THE ARIZONA

BANKER

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Why Being Kind at Work Matters

Page 24

A Conversation with Linda Cohen, The Kindness Catalyst

Page 26

Arizona Bankers Association


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Build a Winning Cannabis Banking Program

GET THE GUIDE TO COMPLIANT CANNABIS BANKING

The emerging legal cannabis industry brings significant growth potential, along with challenging operational demands and complex regulations. But cannabis banking does not have to mean high-risk banking.

To ensure the processes, procedures, technology, and trained staff are in place to serve this industry, bankers need to start with a plan. Having a clear understanding of what is required to serve cannabis businesses and minimize risk to the financial institution will help bankers prepare for the upfront costs associated with cannabis banking and develop the policies and procedures needed to hit the ground running. With regulations varying from state to state, it's a complex industry with high costs, requiring a considerable investment of time and energy.

Compliant banking operations require continuous enhanced due diligence to help guard against risks such as:

A Robust Illegal Market. According to New Frontier Data, the legal cannabis market in the U.S. is expected to reach $41 billion by 2025. Unfortunately, the illicit market, valued at $65 billion by some estimates, is shrinking at a slower pace. Financial institutions must ensure that funds coming through their doors are from legal channels.

Bad Actors. To ensure bad actors are not attaching themselves to good businesses, enhanced due diligence conducted around underlining beneficial owners will continue to be at a heightened level for the foreseeable future.

Legacy Cash. Because the cannabis market existed as a cash business long before legalization and because the industry continues to operate largely as a cash business, a strong BSA/AML program will help ensure that funds coming into the financial institution are from legal cannabis operations.

While the added burden and cost associated with serving this industry may limit the total number of participants in the short term, we expect competition from financial institutions to steadily increase as more states launch legal programs and we get closer to federal recognition.

Financial institutions that invest in technology to improve efficiencies and lower costs today will be able to scale as the industry grows and have a competitive advantage when the economics of the industry change over time and new banks and credit unions enter the market.

Informed by the experiences of pioneering bankers across a growing number of states with legal medical and adult-use programs, the Shield cannabis banking playbook defines a path forward for financial institutions to serve cannabis-related businesses compliantly while benefiting from the financial rewards of this market.

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shield compliance

ARIZONA BANKERS ASSOCIATION

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IN THIS ISSUE

THE newsLINK group

EQUIPMENT LEASING

SERVICES • L.L.C.

Putting the financial pieces together for your bank's customers.

Areas where ELS has expertise navigating obstacles

- **Structure:**
  Your bank might be limited in what it can offer when it comes to unique financing terms. We get that. ELS has over 30 years of experience in providing customized funding options. Whether your customer needs a lease or a finance agreement, ELS has the ability to be flexible and competitive.

- **Credit Quality:**
  Does your customer lack the sophistication, time in business or struggle to meet your covenants? Because we have our own capital ELS can provide permanent financing putting your customer in the best possible situation for success.

- **Collateral:**
  As an independent lender/lessor, ELS is flexible enough to deliver our products to virtually any business. ELS can provide solutions for every industry from aircraft to IT.

- **Size:**
  Have you met your lending limit with one of your better customers? Or perhaps it's a small request from a longtime prospect and it's time to get your foot in the door. As a niche lender we can provide fast solutions for smaller requests or aggressive terms of any size for your creditworthy clients.

Under the Copper Dome

Banks in Battle at the State Capitol … Big Fights Still to Come

The 2022 legislative session has adjourned … finally. The session dragged on, as expected, while the legislators and Governor hammered out a state budget. The budget was complicated by a massive revenue surplus, very narrow Republican majorities (not a single vote to spare), and election-year politics. The goal of a 100-day session was quickly abandoned, and ultimately the session dragged on to 166 days, just one week short of the new fiscal year.

What was the result for Arizona's banking industry? The efforts of the Arizona Bankers Association paid off, and the banking industry escaped the session unscathed. In fact, the Association had a few proactive victories. We were able to clean up the Foreign Country Money Judgements law to insert a savings clause. The lack of a savings clause was thoroughly discussed in litigation that came before the Arizona Supreme Court, and with the input from the Court's decision, we were able to make the law better. Additionally, we had several victories in getting amendments to legislation on data breaches and money transmitters. However, our biggest victories came in the form of defensive wins.

The biggest legislative challenges faced by the banking industry included efforts to eliminate the use of ESG factors (Environmental, Social Governance) in investment and banking decisions, as well as forced access laws relating to banking of the firearms industry. These bills were narrowly defeated because a few Republican members stood up for the right of a business to determine whom they choose to do business with in a competitive free market. Specifically, the proposed ESG legislation would have prohibited a financial institution "from discriminating against any person based on a political affiliation or other social credit, environmental, social, governance or similar values-based or impact criteria." The bill broadly defined "discrimination" and would therefore have severely tied the hands of banks and large investors. Forced access legislation followed a similar narrative of "preventing discrimination" against firearms businesses. Despite the inability of the bill's proponents to demonstrate actual harm or the inability to secure banking services, the bill advanced easily through committees but was finally held up before reaching the Senate floor.

> The lack of a savings clause was thoroughly discussed in litigation that came before the Arizona Supreme Court, and with the input from the Court's decision, we were able to make the law better.

Unfortunately, these wins may be short-lived as the face of the Legislature changes following the 2022 elections. Republicans are expected to increase their numbers in the Legislature following the recent redistricting process. The bills' sponsors and like-minded legislators are expected to return, whereas many banking allies were defeated in the August primary or have chosen to retire from the Legislature. Not only do we expect these bills will be reintroduced in January 2023, but we expect the effort will be bolstered by the passage of similar bills in other states and the national attention being brought to ESG from Florida Governor and Presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis.

Before you know it, the next legislative session will be upon us. It is critical that the banking community be ready for the debate ahead. The Arizona Bankers Association will be prepared, having spent the interim meeting with legislators and collecting facts supporting our case. Please tune in to the Government Relations Committee (GRC) to stay informed and stay involved in advocating for the Arizona banking industry. ◗

Inverted Yield Curve
May Bring Hedging Opportunity

"We dive deeper into what really impacts the yield curve and how your bank can take advantage of this unusual circumstance."

This past spring, the U.S. bond market, where many community banks are invested, flashed a common recession warning: the yield curve briefly inverted, with short-term debt paying more than longer-term loans.

Traditionally, an inverted yield curve has been an early predictor of a coming recession. But the correlation has grown weaker over the past two economic cycles. In the current market, another explanation of the inverted yield curve could be that the yield on two-year debt is rising at a faster pace in response to the Federal Reserve's aggressive tightening of monetary policy. We dive deeper into what really impacts the yield curve and how your bank can take advantage of this unusual circumstance.

Multiple factors shape yield curves.

Both short– and long-term considerations determine the shape of the yield curve. In the current environment, a mix of economic and geopolitical events have nudged short-term interest rates up while slowing down the momentum of increases in long-term rates.

Fed rate hikes are the big factor in this occurrence of an inverted yield curve. In 2020, the Fed cut its overnight rate to near zero as part of an effort to limit the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the economy. Now, however, the Fed has begun to raise its benchmark rate to counter the effects of runaway inflation. The Federal Reserve's current dot plot (used for signaling the Fed's outlook for the path of interest rates) shows the median year-end projection for the Fed Funds rate moved up to 3.4%. The estimate for the end of 2023 was boosted to near 3.8%.

When the Fed raises rates, other rates typically go up as well. But the increase can sometimes combine with other economic factors to have counteracting effects on different terms along the yield curve. Right now, short-term bond yields are increasing, but longer-term bond yields haven't gone up by much. That's because strong international demand for U.S. treasury bonds, plus quantitative easing, has made longer-term bonds relatively more expensive — and pushed their yields down.

An inverted yield curve brings opportunities.

No one can know for sure when the next economic recession will begin. But financial institutions may be able to take advantage of two potential opportunities that the inverted yield curve offers.

1. **The first opportunity is in buying bonds.** When the yield curve is in its usual upward-sloping shape, investors earn lower yields for short-term debt and higher yields for longer-term bonds.

   In an environment of rising interest rates, bond buyers have to choose between longer-term debt, which carries a better yield, and shorter-term debt, which yields less but gives a buy-and-hold investor more opportunities to purchase newly issued bonds at higher rates. But when the yield is inverted, bond buyers get the best of both worlds: higher yields and more opportunities to buy new bonds as rates rise.

2. **The second opportunity is a chance to hedge floating-rate debt with an interest-rate swap.** Any time investors use an interest-rate swap hedge, they have to consider whether the value of locking in an interest rate justifies the cost of the swap.

   However, investors can have the best of both worlds with an inverted yield curve. They can lock in a swap rate less than the rate short-term bonds are paying while also giving themselves longer-term certainty of debt payments with a stabilized interest expense.

To continue this discussion or for more information, please contact Jay Kenney, SVP & Southwest Regional Manager for PCBB, at www.pcbb.com or jkenney@pcbb.com.

Dedicated to serving the needs of community banks, PCBB's comprehensive and robust set of solutions includes cash management, international services, lending solutions, and risk management advisory services.

Graduate School of Banking at Colorado

Howie Jorajuria

Earns Prestigious Diploma In Banking

The Graduate School of Banking at Colorado (GSBC) is proud to announce the graduation of Howie Jorajuria of 1st Bank Yuma in Yuma, AZ, from its state-of-the-art graduate school of banking program.

Graduates receive their GSBC diplomas upon successfully completing three annual two-week sessions of classroom training on the University of Colorado Boulder campus in Boulder, Colo. Jorajuria was among 168 students honored in a ceremony on July 28, 2022.

GSBC's curriculum is community banking-focused and delivered by expert faculty. All courses fall under one of four tracks: Financial Management & Strategy, Innovation & Engagement, Leadership & Culture or Lending.

The graduates also completed six immersive intersession research projects throughout the program, including a strategic topic project that they tied directly to an issue or opportunity facing their organization.

The program's capstone course is an in-depth bank management simulation, where students assume the roles of senior management of a commercial bank, involving themselves in the group dynamics and managerial skills of managing a bank in a competitive environment with changing economic conditions.

GSBC held its 71st Annual School Session July 17-29, 2022, on the University of Colorado Boulder campus, hosting nearly 500 students from across the nation. The school's 72nd Annual School Session is scheduled for July 16-28, 2023, in Boulder, Colo. For enrollment information, visit www.GSBColorado.org.

The Graduate School of Banking at Colorado is America's Premier Community Banking School, boasting over 8,000 alums since its inception in 1950 and educating approximately 600 bankers and regulatory professionals from around the nation annually. GSBC prides itself on providing unmatched higher education to America's community bankers. For more about GSBC's lineup of comprehensive educational programs, visit www.GSBColorado.org or Josie Bunch, Director of Marketing, at 303-892-6897.

IntraFi Network

Why Banks Need to Prepare Now for Greater Costs, Revenues

The Federal Reserve is winding down its tapering program and eyeing faster rate hikes to curb inflation.

For banks, higher rates mean more revenue potential, but they also mean higher costs. Given this, it's no surprise that our most recent quarterly survey showed that 63% of bank executives expect funding costs to increase over the next 12 months (a 34-point jump from Q3), and 42% expect competition for deposits to increase (an 11-point jump from Q3).

This anticipated pressure on funding follows a two-year period in which banks have been completely saturated with liquidity.

Meanwhile, 59% of executives anticipate loan demand to increase in 2022 (an 11-point jump from Q3), and 80% expect economic conditions to improve or remain the same.

With the costs of funding soon to rise and the business environment showing signs of improvement, now is the time to begin preparing for the future. Below are two suggestions.

2021, Q4

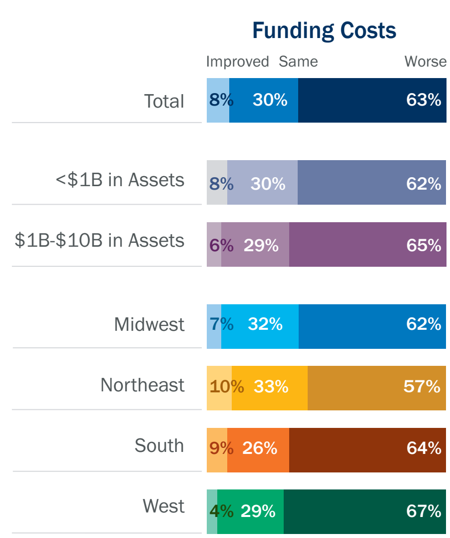
BANK EXECUTIVE BUSINESS OUTLOOK SURVEY

1. Lock in Cheap Funding While You Can

While interest rates in general are expected to rise, the same expectations don't extend to deposit rates. Recently, both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* published stories explaining that, due to excess liquidity, banks won't be raising rates anytime soon.

Therein lies a tremendous opportunity. By lowering deposit costs and lagging rate increases, banks have the potential to generate more revenues than they have generated in a while. Even if customers leave in search of higher yields, any runoff could be supplemented with wholesale funding—which is currently cheap but may not be for long.

Just imagine if your costs were slightly less—or even the same—as they are now, and rates increased by 50 basis points (for example).



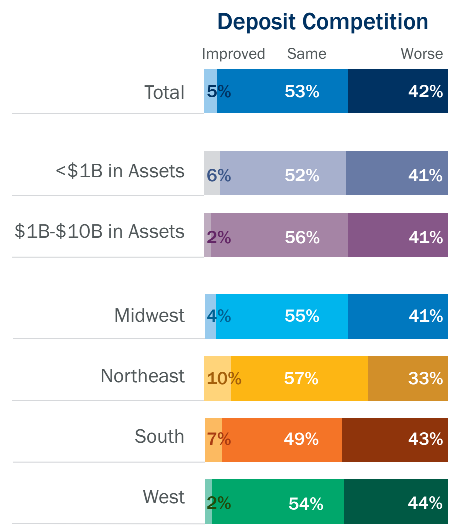
Topline overview of banker expectations for the 12 months ahead, broken out by asset size and region.

2. Increase Your Attractiveness to Customers

With competition for deposits expected to increase, bankers should be thinking of ways to make their services more enticing to prospective customers.

For instance, reciprocal deposits enable banks to offer depositors access to FDIC insurance in amounts greater than $250,000—security that can otherwise be costly or cumbersome to obtain—through a single financial relationship.

Protecting large deposits can give depositors more confidence to bank with local institutions. This helps drive economic growth in communities throughout the U.S.



Topline overview of banker expectations for the 12 months ahead, broken out by asset size and region.

About IntraFi® Network℠

IntraFi Network is a leading provider of overnight and term funding solutions, the #1 provider of FDIC-insured deposit solutions to U.S. financial institutions, and one of the nation's best places to work. The company's network of nearly 3,000 banks—the largest of its kind—brings scale, stability, and the confidence of working with a category leader. Its members include most of the nation's community banks, minority depository institutions, and community development financial institutions.

IntraFi Network | IntraFi Funding | IntraFi Network Deposits

For more information on IntraFi Network and our products, please contact:

Bryan Harper, Managing Director

(866) 776-6426 x3422
bharper@intrafi.com

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WHAT AZBA MEMBERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE COLORADO & ARIZONA BANKERS ASSOCIATION'S WOMEN IN BANKING CONFERENCE BEAVER CREEK, COLORADO AUGUST 18-19, 2022

Cheryl Rolland, VP/Branch Manager
Pinnacle Bank

I would say the experience at the WIB conference was so good for so many reasons.

I had the chance to connect with other women who understand the struggles and joys of balancing our banking career and home life. I had the opportunity to learn from experts in several fields who gave us tools to use in our daily operations.

Lindsay Shaw, VP
FirstBank

It was great to interact with like-minded women in our industry and discuss topics that impact our work.

Stefanie Callison, SVP
National Bank of Arizona

I attended my first Women in Banking conference, and it was such a great experience. From the beautiful location to all the terrific speakers this event was something I will look forward to attending next year. I benefited from so much insightful information that I was eager to incorporate and share with my teams. Thank you for the great experience!

Laura Shaeffer, Director of Operations & Technology National Bank of Arizona

I thoroughly enjoyed my first time at the Women in Banking Conference in beautiful Colorado. I had the opportunity to network with other women bankers and the content of the presentations was very enlightening. The speakers presented topics that were outside the standard fare for a banking conference, which I enjoyed.

Barbara Lietzke-Phillips, Business & Retail Loan Mgr. National Bank of Arizona

The conference was a great opportunity to learn about topics not often referenced in our day-to-day careers and provided the ability to collaborate with fellow bankers to expand our network. Looking forward to enacting some of these great ideas we brainstormed over the next few months.

Jeannie Nguyen, SVP National Bank of Arizona

The Women in Banking Conference was well rounded, informative, and inspirational. I walked away with new information as well as new ways to think about concepts I had learned in the past, taking those concepts to a new level. I would definitely like to attend this conference again in the future.

PLAN ON ATTENDING!
WOMEN IN BANKING
AUGUST 2023
Colorado

2023 Arizona & Colorado Banker Summit

Marana, Arizona

SAVE THE DATES - May 31 - June 3, 2023

Early Bird Attendee Registration Fee- $600
Standard Room- $249 per night
Executive Suites- $399 per night

Golf Tournament- $150 per person
Guest/Spouse- $125 per person

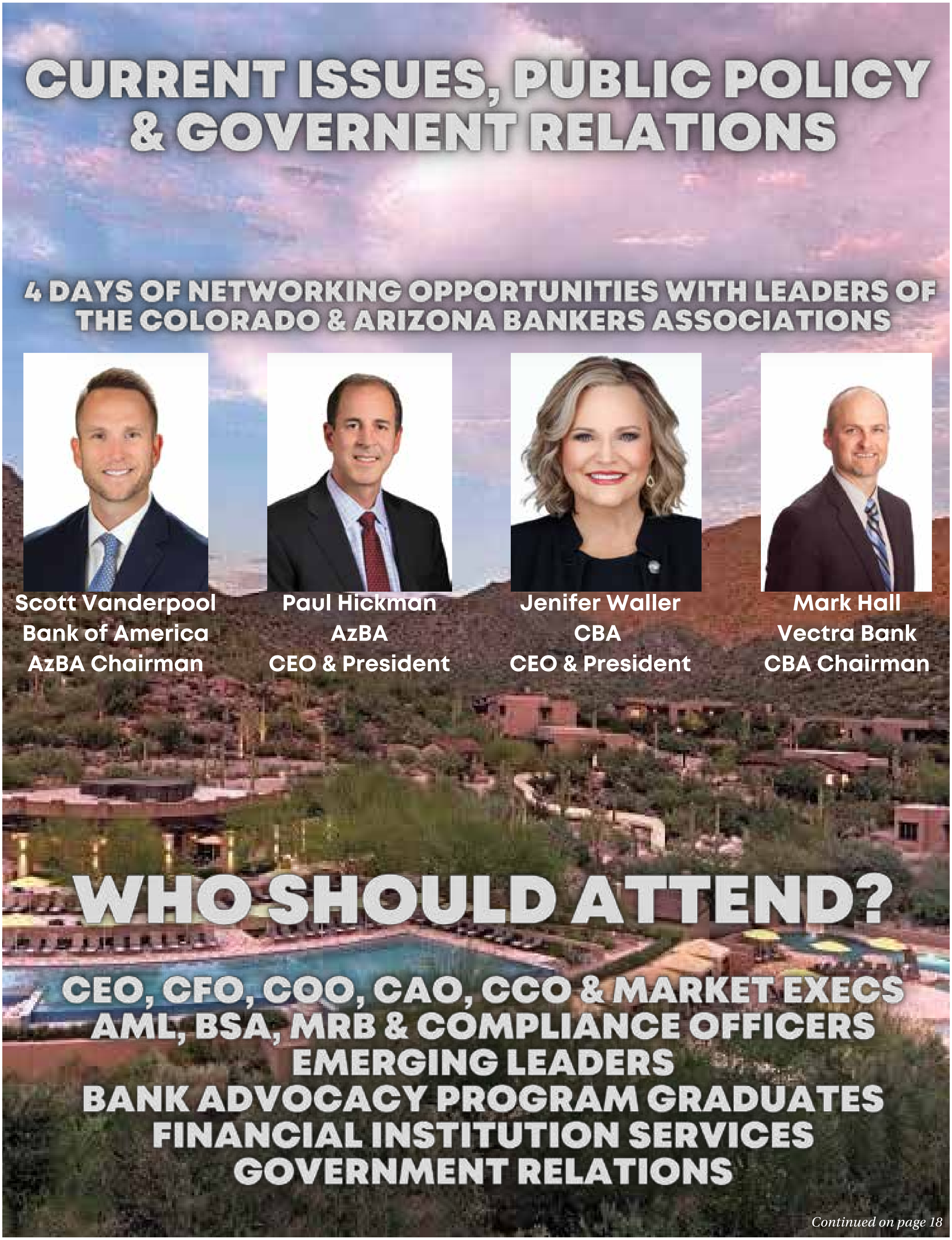
Ritz Carlton at Dove Mountain | Marana, Arizona

https://azbankers.org/register
email: events@azbankers.org

Arizona Bankers Association

Colorado The Bankers Association

3rd Annual Arizona & Colorado Banker Summit | May 31 - June 3, 2023
Ritz Carlton at Dove Mountain, Marana, Arizona | https://azbankers.org/2023BankerSummit



Continued on page 18

Continued from page 17

2023 ARIZONA & COLORADO BANKER SUMMIT

Join 100+ of your bank colleagues from Arizona & Colorado along with associate member sponsors at the Jewel of the Sonoran Desert for 4 days of learning and connecting at the Ritz Carlton at Dove Mountain in Marana, AZ

May 31, 2023 - June 3, 2023

100% IN-PERSON

Register now at :

azbankers.org/2023BankerSummit

FEATURED SPEAKERS & SESSIONS

OPENING KEYNOTE

Jason Schechterly

One Man's Life Changing Story of Survival

REGULATOR PANEL- MODERATOR

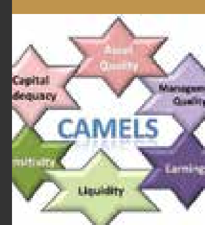
Kathy Moe

FDIC Director- San Francisco Region

EXPERT SPEAKER

Jim Hayden

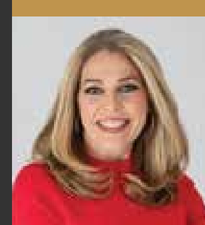
CEO- Board Developer
How to get what you need from your board



DEBATE

CAMELS

Realtime Polling Exercise- The 6 CAMELS Experts Debate & You Decide Who Wins!



EXPERT SPEAKER

Rhonda Blatti

Senior Director- ServiceNow
Real Talk | Employee Retention

EXPERT SPEAKER

David Fragale

Senior Managing Director- Western Alliance Bank
Where the Future Banks | Blockchain & Digital Assets

2023 Arizona & Colorado Banker Summit Schedule of Events

Wednesday, May 31, 2023

1:00-3:00 Exhibitor Setup
3:00-5:00 CEO Roundtable
5:00-5:30 CEO Exhibitor Preview
4:00-6:00 Conference Registration Check-In
5:30-7:00 Chairman's Welcome Reception

Thursday, June 1, 2023

8:00-5:00 General Sessions
5:30-7:00 Reception & Emerging Leader/Bank Advocacy Recognition

Friday, June 2, 2023

8:00-8:45 AzBA & CBA Annual Meetings
9:00 Emerging Leader & Bank Advocate Graduation
9:00-4:00 General Sessions

Saturday, June 3, 2023

7:00-12:00 Bankers Cup Golf Tournament, Dove Mountain Golf Club
12:00-1:00 Bankers Cup Awards Reception & Lunch, Dove Mountain Golf

Continued on page 20

Continued from page 19

Explore
TUCSON, ARIZONA

TITAN MISSILE MUSEUM

AIRPLANE BONEYARD

SAN XAVIER MISSION

SAGUARO NATIONAL PARK

VISIT TUCSON

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GOLF Tournament

Saturday, June 3rd

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Individual Players $150

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Quarles & Brady LLP

Continued on page 22

Continued from page 21

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Why Being Kind at Work Matters

Kindness is a soft skill. Since kindness can be hard to teach, measure or master, many people dismiss it as a nonessential nicety that won't make or break your business. They value other capitalist-oriented skills more, such as ambition, grit and skill.

Consider a fictional example: Scrooge, the main character in A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens; people recognize he is a miserable, lonely man, and no one would want to be like him or be around him. Yet Scrooge also fits the idea of the selfish and ruthless business owner who makes money because he is willing to take advantage of others. As the story begins, he thinks any generous act detracting from profit is foolish.

No business leader is likely to make similar claims in public, but when they consider the business ideas separate from the man, some might secretly think Scrooge's ideas have some merit. But this is a big mistake. The soft skill of kindness is not just an important life skill; it's also an important business skill. Being considerate, friendly, helpful and generous is a strength. It does not mean being a pushover or finishing last. Kindness means giving people the benefit of the doubt and remembering they may be dealing with difficult issues.

Kindness can strengthen business relationships within any culture, and many benefits involve employees. When the workplace culture is kind, communication is smoother and more effective, and employees are more likely to trust their leaders. Employees focus on their work and are less likely to compete negatively with other employees. Not only are relationships in and outside the company improved, but research also shows that employees with opportunities to be kind at work feel more loyal to their company.

Companies with a reputation for being kind find it easier to recruit and retain new employees. That's a huge plus, as there are currently more open jobs than people to fill them, and qualified applicants have their choice of jobs.

> When the workplace culture is kind, communication is smoother and more effective, and employees are more likely to trust their leaders. Employees focus on their work and are less likely to compete negatively with other employees. Not only are relationships in and outside the company improved, but research also shows that employees with opportunities to be kind at work feel more loyal to their company.

Who wouldn't prefer working at a company where they can feel valued and respected?

Productivity also improves. Everybody makes mistakes, especially when trying out new business ideas. Employees can safely share information and be more innovative if the work culture kindly embraces learning from failure instead of punishing it.

Kindness is most challenging when it requires taking the high road and being kind in response to negative behavior. If you are trying to figure out why someone behaves badly, rather than treating them harshly, kindness is more likely to open someone up, giving them a chance to explain their side.

Customers respond positively to companies they believe are kind. When customers interact with a kind employee, a bond forms, resulting in increased customer engagement and brand loyalty.

Kindness is also helpful during difficult conversations. When speaking candidly to someone about a problem, kindly delivering what you must say is essential if you want the conversation to be a success. Choosing to be kind doesn't mean avoiding any discussion of difficult things. Balance honesty with kindness. The goal is to be empathetic and curious instead of harsh.

All employees should be courteous to everyone, regardless of status. Smile often. Say thank you. Use a kind, pleasant tone when talking, be clear and positive when communicating, and accurately express your feelings and ideas. The cleaning crew deserves the same level of civility as the company owner. Managers might also encourage employees to help others when their tasks are complete and to be generous about sharing space and material resources when necessary.

Be a good, thoughtful and kind listener. Listening skills improve communication, reduce mistakes and encourage collaboration. Make time for others when they need it. If employees need substantial help, schedule a time to work with them.

Doing little things, like complimenting someone's work and recognizing others when they do well, shows kindness. Recognize each person's strengths and abilities. You can also communicate appreciation with food. If appropriate, a manager could bring breakfast or provide a snack tray during an important meeting. And team-building activities create a positive environment and show you want the workplace to be enjoyable.

Since some employees are gatekeepers, their opinions and influence may be larger than you think. Please treat them with respect. Start by introducing yourself and asking for their name if you can't see their name on a tag or desk when you meet them. If they are busy, keep the conversation to a minimum. If they seem open to small talk, keep the conversation pleasant and neutral. Notice photos and awards. The next time you see them, kindly acknowledge them in a way that lets them know you remember your last conversation.

Don't be overly familiar with people you've just met. Avoid terms that might be deemed insulting or condescending, such as "sweetie," "babe," "son," or "dude." When there is an opportunity to talk with anyone, engage in meaningful but not polarizing conversations, such as talking in a general way about weekend plans, previous work experiences and family.

Notice when someone is struggling with a door or carrying large packages, and offer your help. Also, help other people succeed. Recommend people, send them referrals, and be willing to provide expert advice if asked.

If appropriate, mentor new employees. Mentoring can involve introducing a new employee to others, training them in their job responsibilities and helping them feel comfortable.

Being kind at work — and everywhere else — matters because it contributes to creating and maintaining a more positive world. It makes sense from a business perspective, but it also makes sense from a human perspective. There are no regrets about being kind, which is something you can't say about everything.

A Conversation with Linda Cohen,

The Kindness Catalyst

Linda Cohen, the founder of Linda Cohen Consulting, is a professional keynote speaker known as The Kindness Catalyst. A consultant since 2012, Linda has a blog on her website (https://lindacohenconsulting.com). She has written two books; 1,000 Mitzvahs in 2011 and The Economy of Kindness in 2021.

> "When an organization gets a reputation for being unkind, its customers and staff often leave. In contrast, organizations with good reputations have an easier time recruiting talent."

It seems clear that you've made kindness your life's work. What is the story behind that?
My father called me in April 2006 after his terminal lung cancer diagnosis. He was a family therapist, and he had just turned 70. I was 38, with two young school-aged children. We had a difficult relationship, but I flew to Burlington, Vermont, and we started working to heal our relationship. He lived eight months after that call. Those months and the healing process were a gift. We both found peace; he died Dec. 1, 2006, on my son's sixth birthday.

Five weeks later, I woke up in the middle of the night with the idea that I would do 1,000 mitzvahs (good deeds) in his honor. Completing them was transformative. When I was more than a year into the project, my rabbi suggested that I write a book about it.

I thought the project was just a personal experience to help me process my grief, but it changed my life. In 2011, I did a TED talk to share the idea of kindness with other people. My first audiences were nonprofit groups like Girl Scouts, houses of worship and schools. Eventually, I realized how important kindness is in the workplace and why kindness is so important to business leaders.

Kindness is important everywhere. Why did you choose to focus on kindness in the workplace?
I could see that there were real challenges in the country and the world. Rhetoric was more challenging, and conversations were becoming more divided. Since people spend so much of their day in the workforce, I started looking for good business cultures and organizations that focus on kindness because I wanted to see their results. Also, I started working to bring kindness to the workplace. My first paid opportunities were with local government, health care and long-term health care, and then credit unions. I have continued working with many of these industries.

Why does kindness improve the bottom line?
My three Rs are reputation, recruitment and retention. When an organization gets a reputation for being unkind, its customers and staff often leave. In contrast, organizations with good reputations have an easier time recruiting talent. The third R is retention. If you tell people that your culture is one way, you hire them, and they discover it's not true, they will usually leave.

What is the easiest way to help business cultures turn toward kindness?
Start by listening. Some organizations listen to find out what is happening before they make changes. Schedule multiple sessions of active listening.

What's the next step after the first one?
Implementing what you can. For example, a fairly small company had its employees working remotely in the spring of 2020. They couldn't do their jobs because the schools were closed and their children were home.

Childcare is a huge challenge for most women. It should be everyone's problem, but it falls mainly on women. The company solved the problem by temporarily making the headquarters into a school. Employees dropped off their children at the temporary school, then went home to work.

What are your favorite stories about kindness in the workplace that have inspired you?
I met a volunteer manager during the first six months of the pandemic. She coordinated 75 working hospice volunteers. April was the usual time to honor volunteers, but she couldn't do a luncheon and provide recognition in the usual ways. Instead, she put together what she called a porch project. She got some cookies and mugs with the hospice logo, and then she and the other professionals in her organization drove over a large geographical area to thank the hospice volunteers by delivering the cookies and mugs to them. Everyone wore masks and stayed socially distanced, but they could see each other eye to eye.

I heard the second story when I spoke at a women's leaders event for a major retail chain. I addressed 250 women, with only three men in the audience: the CEO and two vice presidents. They were working in the grocery market, and I asked them to share a time they had received kindness from a manager.

A woman raised her hand. A decade earlier, when she was in her 20s, she worked in a different state than her family and missed them very much. The manager called her in at Christmas and instructed her to buy a ticket the company would pay for, take a week and visit her family. That was a huge gift; you never get that holiday week off when you are in the retail business.

One of the three men in the room was the boss who made that Christmas trip possible. I got choked up, witnessing that. It reaffirmed the rippled effect and how long somebody might hold on to a remembered kindness. Most people don't forget.

What is the most important lesson about kindness that you've learned?
I have three lessons, not one.

1. The size of the kindness doesn't necessarily matter.

2. Kindness has a ripple effect. Even one act can make a difference.

3. It is harder to receive kindness than it is to give kindness. Many people struggle with receiving, but when we receive kindness gracefully, we let them give us an important gift. Thank you is a complete sentence, and we should practice it regularly.

Do you have a story to share that you heard after a presentation?
In my book, I wrote about one gentleman who was in the senior living world before the pandemic. He was the franchise owner of a home care business. He wanted to recognize people in their work because he knew they were working with elderly adults.

This business owner would meet on Mondays at the beginning of the pandemic with front-line home-care workers. It was still unclear how contagious COVID was, so he made sure he knew what they needed and gave them hand sanitizer, lunch and water. Later, when the staff returned to the office, he had them work Fridays at home that summer, beginning in June 2021. He knew they could work remotely and get their job done.

He made people feel valued and appreciated.

Do you have other mentors who have helped you along the way?
When I began speaking professionally, I joined the National Speakers Association. Keynoters, trainers and consultants are all members who have helped me 100%. I wouldn't be at my current level without their encouragement, and I have encouraged others, too.

What are some lessons you have learned from them?
A fellow speaker once said, "Curiosity didn't kill the cat; comparison did." Celebrate your wins before you start working on conquering the next mountain.

Also, build a bigger pie in your life. I try to live a life of abundance, not scarcity. Choose to live in a place of abundance. Tell yourself different work and a better client are coming when something doesn't work out.

What do you want readers of this article to remember about you and your work when they finish reading it? What is the main takeaway?
I invite you to become a kindness catalyst, too.

Humanity wants more kindness, and we are disenfranchised without it. When people are surrounded by kindness in the workplace, they are healthier, happier, less stressed and less burned out. Real-life research in the last decade supports that conclusion, and more research is continuing to come out. ◗

Linda lives in Portland, Oregon. She and her husband have two adult children and one Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. To learn more, please visit lindacohenconsulting.com.

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