

## The Leader Who Serves- Howard Smith

Posted **September 11, 2020**

With a heart for philanthropy and ensuring that others succeed, Howard Smith epitomizes the Rotary Club's motto – Service Above Self – in all aspects of his life. Guided by the philosophy 'live a balanced life', the immediate past president of the Rotary Club of Liguanea Plains, has balanced the scale between fulfilling his passion and maintaining a successful career.



Smith has built a promising career in banking, while maintaining a level of commitment to putting others' needs above his own. Though banking is an unlikely career for an individual with a background in Information Technology, Smith has carved a path to success at Sagicor Bank, ascending the ranks from teller to the recently appointed manager for SME Business Banking.

The 36-year-old's baptism in banking happened in 2003 when he enrolled in the Heart Trust NTA's trainee programme and was placed at the then RBC Bank to work in an entry-level position. There Smith provided support to the Operations team, gaining much needed work-experience as he had recently completed his diploma in Information Technology from the Portmore Community College.

Finding his footing in the field, young Smith realized he had a passion for customer service and would utilize his lunch time to learn the role. Six months into his job as a teller, he transitioned into Customer Service and settled into a career geared towards helping persons accomplish their goals through financing.

For Smith, his success in the field is largely attributable to his 'can-do' attitude and his ability to build meaningful relationships with clients and team members. Having served as a Personal Banker and Relationship Business Banker, Smith played an integral role in building the business portfolio for the Hope Road branch – something he notes was

one of the most challenging aspects of his career to date.

“During that time in my career, I used to traverse many communities in Kingston just to get clients”, Smith shared. “That was probably the toughest year ever in my banking career”, he added, but said it was necessary to help build the bank’s portfolio.

A dedicated professional, Smith said that though it was a challenge walking the plazas in and around the corporate area and getting businesses to open accounts at Sagicor Bank; it was a valuable part of the process, which taught him patience and people skills. He is also encouraging other young professionals to not be daunted by how difficult a task may seem, but to instead focus on the results and the rewards that will come from being committed and industrious.

To date, Smith still maintains good relations with clients whose businesses he would have signed from that point in his career – a testament to his professional dexterity in the field. This, coupled with his penchant for success, saw him taking the helm at the Hope Road branch in 2017 and leading his team to cop the coveted Branch of the Year Award for the past two years.

Leading from the front, the innovative people manager noted that as a branch manager, he could normally be seen at the front desk, sitting in for team members while they went to lunch or assisting clients in customer service when the branch was full. This strategy he believed was one of the reasons the team members were wholly invested in the success of the branch.

“People management has changed; no longer can you sit in your office away from what is happening without any idea of what your team members are going through. What you find is that you can get a lot more from persons when you are with them on their level, facing the same things that they are facing,” he said.

The formula for success according to Smith also includes his ability to take a vested interest in the individual development of each person on his team, noting that he ensures his team members are exposed to the relevant training opportunities they desire, as well as connecting them with mentors if they express interest in a specialized area that someone else can help them in.

“My belief is that when persons are given the support needed to blossom and accomplish their goals, whether personal or professional, they become more willing to support you as a leader to achieve the goals of the organisation,” he said.

A humanitarian at heart, Smith dedicates much of his time to philanthropic work and giving back. Armed with his background in Information Technology, the experienced banker has been a volunteer teacher, an online lecturer and has served at the administrative level in the education sector throughout his professional career. He shared that following the completion of his Masters’ degree in Management Information Systems from the University of the West Indies, Mona, he lectured at the institution’s online campus for three years.

He has also volunteered to teach adults in inner-city communities around downtown, Kingston in a programme aimed at helping adults with computer literacy.

Smith also serves as the President of the Past Students' Association at Greater Portmore High School and is a director on the school's board.

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