

**INDIE BANKER**  
*of the month*

**Ron Geib**  
*Harleysville Savings Bank in Harleysville, Pa.*

**Harleysville Savings Bank**  
**Location:** Harleysville, Pa.      **Employees:** 130  
**Assets:** \$805 million      **Retail locations:** seven



PHOTO: LEE C. BHELLY

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—RON GEIB, HARLEYSVILLE SAVINGS BANK

#### **Leadership for Everyone**

Six years ago, Ron Geib embarked on a leadership training program after he was promoted to president and CEO of Harleysville Savings Bank. Since then, the program has expanded into a formal curriculum that helps continually guide the work and communication of all the bank's employees, from senior managers to frontline service staff.

# Growing Leaders

Ron Geib helps make leadership and professional growth an everyday pursuit at Harleysville Savings Bank

By Carol Patton

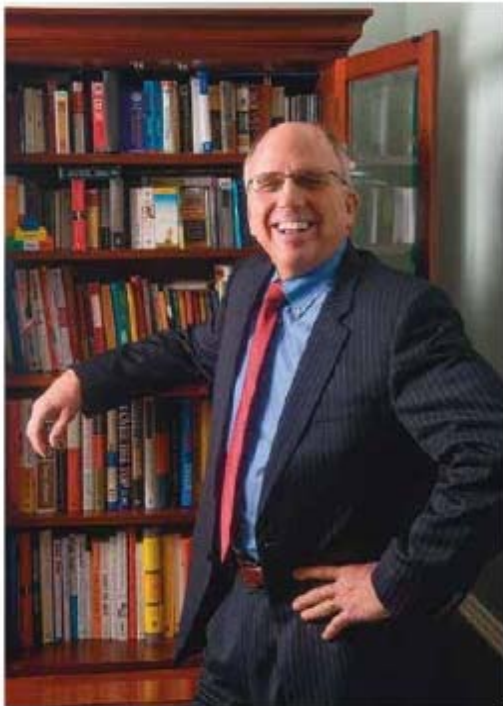
**E**verything in any organization rises and falls based on leadership. That's insight Ron Geib has taken to heart since becoming president and CEO of Harleysville Savings Bank in Harleysville, Pa.

Back in 2007, when Geib was promoted from within the bank to his current role as the bank's chief executive, he received uncommon advice from the community bank's board of directors: find a leadership coach.

So he did. After a brief search, Geib hired Mark Crocco, a leadership development consultant. The instruction from Crocco not only shaped his own thoughts and style of leadership, but it blossomed into a full-blown leadership development program that guides the daily interactions and performance of all of Harleysville Savings' employees.

"It became evident in our strategic planning that developing our people was important," Geib says. "That's the only way we can exist—to bring value. It's not just doing transactions correctly; it's developing people."

Over the past five years, Harleysville Savings, an \$805 million-asset community bank, has done just that. Under Geib's and Crocco's guidance, the bank's five senior officers and 18 managers have embraced the idea of building a prominent leadership culture. They worked to create a formal leadership training program that encourages the ongoing development of interpersonal and communication skills among staff. This outgrowth of culture has enhanced working relationships and improved results between the bank's employees and customers.



Ren Geib, CEO of Harleysville Savings Bank, reinforces the bank's leadership culture through frequent outreach to his management team.

The leadership training program is geared to inspire the bank's 130 employees to deliver a consistent experience of excellent customer service. "It makes our operation as strong as possible, producing the best bottom line," Geib says.

Geib learned a lot about himself through leadership training, such as how he makes decisions and how his own skills can complement the

talents of his management team. The training has also helped the team have difficult but honest conversations without taking what's said personally, he says. "The bank benefits from having these wrestling matches over issues. We make things better, pound out a better answer."

One example of this open and candid communication is the nature of employee performance feedback

at Harleysville Savings. Instead of conducting formal evaluations twice a year—as was done in the past—the bank's managers offer their team members constructive feedback as situations emerge, rather than waiting to address performance issues at the employee's next review. In these instances, managers might offer further instruction or training, a pat on the back, a few words of praise or encouragement, or even advice to correct a problem.

As a result, employees now accept, and even anticipate, constructive feedback and appreciate its value, Geib says.

**Proof positive**

Harleysville Savings managers are encouraged to demonstrate their

leadership skills on a daily basis, mostly by acting as role models for other staff members. Geib says this ripple effect of leadership has produced positive results on recent employee engagement surveys. Staff members were asked to rate various statements, and the average employee score for the statement, "I know what's expected of me at work," was 4.7 out of 5. Another statement, "During the last seven days, I received recognition or praise for doing good work," averaged 4.1.

Sometimes, employees don't understand fully what it takes to "win," Geib says. Like players on a sports team, all employees must fulfill a specific role and know exactly what their teammates expect of each other. Through the bank's leadership program, all Harleysville Savings employees understand their role, what's expected of them and how their efforts contribute to the bank's overall mission and bottom line, he says.

To reinforce Harleysville Savings' leadership culture and philosophy, Geib emails weekly thoughts—such as steps for building your own self-image—to his management team. Additionally, the senior managers meet with Crocco monthly—and then again with the whole management team—to identify new ways to apply their skills.

Geib credits the bank's leadership program with encouraging managers to serve in leadership positions throughout their community, often on local nonprofit boards. In return, their volunteer work—along with the bank's sponsorship of local events—has attracted more new business, including a recent \$5 million loan to a grocery store.

Another perk of the bank's leadership program has been the overall positive reaction from customers, Geib says. "What I love hearing are customers saying, 'No matter which branch I go in, I feel important,'" he says. "We have a consistent experience or brand across the bank's footprint."

### Room for growth

When the leadership program was first launched for Harleysville Savings' management team, Crocco conducted monthly team-building exercises. Then he created individual

## Building Blocks to Leadership

Here are six recommendations from Ron Geib, president and CEO of Harleysville Savings Bank, on developing leadership in your community bank's employees.

**1. Be intentional about leadership development.** Develop a plan that is implemented, embraced and monitored.

**2. Value staff training and development.** Make it an integral part of your bank's culture.

**3. Spell out management's expectations** of employees as well as their job responsibilities.

**4. Communicate your bank's vision and mission** to all team members.

**5. Demonstrate how employees' unique skills and efforts are respected,** appreciated and a significant part of the bank's success.

**6. Create career development plans** for frontline staff. Identify potential growth opportunities.

leadership development plans tailored to Geib and each of the bank's other senior officers. Team members also regularly share with each other how they have applied their leadership skills, often telling how they've given colleagues a sense of purpose, appreciated their work contributions or praised their skills.

"I've seen growth in their attitudes, people skills, communication skills and level of accountability," Crocco says.

However, Crocco adds that the most difficult part of the program is measuring leadership effectiveness, saying that staff development is a primary leadership responsibility. "Are they growing and developing their people? That's a much higher and challenging standard."

Among the leadership program's goals is to drive the bank's vision, mission and values deep into the organization. As part of this process, Sheri Strouse, the bank's chief retail officer, has been visiting staff at all of the bank's branches to review individuals' leadership skills for approximately two years. Initially the branch managers completed a Myers Briggs personality test, the results of which were shared with the employee and his or her management team.

"Everyone knew where everyone scored, the way they evaluated issues and made their decisions," explains Strouse, adding that the experience was so successful that personality tests were later conducted with

assistant branch managers and then with 85 frontline employees at the remaining six retail offices.

Strouse explains that employees and managers learned about each other's personality traits and how to better communicate with peers so tasks or projects could be completed more efficiently. She points to her own experiences as an example: "I now understand how I need to approach some of the senior officers and how they make their decisions."

Later, the leadership program focused on creating development plans for employees that focused on their individual strengths, areas requiring improvement and motivational triggers. The plans also cover how the bank can help each employee reach his or her career goals. Conversations with employees about their professional progress take place every four to six weeks.

Today, Strouse is coaching branch employees by leading skills drills, observing how they interact with customers, and offering customer service and communication tips. "I truly believe in this program," she says, giving the program partial credit for building an "amazing" work environment and bank culture.

"By developing these leadership skills, it's giving our employees an opportunity to grow," Strouse adds. "It's important that we keep continuing to grow and keep investing in ourselves." ■

Carol Patton is a writer in Las Vegas, Nev.