
Spring Training Around The Corner

by [Steve Brown](#)

So many people are gearing up for the NCAA Tournament that few may be thinking about baseball right now, but that will change soon. After all, spring training is already underway and the official 2014 Major League Baseball season gets started in Australia on March 22 (when the LA Dodgers going up against the Arizona Diamondbacks). Until then, enjoy hoops!

When it comes to banking and baseball, there are many benefits to spring training that relate to banking. In sports, spring training helps players generate energy for the upcoming season, without having all the pressures of winning, losing and statistics heaped on them. It's a chance for players to strengthen their muscles and improve their physical fitness. The atmosphere is more relaxed, so players have the opportunity to practice moves that might be deemed too risky for the regular season. It's also a time for senior members of a team to get acquainted with the rookies and to look forward to a good season ahead.

In banking, similar themes arise that can be leveraged. What is your bank doing to rev up employees and motivate them for the year ahead? Do you foster an environment that's chock full of ongoing learning opportunities and team camaraderie?

To be sure, there are many training programs available to help employees fulfill various requirements, but what about going beyond that? There are a host of training options banks can offer beyond the essential. We're talking here about training programs designed to help motivate employees and give them practical techniques to become better at their jobs. Cross selling, sales tips, organization and a host of others can improve opportunities and boost performance of the bank.

Nowadays, with the plethora of available classes across many mediums, there's really no valid reason not to offer professional training and development opportunities to employees. You may have to do some initial leg work to determine what options best fit your bank's needs and budget, but to bypass the opportunity to provide ongoing professional development does employees a disservice. As a starting point, you might want to check out the ABA's catalogue or one from the ICBA. Each one offers hundreds of online courses, many of which are designed for community banks. A few tailored web searches will lead you to other providers as well.

To drive forward even more in training, you might also consider bringing in motivational speakers from time to time to get employees' creative juices flowing and to motivate others who may be stuck in a rut. You never know precisely what's going to inspire someone, so it behooves you to experiment a bit. Periodic lunch and learn workshops can also provide a nurturing and relaxed environment for ongoing training.

In baseball, spring training is an opportunity for players to get back into the swing of the game in a more laid back way. Bank employees, too, could benefit from a spring training of sorts from time to time. Everyone could stand a little push now and then and some need it more than others. If you're not providing the opportunity for staffers to grow and become better, you may find yourself striking out when it comes to employee retention. That can lead to a trickle-down effect to customers. So, no

matter what baseball team you root for this year, offering spring training to your own bank team can go a long way toward creating a winning season this year.

BANK NEWS

More Bearish

The Wall Street Journal highlights research by a finance professor at the University of MI that finds corporate officers and directors (insiders) are the most bearish (pessimistic) they have been in 25Ys. The professor adjusts his analysis by stripping out the largest shareholders and then focuses in on corporate officers and directors only to see where things stand. It is by this analysis that he points out the increased pessimism.

Biz Lending

A survey of business owners by BMO Harris Bank (\$92B, IL) finds 64% of respondents plan to invest in their business this year, 42% expect to upgrade or purchase new equipment, 25% plan to modernize their technology and 24% plan to expand operations. As for lending opportunity, 58% of owners said they would invest using cash reserves, 11% expected to borrow and 31% said they planned to use a combination of the two methods.

Loan Doc Change

Appellate Division for the Superior Court of New Jersey has ruled electronic business records, data files or copies documenting ownership and containing consumer names or account numbers and last billing statements are sufficient proof borrowers own debt and the amount thereof.

Biz Clients

The White House is moving to expand overtime pay to millions of workers by changing the threshold that would trigger time and a half from any salaried worker making less than \$455 per week to something much higher. No specific level has been set but the Labor Secretary has been instructed to work on a plan that could raise it to \$1,000 over time based on analysis that has surfaced in the press. This change could add pressure to business clients, so bankers should closely monitor loan exposures.

Customers

A study by Spectrem Group finds the number of millionaire households in the U.S. jumped to an all-time high level of 9.63mm last year (up 7% vs. 2012) as the economy, stock market and housing prices rebounded.

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