

TEXAS

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IN THIS ISSUE

- The 82nd Texas Legislature and your bank
- The 'Make it or Break it' person
- Meet the 2011-12 Board



An uncommon combination

Brian Townley, Senior Vice President, The National Banks of Central Texas, Waco

“I’m not just an ex-banker with abstract ideas; I’m dealing with the same things that bankers everywhere are dealing with on a daily basis.”

No day is an ordinary day for Waco banker Brian Townley. On any given day, he could be visiting branches to sort out human resources issues, speaking at leadership conferences, setting up shop at another bank for a week as an in-house leadership consultant or developing creative incentive plans involving a “Mission: Possible” theme and bank shirts autographed by Tom Cruise. During one particularly stressful branch-wide computer conversion, he even led the branch’s employees in an outdoor heyday of Office-Space-style destruction of broken computer parts destined for the trash.

In his job for the National Banks of Central Texas, Townley serves both as a full-time banker in charge of human resources and marketing and as a full-time motivational speaker and consultant through the bank’s side consulting business, Motivational Management Group Inc. The bank formed the consulting business to help cultivate Townley’s growing reputation in the banking world and drum up some business in the process. The success of his unconventional approaches to encouraging employee motivation have earned him much word-of-mouth attention and are the subject of his new book, “Inspiring Leadership: Unleashing

Motivation in the Workplace,” out this month.

“It is a firm belief of mine that a true leader finds fulfillment in helping others succeed,” Townley said. “My great uncle Grady Ash, a great leader and business owner, always tells me that the view is always better from the top. But it can also be a lonely place at the top, unless you’ve helped people along the way who are right there with you. That’s why motivating employees is so important, not to mention the effect on the bank’s bottom line.”

No ordinary banker

Townley realizes that his employment situation is a unique one, but he attributes his out-of-the-box success to the thinking of two great leaders at his bank, Chairman David Barnard and Executive Vice President Ken Poston.

“I have been very lucky that our bank’s chairman has always been very good at recognizing talent, and my direct supervisor is a developer and a very creative man who is always looking outside the box,” Townley said. “Between the two of them, they have nurtured my career and created a workplace very open to innovation. They’ve always allowed me to lead and try new things, even though the places it leads may be unconventional.”

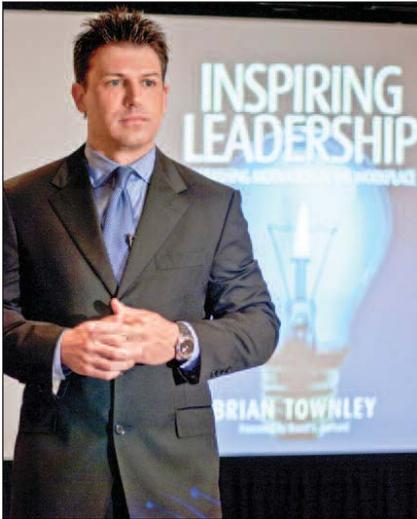
Aside from the consulting work, Townley’s actual job is also a direct result of the unconventional thinking of his superiors. Townley serves in a unique position in his bank, a position created specifically for him, as the head of both the human resources department and the marketing department.

“It’s not a common combination, but I greatly enjoy finding ways to bridge the two together,” Townley said. “I have to hire the right people and get them proper training, but those people are what make our marketing engine run. I love this dual role; it’s amazing how much the two departments actually do intersect.”

Townley actively juggles these two roles together with the role of consultant and motivational speaker, but he said it helps him retain a fresh perspective.



Brian Townley explores New Zealand’s highest mountain top on a recent trip.



Brian Townley presents on topics from his new book, "Inspiring Leadership," at a conference.

"It makes for a very busy work life, but it's a good thing that I am both an active banker and a consultant," Townley said. "I'm not just an ex-banker with abstract ideas; I'm dealing with the same things that bankers everywhere are dealing with on a daily basis."

A runaway success

The Texas Bankers Association played a key role in launching the motivational speaking portion of Townley's career. After hearing about Townley's unconventional methods in his bank, TBA invited him to speak at an educational event, his first speaking engagement. Townley presented on the various themed incentive programs he came up with at his bank, including the "Mission: Possible" campaign and others with themes based on "Survivor," "Head of Household" and a Las Vegas theme.

The presentation was a runaway success, and Townley's speaking career was launched. Townley has since spoken at various leadership conferences and to marketing groups across the country, as well as at the educational events of various banking associations, including the American Bankers Association and a number of state banking associations nationwide.

Townley will continue his partnership with TBA with presentations



Brian Townley discusses financial topics on air with Moms Everyday host Kira Hanney.

at the upcoming Human Resources and Training Conference in August and at the new Branch Leadership School in September, both in San Antonio.

An unlikely start

Townley did not set out with the intention of becoming an expert on motivation. In fact, he didn't even intend to become a banker. "The thought never even crossed my mind," Townley said.

Townley's banking career found him as a hesitant high school student. "My dad was always on me to get a job, and every day he would ask if I had applied anywhere yet," Townley said. "I kept avoiding it, until finally I just got tired of my dad's nagging and applied for a job at the local bank. I was not expecting or even hoping to get the job, but just looking for a different answer to give my dad, so I could tell him I had applied for a job and he would leave me alone."

But Townley's indifference was rewarded in an unlikely way: he was offered a job as a part-time drive-thru teller at \$3.10 an hour. He has worked for the same bank ever since, advancing through the ranks with discipline and effort and finding ways to stand out above the crowd through a number of various departments and an ownership change in 1991.

The track to leadership

Townley says the real turning point in his career was when he was working in his first supervisory role over a small branch. He was only 21 years old at the time, and, after the bank's ownership change, was thrust into a leadership position supervising a number of more experienced employees. One day his own supervisor took him out to lunch and told him that some of his employees were complaining that he was difficult to work with.

"I started to get angry because these employees just thought they could go over my head because they were older than me," Townley said. "But then I realized that their reasoning didn't change anything. There's immense power in perception and even if you're not doing something, if it appears to others that you are, that's almost as bad. You have to remove any shadow of doubt. So I went in the next day, completely resolved to be the nicest, most helpful person ever, and the respect came almost instantly. They began to look at me as a true leader."

It was then that Townley began to realize that leadership is a learned skill, he said.

Leadership and skills

The difference between a true "leader" and a dictator-style "commander" is a cornerstone of Townley's leadership philosophy and

a topic he often addresses in consulting work and speaking engagements. He now requires all employees taking on management responsibilities for the first time to complete a leadership training course that makes them aware of the changing scope of their job.

In fact, good leadership skills may be even more important than technical skills, Townley said. He specifically recalls when he was tasked with starting a brand new Data Center department for the bank. "I asked why they chose me because I had no experience with the new technology we were launching through this department," Townley said. "They told me that they could easily teach me the skills, but that true leadership was required to run this department."

As it turns out, the group of employees slated to start up this new department were overflow employees from other departments, "extra" employees whose jobs had been swept away by technology and were, in many cases, lacking vision and direction. "They would be the first to tell you that they were the 'problem' employees at the bank," Townley said. "They were the ones everyone wanted to get rid of. They were a ragtag group, and I was tasked with building a new department with these 'castoff' employees."

Around this time, Townley saw a news story on parenting reporting that children know when talk is just talk. When parents threaten to pull the car over and never actually do, children recognize the empty threat



Brian Townley, right, poses with inspirational singer David Phelps. In his spare time, Townley works as a concert promoter for Phelps and donates his earnings to charity.

and refuse to behave. Townley pulled his employees aside on day one and told them about this news story. "Make no mistake," he told them, "with me, talk is not just talk. I really will pull the car over." The employees believed him, and in time, treated him with respect and grew into wonderful employees.

Banking with people

The National Banks of Central Texas has seven locations in widely varying markets with widely varying financial needs, including agricultural, military, suburban, urban and retirement niche markets.

"We are the embodiment of not putting all our eggs in one basket," Townley said. "In any crisis, whether it's a drought or a deployment, our other markets are able to pick up the slack."

The bank's focus has always been based on trust and customer service. "People bank with people," Townley said. The bank's unusual

focus on leadership has also granted it an edge with its customers. "When our employees are happy, it trickles down to the customers and shareholders," Townley said.

Beyond the bank

In addition to juggling his various roles at the bank, Townley juggles a side job as a concert promoter for inspirational singer David Phelps. Townley saw Phelps in concert for the first time in 2001. "His music was so inspiring that it motivated me to look at life through different eyes," Townley said. "I then resolved to bring this inspiration to my hometown, Waco."

Townley is also an avid traveler. He has resolved to take at least one epic trip per year. Last year he visited New Zealand and the South Pacific, and slated for later this year are Hawaii and Paradise Island, Bahamas. He has already started planning for a Europe trip in 2012.

"We, as Americans, are often in blinders, thinking that life is just the way we know it here," Townley said. "But the world is a really big place, and there are places to get inspired all over the world. Travel can open your mind, but it can also rest your mind. Travel recharges my batteries and ensures that I don't get burned out."

Townley also serves as a financial expert for KWTX, a local TV station. He began with a six-week segment called "Money Tips" that covered basics of budgeting, saving and credit and answered questions from viewers that were emailed in. He still serves as an on-air expert when needed and offers money tips on a show called "Moms Everyday," where he presents segments on bank accounts for kids, saving for college, how to give allowances and financial education to mothers at home.

"It's the same, whether you're dealing with problem employees or trying to get the general public educated on the necessity of saving," Townley said. "No one can actually motivate someone to do something. But someone can inspire people to motivate themselves. Then there is no limit to what can be accomplished." ♦

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