

Monthly Mentors: Career Advice for Young Bankers

November's Monthly Mentor is a fellow Young Banker: **Beteshia "Bea" Ethridge**, branch manager at United Bank! Bea has worked in this industry since the age of 19, beginning her career as a teller and working her way up to the leadership role she serves in today.



Bea is no stranger to making an impact in her community. Serving as a CRA Action Committee member and a DE&I Council member at United Bank, she is a passionate advocate for diversity. Most recently, Bea took the initiative to reach out to the NCBA with an idea: a committee of minority bankers to help the NCBA and its membership promote diversity, equity and inclusion. Her suggestion sparked action, and the newly-launched council held its first meeting in August with 18 representatives from banks of all sizes! Through robust and genuine conversation, they exchanged stories, best practices and ideas for advancing equality at their institutions.

We recently had the chance to speak with Bea about the importance of diversity in teambuilding. Read the thoughts she has shared below!

To make diverse decisions, you must have diverse decision makers.

When it comes to advancing and recruiting diverse talent, the ultimate goal should be retention. If you want to attract diverse talent, job candidates should be able to envision themselves advancing to management roles and sitting in the boardroom. Make sure that there is representation at all levels of your institution.

Acceptance and accountability are critical.

It is okay to admit that you may not know what to say about diversity in the workplace. After admitting and accepting this fact, however, you must also be accountable with action. Sometimes that action is adjusting or adding a new policy; sometimes it's advocating for a professional resource that will assist in the adoption of diversity, equity and inclusion. It doesn't matter *where* you start - just make sure that you start!

Build your network of advocates.

There are many advisors with the expertise needed to guide you through uncomfortable conversations. It is important that you develop connections with a diverse range of people. Find a friend who will not take offense when you are being transparent and honest, and actively listen to their feedback so that your messaging is not misinterpreted.

You should not have to relocate to feel valued.

North Carolina has one of the highest presences of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the United States from which to recruit new talent. Unfortunately, North Carolina has some of the least diverse boards and c-suite executives in this industry. While some financial institutions provide pathways for the advancement of minorities, not all of them do. As a leader, it's up to you to change that.

Every state has a different history that should serve as a backbone for progress. We must respect our own truth and our own history, but we must also commit to doing better. Addressing this commitment in a measurable and timely fashion is essential to being effective in leadership.

No more checking boxes. Be gamechangers!

The NCBA and NCYB are amazing resources – use them to your advantage. The NCBA has a newly-launched Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council made up of a diverse group of bankers, all of whom are capable of helping you to advocate and be the voice of change. Get involved!

We each have a unique story about how we have been the “only ones” in our departments, in our roles or even in our companies. Refuse to be the tokens or the check boxes. **Choose to be the trailblazers!**

Do you have a mentor who has helped you along with your career? Would others appreciate their advice? Reach out to Scott Brownlow at scott@ncbankers.org in order to suggest future guest mentors!