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STUDY

Thinking Partnership

Tyler Erickson, Vice President of
Development & Marketing at American Bank

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A decade into his banking career, Tyler Erickson was juggling a lot of responsibilities as then-VP of marketing & development at American Bank. An energetic leader, he liked to move fast — whether on skis or in business.

But one afternoon, Emily Wolfe, one of his main thinking partners, stopped him in his tracks.

“What do you actually *do* as VP of marketing and development? she asked, sitting in her usual chair across his desk. “And what do you want to accomplish with the bank?”

These questions would become the cornerstone of their work together, a key to rejuvenating the bank’s culture, and a catalyst in his career growth.

“Emily helped open up what I truly want to do in banking. She’s really good at turning up the volume on what is valuable and interesting.”

American Bank is a privately-held community bank with a 75-year history in Montana, and Tyler has a heart big enough to contain it all. He savors morning hellos in the lobby and meets customers around the state, whether in his hometown of Livingston, or at one of the five other locations. Determined to stand out, he’s furnished branches with antique toys, Western art and shoe shines. He cherishes its history, which began when his grandfather founded the first branch.

As community banks nationwide scramble to stay relevant, Tyler is working to strengthen the bank’s role as a foundation for its communities and a key partner for its customers.

Which is why Emily was there in his office, asking tough questions.

As Tyler considered how to describe his role, Emily shifted in her seat. She’d worked closely with him to rewrite the company website, and they were now collaborating on the AB Heritage Book, a nostalgic and educational 50-page booklet meant to strengthen the bank’s culture. She knew that his grandfather, Claude, gifted fish fillet knives to customers, and that his father, Bruce, once sold a prized silver dollar collection to meet payroll when the railroad left town.

Emily knew Tyler had big dreams for American Bank, too.



“Before you tell me what you want to accomplish,” she said, “let’s consider something else. How might you maximize your impact?”

Answering that question has become the essence of their partnership in the years since.

Tyler shares his big ideas, and Emily helps vet and bring the best ones to life.

The results have aligned and enlivened American Bank’s culture and driven its business strategy.



“When I’m with Emily, I pick up all the projects I usually just dream about. Without her, the culture workshops and leadership retreats would never have happened.”

Alongside the Heritage Book, they articulated the bank’s purpose, vision, mission and values. They used that high-level thinking to create the bank’s first rigorous strategic plan, which they launched at a new annual leadership retreat — a retreat Emily helped sculpt, and where she continues to facilitate innovative workshops years later. Next, she assembled a crack team of contractors to create the bank’s branding and marketing.

But the most valuable thing, if you ask Tyler, are the conversations.

What followed is what continues to this day: Thinking partnership. Developmental coaching. Leadership retreats. Team workshops. Empowering branches to give back to their communities. And, of course, weekly conversations in Tyler’s office.

Since Tyler and Emily began their work in 2019, more than 1,000 community banks have shuttered or sold. During that same time, American Bank has remained independent and become a top performer among its peers nationwide. 🤝