If you're successful in your career, chances are you have a mentor to thank. They're the ones who showed up at your side – perhaps out of nowhere – and guided you through a sometimes-tumultuous workplace. They explained things. They encouraged you when you needed it. Maybe they introduced you to influential people or even interceded on your behalf. With the Valley Mentors Awards, those who were helped get a chance to thank their mentors by nominating them for acknowledgement. The nominees who were chosen as finalists are on the following pages. And at our event on Aug. 20, a select few of them will be chosen as the Business Journal’s Best Mentors.

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Achieving great things in any community takes courage, vision, and tremendous effort. What each of us does can make life better for everyone.

It’s an honor to recognize the recipients of the San Fernando Valley Business Journal 2020 Valley Mentor Awards.

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Together we’ll go far
“If you’re early on in your career and they give you a choice between a great mentor or higher pay, take the mentor every time. It’s not even close. And don’t even think about leaving that mentor until your learning curve peaks.”

STANLEY DRUCKENMILLER
Banking on Trust in a Pandemic and Beyond

by TAMARA GURNEY

ever has the importance of community relationship banking been more evident than in 2020. With the passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act in late March, emergency financing options broadened to include the SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) and the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Both programs were crafted to help businesses manage day-to-day expenses through the worst of the developing COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

By mid-April, funds were exhausted, but a second round of additional PPP funding soon became available. In June, the PPP Flexibility Act was signed into legislation, reforming the forgiveness piece of the SBA funding program in the CARES Act. Formal guidance has been slow in coming but community banks have been in constant communication with policymakers to ensure compliance once implementation begins.

Factories will show, the national rollout of the PPP loans for those businesses impacted by the crisis was anything but smooth. Its roll-out gave many large banks initial hesitation. Finding themselves suddenly on the financial frontlines of the pandemic, community banks fought through the funding difficulties to emerge as trailblazers amid constantly changing guidance.

So how do you explain the speed, agility, and resolve of community banks accomplishing for clients what so many larger institutions could not? Because community banks go well beyond simple transactions to create meaningful relationships with clients. It is known that any street corner bank – big or small – can handle the transactional side of banking. Even non-traditional financial service providers have entered the banking space. And while low-cost providers and special promotions may seem appealing, there is still a long-term value generated for the client’s business.

It is known that any street corner bank – big or small – can handle the transactional side of banking. Even non-traditional financial service providers have entered the banking space. And while low-cost providers and special promotions may seem appealing, there is still a long-term value generated for the client’s business.

Generally defined, bankers are known for delving deep into numbers – financial statements, transactions, and projections, and more. Often there’s the lesser-known side of banking: the listening, coaching and mentoring side that distinguishes a trusted advisor from their transactional counterpart. Relationship banking has the potential to create a win-win scenario for bankers and business owners. Generally defined, bankers are often able to strengthen their relationships with clients by offering a broad array of financial products and services to meet their needs when considering the business as a whole.

Remember the days when you could walk into a bank and everyone knew your name? Well, relationship banking is built upon that very principle. Instead of offering financial services one at a time, a relationship banker attempts to gain an understanding of the client’s needs and offer services that fulfill those needs to translate the numbers into a client’s personal success story.

As community bankers, we take our role as trusted advisors seriously and it is at the heart of all we do. We also take great pride in the fact that those seeking help are often greeted by a live person and receive personal calls from their banker. It has been stated by clients repeatedly that the personal contact received during this difficult time of COVID-19 clearly distinguishes Mission Valley Bank from other institutions.

A simple truth is that banks cannot be all things to all people. By the same token, not all banks are created equal nor do they focus on the same core competencies. In addition to the overall client experience, businesses need to be sure their bank is a good fit for what is needed to grow and operate their business.

Here are three questions to start a conversation with a prospective bank.

1. Is your bank interested in a relationship with your business?
   - Asked another way, is your bank in it for the long haul? The internet provides an unprecedented wealth of information easily available on the strengths, health, and direction of financial institutions. A little research can go a long way in determining the health of your own bank, the direction it is taking, and its willingness to have you as a customer.

2. Does your bank provide the array of products and services your business needs?
   - While many large financial institutions are able to spend mega-dollars on advertising campaigns and flavor-of-the-week products, ask whether if what they are offering really fits your needs.

3. Will your bank be honest with you?
   - There will be times when even after putting forth everyone’s best efforts, it’s just not possible to obtain the financial products you are seeking. A good banker should be willing to sit down and review your financials with you in detail and work to explain what areas may need to be addressed so that you are able to secure the financial products and services you desire in the future. Learn from the setbacks as much as the successes. Every action is an opportunity to learn something towards achieving goals.

Having a relationship with your banker is invaluable, particularly with what is happening in the world today. A good banker will earn their role as a trusted advisor, invested in the growth and success of your business, and will work closely with you.

Lastly, to achieve trust, banks must demonstrate their dedication to a broader purpose. They need to prove they are not just driven by quick profits, but also by shared values. There is tremendous value in working with a client-focused, relationship-driven banker who will invest the time necessary to truly get to know a business and understand its unique needs. The path to long-term success is for businesses to develop long-term relationships with bankers who demonstrate expertise, experience and dedication to their success.

Tamara Gurney is President & CEO of Mission Valley Bank, a locally-owned, full service, independent community business bank headquartered in San Valley, California with a business banking office in Santa Clarita. For more information visit MissionValleyBank.com or call (818) 394-2300.