

JOURNAL

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HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT BANKER...

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Avenues for obtaining capital are numerous, affording you more choices for financing than ever before. Loaned dollars have become a commodity in the opinion of many, so the options for borrowers can be overwhelming. In all cases, I would submit to you, the right banker makes a difference.

With that being said, what traits should you look for in selecting the right banker? The characteristics below will help guide you down that path.

Specialty

Just as dentistry continues to become more specialized, there are bankers and banks that have developed very specific market niches and expertise. Knowledge and success in a particular field

is typically the result of significant experience in that field. Find a banker, and a financial institution, who understands health care and how a practice functions. This should be an individual who can demonstrate historical successes in a variety of circumstances. For example, in your industry a banker should understand the growing expense related to equipment as a result of new technological advancements. To a bank, this means it will be more expensive to finance practice purchases, updates, and start-ups. A banker who has been there will understand the efficiencies associated with this new technology and will be able to assist you in overcoming the additional debt load which may accompany same.

Creativity

Most people wouldn't think of bankers as creative. In fact, the majority of folks would think quite the opposite. However, the best bankers are able to look at situations from different angles and find creative solutions. Your banker should provide you options. Resist relationships which force your needs into limited and common solutions. Banking relationships should garner a clear understanding of the issues at hand and provide you with multiple solutions to assist you in achieving your dreams.

Longevity

You should look for a banker and bank with growth potential. Your evaluation of bankers and financial institutions should be based on long-

term objectives. Do not limit your evaluation to one transaction. In other words, find a banker who has your long-term interests at heart. This provides accountability for both you and the banker to do what you both say you will do. Many of you have experienced difficulty when your banking officer switches banks. Make sure the bank has the same philosophy as your officer. This provides continuity should your banker move to another institution.

Honesty

Sometimes the best thing a banker can say is “No”. At the time, this may be frustrating. However, if there is a high level of trust, expertise, and experience this can lead to better decisions for the future of your practice. Your banker should be upfront and open about his/her bank’s processes, approval times, and who makes decisions. While “No” may not feel good at the time, many times you will be thankful later.

Personality

Simply put, someone you find enjoyable to deal with. Life is too short to do business with people you don’t like. If you do not have an open and positive relationship with your

banker, it is very difficult to reach new levels of success. If your relationship proves to be stressful and closed, you will be less likely to ask for opinions, advice, and suggestions. These conversations are those that bring future achievements.

Connectivity

Your banker should be well thought-of in the community. He or she should have an available network of professionals (i.e. CPAs, Attorneys, and other vendors) which can provide additional angles of expertise to your questions. The ultimate situation is to have joint meetings with your CPA, Lawyer and Banker to attack a particular question/concern. This provides depth and confirms your decision making process. As a result, you will have logically thought through all possible outcomes ultimately making a more informed decision.

Curiosity

Simply speaking, your banker should be interested in your business, how it works, where it has been and where it is going. If your banker is not asking these questions, how could he or she possibly be able

to help you achieve your goals? Your banker should be constantly asking questions which cause you to think.

Networking Ability

Your banker should be an additional networking partner for you. This means he or she should be looking for people to introduce you to. In addition, your banker should be thinking about strategic partnerships for your practice and new relationships which can be of value. Networking is not about sales. It is about getting two people together who may provide value to each other in their individual endeavors.

Finally

Does this seem like a lot to ask? Probably. However, a long-term, mutually beneficial banking relationship can add significant enhancements to your practice. In many cases, the lowest cost provider of a loan will not be able to offer you all the traits listed above.

However, a banker with a majority of the traits listed above will provide you with value-added financial solutions. •