**Start with Captain Obvious**
by Charles Wendel

You have probably all seen the Hotels.com commercials featuring Captain Obvious. As a *New York Times* article noted, "Everything he says is self-evident." There is a lot to be said for stressing the obvious.

Last week's newsletter, loftily titled "[The Keys to Success](#)" listed six areas that we think banks need to assess and improve if they are to succeed:

1. Segmenting/Differentiation
2. Compensating staff as a competitive advantage
3. Changing the role of support groups
4. Making sure the customer (rather than internal groups) view customer service as excellent
5. Getting your workers back into the office to improve communication and culture
6. Avoiding fads, the shiny new pennies that seem to captivate many executives and cause them to shift focus to new areas rather than ensuring effective implementation of initiatives already underway

One reader added three items:

7. Hiring and retaining the right people
8. Preserving the culture
9. Stressing implementation

If any company managed these nine areas with focus, success would follow. But isn't each one fairly obvious? Yes, but that does not mean that banks pay attention to these topics or, even less, excel at them. In some cases, the obvious has been abandoned. Instead, executives pursuit AI, or digitalization, or crypto, or dozens of other shiny new pennies.

Why do banks fail to button down issues related to obvious areas and instead launch off into initiatives that, while important, will have limited success unless the obvious has been settled.

**Obvious does not mean easy**. Many of the above issues require crossing across organizational lines and making decisions that will raise the ire and defensiveness of internal groups.

**Dealing with the obvious requires decision making and leadership**. It is much easier to equivocate and placate than it is to make decisions that change an organization.

**Internal groups may muddy the obvious**. Groups like HR, Marketing, IT can complexify what others might say are obvious choices. These groups act based on sincere concerns and, maybe, self-preservation.

**Consultants and others thrive on obfuscating the obvious**. I am repeating a story I have used before, but it remains relevant. A senior consultant at a MAJOR firm once told me the following tale. A consulting partner goes off on vacation. When he comes back two young consultants are outside his office waiting to update him on their separate projects. One consultant excitedly tells the partner (who is responsible for revenue generation) that while he was away, his client's concerns were addressed, the client loved the solution, and the project ended. The second consultant enters to discuss a different client. This consultant talks for ten minutes describing how the initial issue they were working on was much more complex. Instead of solving the problem and ending the project, work had continued and would go on for another two or three months.

The partner then stopped and paused dramatically. He looked at me and asked, "Which message do you think the partner wanted to hear?" The answer to that question is obvious. But good for the client? Maybe not.

Embracing obvious issues and nailing them, getting them right before becoming distracted could well serve as the foundation for new initiatives and sustainable success.