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HOW TO GO TO BANKING SCHOOL

Are You Maximizing the Return on Your (*bank's*) Investment in a School of Banking?

*Nine Notions for Bringing a Competitive Advantage
Back to your Bank When You Return to your Desk*

Let's face it, your bank is investing in you, at these banking school sessions, in the hopes that you'll come back ready to make an even greater contribution to the company's success. And from my side of the podium, I can tell you that nothing is more satisfying than hearing from participants who have applied what I've taught, and who contact me later to tell me it made them more effective in their jobs.

Over the years, I've noticed some patterns among those participants who really deliver a return on their bank's investment in this training, and here are "Nine Notions" about what you can do during these classes to make sure what you learn makes a difference:

1. **Personalize your notes and handouts** by linking them back to your own market, products, and practices. Write *specific* customers, transactions, procedures, products, services next to the more generic content you'll find in your handouts, so when you return to the bank, you can see from your notes where information applies.
2. **If something doesn't seem to apply to your situation, ask yourself why not.** Sometimes it is because the example or topic fits markets or systems that are very different from yours. Sometimes it *could* apply to your situation, and you realize your bank doesn't do something that many other banks do (or does something that others don't). If content doesn't apply to your situation, *don't just dismiss it*. Make sure you know the difference between something that *really* doesn't apply to you, and something that *should*, but doesn't.
3. **Make your own "takeaways"**. Many instructors provide various tools -- summary cards, convenient tables, etc. -- that capture key points in easy-to-remember ways, so you can apply them when you get back to your desk. But *no tool fits the way you think as well as one you make yourself*. Try to boil each unit down on an index card, using words, symbols, whatever helps you apply the content. Then you'll be able to grab a card, instead of wade through a notebook, when you need that information at your desk.

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4. **Review your notes daily *while you're here!*** If you wait until you get home, you'll already have forgotten some of what you learned. Try getting to class a few minutes early in the morning and reviewing the previous day's events. That will give you context for the day's work, and prompt you to ask questions about anything you're unsure of before it becomes ancient history.
5. **Listen for what hasn't happened to you . . . yet!** Don't just pay attention when the conversation seems to be covering *your* situation. Look for things that you *haven't* experienced, but *could* in the future. Banking schools bring together a lot of experience, from instructors and students alike. If you only tune into the experiences you already know about, you're wasting a good portion of your bank's investment in the training. Get a glimpse of *your* future, and start preparing for it now.
6. **Prepare a list of questions** for when you return. As you discover differences between the practices described in class and what goes on in your own work, prepare to have some discussions with your management and colleagues when you return. There may be good reasons for the differences, but you want to know the *why* of what you're doing, not just the *what*.
7. **Find a study buddy for AFTER the school.** When you get back to your desk, things that were clear while you were in class are suddenly going to become a lot fuzzier. Find someone you can share notes with, talk things over with. And the best study buddy is someone from a similar situation, but *in a different market* -- so you can call or e-mail each other, refresh your memories, and not be in competition with each other.
8. **Write an action plan as you go.** *Education is about behavior.* the purpose of a banking school is to help you behave differently, that is, to work more effectively. At the end of each day, translate what you've learned into next steps that you (and your bank) should take. *Think action, action, action!*
9. **Get instructor contact information.** Most instructors are happy to hear from you after the school if you have questions. Know how to reach them.

There's a big difference between spending time at a school and using that time to develop your skills and knowledge. Making the most of your time here, using the nine tips above, is good for your bank, and good for your career, and it doesn't take a lot of extra effort.

Let a small investment of time and thought maximize your return, personally and professionally, on your banking school experience!

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