Independent Banker

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Leadership at all Levels: Lindsay LaNore

**Making connections**

Like all of us, Ron Brooks is the sum of his parts. The vice president of the Senior Housing Crime Prevention Foundation’s Midwest region speaks of many mentors who have contributed to his professional growth. He offers great advice that I’d like to share.

For Ron, it all started with his college basketball coach, who taught him to learn to be quick, not fast. “When he told me that, I thought he was crazy,” he laughs. “It wasn’t about seeing how fast I could get a basket. It was about surveying the floor, letting my teammates catch up and seeing what the defense is doing.” In short, fast is reckless, quick is decisive.

In 2002, Theresa Vowell, who worked at a large regional bank, gave him an opportunity as a floating teller. When he graduated college a year later, he joined a management trainee program and was assigned a mentor. “One of [my mentor’s] mottos was ‘Change the people or change the people,’” Ron says. “Think of what that means. You train and develop people, give them the tools. If they don’t accept the tools, you change them out.” That type of mentality, where his mentor looked at people as requisition numbers versus human beings, resulted in high turnover. It wasn’t something that gelled with Ron. Sometimes, he thought, mentorship teaches you who you *don’t* want to be.

A year into the job, he asked Vowell about an opportunity to manage a new branch in downtown Memphis, Tenn. She told him he wasn’t ready and put him in the hands of a veteran mentor. In this way, Ron learned the importance of rising through the ranks, rather than aiming straight for the top, and of thinking about what you want to do, not just what title you want to have.

Ron’s mentors taught him that he wanted to be a connector, someone who brings people of all shapes, sizes and backgrounds together. He encourages mentees to take an active role in their professional development. Your mentors are where you’re trying to get to, so push for that. Only one of his mentors looked like him, and as Ron says, “That was a good thing. Diversity is important.” Be aware of those who influence you. Be around people who model the kind of behavior you like.

To steal from basketball, this means playing the offense. “You can’t sit and say, ‘Please mentor me,’ or write it on your forehead,” he says. “Seek out your mentor, and remember it’s a bi-directional relationship.” In other words, bring something to the table to make that relationship symbiotic.

No formal mentoring program is required. The desire to support, encourage and believe in another can make a real difference. And the end game is a win for all involved: the mentee, mentor, bank and industry.

CRA Partners/The Senior Housing Crime Prevention Foundation is a wholly owned subsidiary of ICBA that helps community banks earn turnkey Community Reinvestment Act exam credit with programs tailored to protecting seniors from abuse and financial exploitation. Reach Brooks at 901-529-4790 or *ron.brooks@shcpfoundation.org*

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