, if you have a client that mentions their upcoming travels, make sure to get them acquainted with your institution's procedures and fees. If appropriate, make your wire transfer department aware of clients who are planning to travel outside the country so they can provide top notch service when/if the time comes.

Fast Track to Success

Some people wait for good things to happen to them or in their careers. Wise people don't wait. They know it is important to take the initiative if they want things to happen. Wise people recognize the importance of getting things done. They take on responsibility and feel good about being productive. Wise people recognize that most managers don't have the time to oversee every detail. When your manager can count on you to show initiative, it gives him or her more time to be productive in other areas.

Most managers appreciate an employee who is not afraid to try something or make decisions within reason.

What's in it for you?

Being a self-starter –

➔ **Builds self-esteem and confidence**. Showing you're a capable, take-charge individual increases your sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

➔ **Improves relationships and teamwork.** Practicing self-direction reduces problems with coworkers. If everyone does their part there is less stress. If other employees feel like someone is trying to slack off, the tension rises dramatically. Self-starters spark enthusiasm in everyone around them. Your commitment will get noticed and will stir similar feelings throughout the branch.

➔ **Enhances your service delivery.** Clients respect your professionalism because you're motivated enough to go the extra mile for them. You save clients time and hassle when you deal with issues now instead of pushing them off on others or getting your supervisor for every little thing.

➔ **Proves you are capable.** A manager must have a great deal of trust and confidence in your ability to make good judgments and decisions to empower you. Taking on jobs without being prompted helps demonstrate that you deserve freedom to make bigger decisions, which can lead to greater levels of empowerment.

➔ **Boosts future career success.** Management will see you as a valued contributor capable of moving up in the organization.

Use Good Judgement

Being self-directed is not synonymous with being your own boss. It's important to understand what the consequences are before you empower yourself. You must work within policies and procedures while still using good judgment. With experience, you will discover the boundaries. Be wise and review the following before jumping all in:

✓ Talk with your manager. Ask how much leeway you have. Invite him or her to offer suggestions on acceptable ways to show initiative. It may seem like a nice gesture to clean your manager's desk. However, it is likely that he or she may prefer that you don't do something that could compromise confidentiality.

✓ Examine the big picture. Evaluate the potential ripple effects of your actions. Let's say you decide to organize a common area. Are the items needed by other employees and will your new arrangement be convenient for them?

✓ Work within security and audit controls. These controls may limit what you can do on your own initiative. For example, you may have to seek out a supervisor to override a frozen account.

✓ Enforce policies and procedures. Only bend the rules if your manager has granted you the authority to do so. Otherwise, be sure to ask for confirmation before you act.

✓ Go through the proper channels. To satisfy a client, you may need to seek information in another department. Instead of

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barging in, check with the person in charge of the area first.

Get on the Fast Track

Initiative is an acquired skill. The more you practice being a self-starter, the easier it gets. By using good judgment and eagerly taking on new challenges, you will shine as a true professional.

☆ **Have a positive attitude.** Regardless of how mundane a project seems; you can always learn from it. If you go about tasks cheerfully, quickly, and with an eye to the details, your attitude will be noticed and appreciated. Your initiative will make a favorable impression on others.

☆ **Seek out knowledge.** Expand your skills and experiences. Read manuals, explore on-line, read help screens, attend seminars, and ask questions.

☆ **Offer to help**. Volunteer your assistance to clients and coworkers. When you see a client waiting in the lobby, ask how you can help. Don't limit your contributions to high-profile or fun jobs. Planning the annual picnic may be enjoyable but self-starters pitch in for the challenging tasks.

☆ **Try to find solutions**. Do some research before you approach your supervisor. Instead of saying, "What should I do," offer a solution. This shows you've put some thought into the matter. Although you may not have the final say, offering solutions grows your decision-making skills too. Also, sharing your thought process allows your supervisor to see how you're developing.

☆ **Look for process improvements.** The traditional way of doing something isn't necessarily the best way. Come up with your own ideas about how to make things better. Focus especially on time or money wasters.

☆ **Answer ringing phones.** If you're not involved with a client, pick up the phone when it rings.

☆ **Fill supplies as needed.** Recognize when supplies and forms are running low. Alert the responsible person or restock if it's within your boundaries.

☆ **Avoid watching the clock.** Anytime you see a need, jump in without fretting about your break, lunch, or quitting time.

☆ **Don't ask for rewards.** Just because you agree to do something, don't expect immediate paybacks. Showing that you're willing to step in - whatever the situation - sets you apart from everyone else. It may take time, but your efforts will get noticed by management.

The Importance of Client Relationships

★ If you know your client and they know you, it is a partnership that you both can depend upon. A solid relationship has a good foundation built on trust and stability. A stable relationship can weather storms (like a pandemic) because clients know they can depend upon you to be there.

★ A relationship is an investment on a deeper level. It is more difficult to break away from those we have relationships with, people we know, and people we trust.

★ A well-established relationship based on sound financial help prompts clients to contact you first anytime they need something of a financial nature.

★ All statistics point to the high probability that an established client will be a multiple product user. Therefore, current clients are the most logical people to develop additional business from, not only from the client, but from their circle of friends and associates.

★ Relationship bankers have a higher sales-to-time spent ratio and that is important to the bottom line.

★ When employees are able to leverage a contact into a conversation about financial needs, that is the beginning of a relationship.

★ <u>Relationship development is a productivity tool.</u> There is still a need for outbound sales efforts. However, if some of your business comes from clients contacting you when they, relatives, friends, or business associates need financial assistance. This makes your time become more productive and efficient.

Rethink

Many people are still struggling through the pandemic. There can be many reasons; lost wages from cut hours or job loss, inadequate savings, or bad timing for those just entering the job market. Taking the time to help clients that are suffering by offering loans, bridge products, and services can help. But you can also take the opportunity to cement a relationship and add long-term loyalty to your financial institution by helping clients rethink their situation.

Rethinking ideas about money and how to use it as a tool may be obvious to you, but a client may never have thought about it. Stressful situations can cause us to have a number of problems, mentally, physically, and emotionally. Stress can cause people to focus only on the problem instead of the solution. This is especially true for your clients that are just trying to make ends meet or are living off credit. Here are some ideas to help your clients rethink their way to financial well-being.

The Approach

How you approach clients will make a big difference. If a client comes to you concerned about their financial well-being – that is a perfect lead into the conversation. Let clients know that they aren't alone, that you've had others that wanted this type of information. It helps the conversation come from a place of offering instead of telling them what to do. Offer the ideas as a short-term change that can make a big difference in the long-term. Using words like "short-term" and "just for now" helps remind clients that there will be an end and that they can make it. Offer appropriate products and services as the opportunities arise during the conversation.

Rethink Monthly Services

Sometimes we think that once our monthly services are set-up that they are needed. This is not true. While most people must have internet, they may not need subscriptions to Amazon Prime, HBO, Disney+, Netflix, etc. Canceling streaming services could mean another $50 to $120 a month. Try some free streaming services during the winter months. There are many streaming services to choose from and some offer a free preview for 30 days or more. Remind clients to read the fine print and cancel before the preview ends.

Easy on the wallet alternatives: Revisit previously purchased movies, look for free movies online, get a universal antenna, have a party on Zoom with friends, etc. Rediscover the library and the services they provide for free or a fraction of the cost. Most libraries have movie rental options, streaming, and lots of great books, magazines, and newspapers too.

Rethink Celebrations

Celebrations can focus more on the company of family and friends with good food instead of fancy gifts. A child is usually just as excited about any gift they open unless they've been given expectations. Teens are a bit trickier but can understand the concept of "not this year" if they are expecting something "big." Instead of dreading what cannot be done, make it a challenge – a game. Make a firm commitment to get through the family celebrations debt-free by staying within budget.

Alternative: Gifts can be numerous if they are minimal cost. Get fun gag gifts, make a gift of favorite snacks, or give practical gifts like stamps or cash. Make care packages – cookie mix, oven mitt, and a spatula or arts and craft supplies. Buy fruits, nuts, candies in bulk for a cost savings.

Rethink More

- **Retirement** – earlier/later, contribution amount, mix of investments

Referral Follow-up

Sometimes you have to refer clients to another person or an entirely different department. To deliver excellent customer service, always make sure your client received the service he or she desired.

Occasionally someone drops the ball and their needs are not met – make sure you aren't the one dropping the ball. Monitor and follow-up with the client.

Whether there was a problem or not, the client will appreciate your caring enough to check back with them. They will know they have received excellent service.

• **Lifestyle** – frugal living, buying necessities, shopping sales and thrift stores

• **Recreation** – ask grandparents what they used to do; walks, picnics, table games

• **Payments** – try to pay off the smallest debt first and always make minimum payments to keep good credit

Hostile Clients

There are other reactions you could encounter from discussing lifestyle change, the biggest being a client taking offense. What happens if you mention one of the above ideas and your client becomes upset and hostile toward you? Remember to remain calm, your goal is to help. For example:

Mr. Hill: "I'm not stupid! Don't you think I've thought of that?"

You: "Mr. Hill, I would never think that. I just wanted to think of everything I can to help you. Some of our clients have been so stressed that they didn't think of these types of things. Let's start again. What are some measures you've already taken? I'm here to help."

Virtual Meeting Manners

Anita J. Nigrel, First Vice President and Growth Manager at People's United Bank, in Riverhead, NY shares that she has been spending a lot of time with her managers on virtual networking and business calls/presentations. She shares some pointers about conduct for virtual meetings.

◎ Be respectful of other people's time. If the meeting is scheduled to start at 3 p.m. and end at 3:30 p.m., then that's the allotted time. Personally, I always schedule the meeting five minutes ahead of time to avoid anyone showing-up late.

◎ Even though virtual meetings don't seem as professional as in-person meetings, the truth is that they are. One should conduct themselves as if the meeting was at their workplace. It's not the time to eat, play with your dog, tidy your home or workspace. Stay seated and present until the meeting ends.

◎ Wear appropriate clothing for the meeting. Casual attire may be fine for staff meetings but business attire is essential for client meetings. No room for pajamas in either case.

◎ All smartphones should be turned off, along with notifications.

◎ Do not use other computers, iPads, etc. because they are a distraction.

◎ All notifications on devices should be turned off and/or muted. This is important on the computer you are using and essential if you are sharing your screen in a presentation.

◎ No multitasking – meetings are not the time to clean out your inbox, check your social feeds, or do work. Your full attention should be on the speaker (eyes on screen), just as you would in a face-to-face conversation.

◎ If you are listening to others mute your mic. When you are speaking make sure the mic is on and try to look into the camera.

◎ Make sure that you keep the meeting as short as possible. Follow the agenda and squash side conversations from taking over.

◎ Include virtual background and make it branded or neutral…psychedelics need not apply.

Anita also recommends reviewing this link to make your online meetings more successful: https://whova.com/blog/15-tips-networking-virtual-event/.

Branch Review

A new year, time to review your branch with a fresh set of eyes – inside and out.

- ❑ Do people know what to do the first time they come to your branch? For example, is there a designated space for new accounts or do they get in line to see a teller?
- ❑ Do you have marketing and promotional items in view?
- ❑ Are the pamphlets promoting products that are currently available?
- ❑ Is your signage tattered or smeared with fingerprints?
- ❑ Are there damp or musty smells from carpeting?
- ❑ Are there chips in paint? Dings on corners, baseboards, or flooring?
- ❑ Is the lighting adequate, dusty, need some new blubs?
- ❑ Do frontline spaces present your branch properly? For example, professional, comfortable, inviting, etc.
- ❑ Are there any dead or dying plants (inside or outside) that need attention?
- ❑ Have you done a security check on your systems lately?
- ❑ Have you switched your "all clear" protocol recently?
- ❑ Does the office furniture need attention? Repairs? Facelift?
- ❑ Do you need to give attention to areas that would boost morale?
- ❑ Have you looked at the break/lunchroom to see how your staff views it?
- ❑ Do you have motivational materials that aren't motivational anymore? For example, posters or cartoons that have been on the wall since 1999.
- ❑ Do bathrooms need sprucing up with a few items from the Dollar Store?

Organizing –
is what you do before you do something,
so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up.

A. A. Milne

Ready for 2021

Be ready to deliver the best service with professional confidence in 2021. The key to serving your clients, your team, and your management is to be focused, ready to deliver efficiently by having a plan and being organized.

Make sure you ready for 2021:

☞ **Get a system that works** – start 2021 fresh. Use a physical check list or an app that helps keep you up-to-date with projects, goals, etc. Make sure your system can prioritize, break goals into tasks or smaller projects. The system should efficiently keep track of progress and a calendar for deadlines.

☞ **Don't create time wasters** - looking for misplaced information or critical documents is stress inducing and can compromise motivation. Create systems that support easy retrieval and maintenance for anyone that may find the need to access it.

☞ **Clear out the clutter** – at your workstation, in your computer, in your smart phone, and in your branch. A clean workspace reduces distraction, promotes clear thinking, and gives a professional impression to all that enter your branch.

☞ **Keep all areas well-stocked and orderly** – from the reception area to the conference room. Don't keep the forms, manuals, files, and product literature in piles on tables or in corners. Always secure confidential information so it's not visible to prying eyes. Ending each day by straightening up your work area before leaving for the day means you'll walk into an orderly work area. Instead of rushing to get ready for the day you'll ease into it with a great start.

☞ **Use deadlines** – they help to get things done. Give deadlines to the smallest and largest tasks and projects and see things get done. Whenever you're assigned a project or goal, ask for a completion date. If there isn't an assigned date, assign one yourself. It gives you a goal and a definitive time of completion.

☞ **Use consistency to be efficient** – following policies and procedures is essential to provide as much consistency for routine processes and safety protocol. Consistency reduces the number of errors, improve efficiency, and helps find problems quicker.

☞ **Always keep a pen and paper handy** – even though this seems like ancient technology. It may seem like a computer or smart phone is all you ever need but what if you need to give information to someone else to use. More importantly, keep pen and paper available to hand do a client that may need to make notes.

☞ **Take time to review what you do and how you do it** - look for ways to be more effective and productive. The times…they are changing…objective analyze is always a good way to approach things (i.e., a new project, a new goal). A few good places to review is time-intensive work and the reports you currently receive.

Ask yourself questions such as, "Do I need this to do my work? Manage others? Reach goals? Provide answers to my staff or management?"

Pushy, Pushy, Pushy

You've offered some information about a new product to a client. You can tell by the client's body language or facial expressions that they aren't happy about it. What can you say or do? Apologize sincerely with a quick explanation: "I'm sorry, Mr. Purdy, I thought it may be something that may appeal to you. I want to help when I can." Results from this conversation:

- ✰ Mr. Purdy doesn't leave with the feeling of a "pushy salesperson."
- ✰ You've learned more about Mr. Purdy.
- ✰ You've learned about a product or feature that may not appeal to particular clients.