

Monthly Mentors: Career Advice for Young Bankers

In the recent webinar with Cassi Chandler, *Diversity - A Personal Journey*, Cassi discussed the reasons why each of us needs to make a personal commitment to diversity and inclusion. She stressed the importance of self-reflection, difficult conversations and raw honesty. If you missed the webinar, make sure you [click here](#) to give it a watch!



Our latest Monthly Mentor is a member of the NCBA DE&I Council and took part in Cassi's recent webinar. We had the chance to sit down with Nick Means, AVP and training and development officer for F&M Bank, and we spoke about the power of raw honesty and transparency - especially where it concerns our shared past and creating a better future. Read on to discover how reflecting upon six powerful words changed Nick's life.

It was all a dream. I remember like it was yesterday. Standing proudly beside my desk, hand over my heart, eyes on the flag, repeating the Pledge of Allegiance and saying, "with liberty and justice for ALL!" That was how our days started in elementary school. Little did we know, as we stood there in agreement, that we would grow up to learn that those last six words don't always ring true – at least, not for everyone.

The older I became, the more I realized that "with liberty and justice for all" seemed to exist as an idea rather than reality. I've realized that everyone isn't afforded the same liberties, and when some minorities do, they are considered "different." Imagine waking up every day and constantly being an "X" that's surrounded by "O's". You're told that in order to be successful, you have to do things a certain way – the way things have always been done. Your examples of success look nothing like you, and you're taught that your history begins in the belly of a slave ship.

Growing up, the only Black leaders that were celebrated in school were the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and a handful of civil rights leaders – absolutely important figures, but only a small sample of Black history. Imagine what that does to the psyche of a child or young adult. When will we start looking at history for what it is, so that we can learn from our past instead of pretending it didn't exist? When will we realize the power of raw honesty and transparency? And when will we truly recognize the atrocities that took place so that we can prevent anything remotely similar from ever happening again?

Many people don't want to accept the ugly past that haunts us; however, unadulterated honesty is the only way we can truly heal and move forward. The goal is not to point fingers or to assign individual blame for harmful practices set in place a long time ago, but we must acknowledge the ways that many still benefit from practices, such as redlining, while others continue to suffer. I Googled "ism," and Oxford Languages

defines it as a distinctive practice, system or philosophy, typically a political ideology or an artistic movement. RacISM, classISM and sexISM are all ideologies that have been passed down for generations that continue to poison hearts and minds. We must find a way to work together to dismantle the practices and systems that allow these "ism"s to continue to thrive.

We are experiencing some critical times when it comes to humanity and how we treat others. We have a moral obligation to take an honest look at the world around us and do the right thing. In 50 to 100 years from now, people are going to look back at what we do today and the direct impact it has on their realities. Ask yourself, what side of history do you want to be on?

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