







# BANK

By Beth O'Brien

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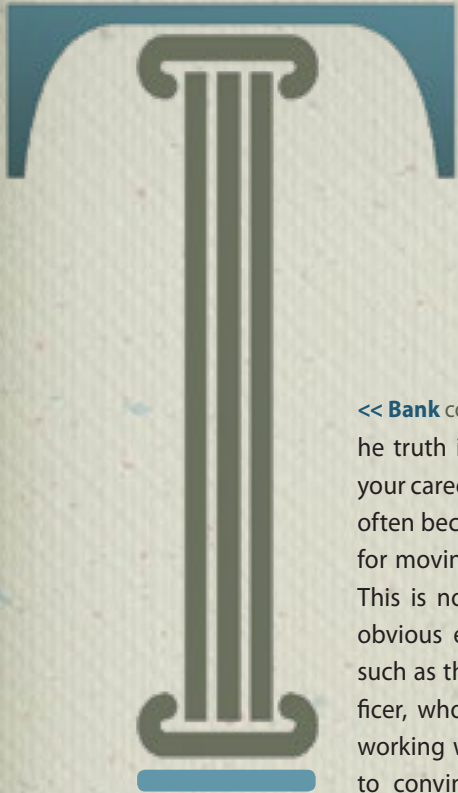
## Your Way to Success

**Build an industrywide reputation and  
take your career to the next level**

A commercial mortgage broker once mentioned that she was passed over for a promotion. She wasn't considered for the job at her prior company, even though she had all the technical skills. The reason, she was told, was that she was not "bankable." In other words, she was not a known commodity to the people inside and outside her company who would be working with her. ■ This seemed pretty unfair given that she had a good internal track record. She had never been encouraged to build a reputation and make the needed connections outside the company. So, although she had all the tangible skills, she was somehow missing a key intangible asset. Many of us make the same mistake of assuming that attributes needed for a job will simply develop with time or experience. ➔

Artwork by Karen Steichen





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he truth is, at some point in your career, being “bankable” often becomes a prerequisite for moving to the next level. This is not only true for the obvious executive positions, such as the chief financial officer, who will constantly be working with outside parties to convince banks to work with his or her company. It is true across the board at a mortgage company.

There are very few senior positions left in the mortgage industry that are strictly internal and isolated. Even those rare positions could be better served by individuals who are comfortable speaking with a range of people inside and outside their organization. Even the senior operations executive should consider how bankable he or she is.

So, wherever you are in your career, if you want one of those senior positions, the time to make yourself bankable starts now. But what does that mean and, more importantly, how does one become bankable before it becomes a career limitation?

### Thought leadership

The first step is to become a thought leader. This sounds a bit daunting at times, but it’s not really that difficult once you focus on becoming one.

Actively listen to what people around you are saying. Religiously read an industry newsletter or blog for a few weeks and then take some time to reflect on it. Are there emerging industry trends? Do specific issues keep coming up, such as a particularly thorny challenge that remains unaddressed and that you have thoughts about? Take some time to think about your subject and connect the dots.

Once you have developed your idea, talk with people in your company about it. Refine your message and consider writing a short piece or just a few sentences of your thoughts. Once you master your subject, make some comments in the feedback section of an online article or LinkedIn post. Test your ability to make your ideas public and see what the reaction is. Then, once you are comfortable, tweet out your ideas and post them on your personal LinkedIn or Facebook page, or in the comments section of an industry blog.

Gradually push out your ideas externally. Start small and become bolder over time. Soon, everyone will be asking for your opinion. You also will gain the valuable side benefit of becoming more aware of what’s happening around you, as well as becoming more interesting to those you know.

### Public-speaking skills

If you attend industry conferences, it’s easy to volunteer to speak, but a public-speaking engagement is probably not the best place to start building your reputation, particularly if you are not viewed as an expert. The easiest place to hone your public-speaking skills is within your company.

Go to your human-resources department and offer to do a “lunch and learn” for the junior employees. Volunteer to organize a few weeks of content for the summer interns, and invite the guest speakers whom you’ve always wanted to meet. If that option isn’t possible, join your company’s on-campus recruiting team and speak to prospective hires about the mortgage industry. Consider volunteering to interview people internally. This can help you refine a pitch on what is interesting about your business.

Once you’ve found your voice, you are now ready to let yourself be heard. Consider doing a webinar for clients on the theme from your internal “lunch and learn.” If something interesting comes out of your recruiting efforts, you also could record a video that your human-resources onboarding team could use with new hires.

You also can publish your webinar ideas and video clips to social media sites and your company blog. Video has limitless possibilities. It not only will draw invitations to speak in public, but it also can have a long shelf life that helps build an audience. Furthermore, when you do get that speaking slot, make sure someone is there to capture it on video. You may speak before just a few hundred people that day, but your video recording of the speech could reach 10 times as many. And, if your posted video gets likes and comments, it will draw even more attention, producing a true multiplier effect.

But if you are not ready to be the star yet, volunteer to interview other speakers and learn from them. Get yourself out there. Be ready when the opportunity to speak becomes available.

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### Personal branding

Your transformation will not happen overnight. Becoming bankable is something that builds over time and requires a deliberate effort. It should be part of your weekly agenda. If you forget to put it on your to-do list, it will likely get pushed aside. Don't let your day-to-day tasks distract you from your strategy. Schedule actual time to nurture this part of your career.

Your content needs to be strong and in your own voice, but it is important to know that you can learn from others. Don't forget to follow other thought leaders, comment on interesting ideas and engage with others both inside and outside your company.

Developing a personal brand is similar to becoming a thought leader and improving your skills as a public speaker. Build your external circle of contacts in concentric fashion from the internal circle. Start by engaging with colleagues and industry connections you know well, and then move on to industry leaders whom you don't know well or at all.

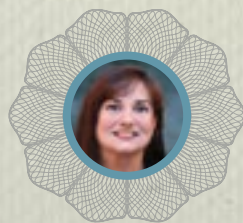
Remember, this is not all about advancing your career. You also can help other people. If you have

exhausted your training and recruiting channels, and you don't have the next step planned for a conference or educational event, consider giving a testimonial to one of your vendors or offer to train them in some way. You also can branch out into your community and speak to nonindustry groups. Maybe a local high school has a finance club that would benefit from a "Mortgages 101" event.

Real estate finance should be interesting to everyone because it is such an important part of everyone's personal wealth and experience. The exchange of ideas is a give and take. You may wind up reconnecting with people from your past that you didn't know were in other mortgage companies or related industries.



Before too long, you will develop a network of close contacts inside and outside your company, consisting both of junior- and senior-level employees, and you will be able to draw on a host of diverse ideas. You also will be bankable. When it is time to be considered for the next promotion, you will be ready this time. Your brand will be heard. ■



**Beth O'Brien** is president and CEO of CoreVest, the leading private lender to residential real estate investors. Previously, O'Brien was executive vice president at Auction.com and president of AuctionFinance.com, where she founded a proprietary private money lender geared toward the investor market. O'Brien also held positions at Citigroup and Goldman Sachs. She has more than 25 years of mortgage industry experience and has overseen more than \$15 billion in transactions. Reach O'Brien at [corevestfinance.com](http://corevestfinance.com) or (844) 223-2231.