

## 10.3: Financial Control

### Learning Objectives

1. Learn about the importance of cultivating a relationship with a banker.
2. Understand the elements of the CAMPARI approach to evaluating a loan.

### Relationships with Bank and Bankers

One often hears the following standard complaint of small businesses: bankers lend money only to those businesses that do not need the money. The inverse of this complaint from the bank's standpoint might be that small businesses request money only when they are least likely to be able to repay it. The conflict between small businesses and bankers may stem from a misunderstanding of the respective roles of both groups. At face value, it might appear—particularly to small businesses—that bankers are investing in their companies.

Under normal conditions, bankers are extremely risk averse. This means they are not investors anticipating a substantial return predicated on the risks associated with a particular business. Bankers lend money with the clear expectation that they will be repaid both principal and interest. It is in the interest of both parties to transcend these two conflicting perceptions of the role of bankers in the life of a small business. The key way is for the small business owner to try to foster improved communications with a banker. This communication promoted by the small business owner should become the basis of a solid working relationship with the bank. Most often, this means developing a personal relationship with the loan officer of the bank, which is sometimes a problematic proposition. Bank loan officers are often moved to different branches, or they may change jobs and work for different banks. It should be the responsibility of the small business owner to maintain frequent contact with whoever is representing the bank. This should involve more than just providing quarterly statements. It should include face-to-face discussions and even asking the officer to tour a business's facilities. The point is to personalize the working relationship between the two parties. "Ideally, it's a human relationship as well as a business relationship," says Bill Byne, an entrepreneur and author of *Habits of Wealth*. "[The Benefits of Making Your Banker Your Friend](#)," *Small Business Administration*, accessed December 2, 2011.

Although bankers and loan officers will rely heavily on data related to the creditworthiness of a small business, they will also consider the trustworthiness and integrity of the business owner. This intangible sense that a business owner is a worthy credit risk may play a determinant role in whether a loan is approved with the extension of a credit line. This notion of integrity has to be built over time. It is predicated on projecting an image that you can be counted on to honor what you say, know the right thing to do to make the business a success, and be able to execute the correct decisions.

It is sometimes said that bankers, when reviewing a perspective loan applicant, think of the drink "CAMPARI," which stands for the following:

- **Character.** As previously stated, bankers will consider the issue of personal integrity. Part of that definition of integrity will include a sense of professionalism, which can be reflected in one's attitude and dress. Bankers will also review one's history as a business leader, namely one's track record of success. This notion of character may also be extended to the upper echelon of the management team of a small business.
- **Ability.** The bank's prime concern is with repayment of the principal and the interest of a loan. The loan application should clearly demonstrate a business's ability to repay the loan. All support materials should be brought to bear to prove to the banker that the loan will not be defaulted on and will be paid in a timely fashion.
- **Means.** This refers to a business's ability to function in a way so that it can repay the loan. Bankers must be convinced of this crucial point. The best way to do this is by providing a comprehensive business plan with detailed numbers that indicate the business's ability to repay the loan. The business plan should also include the business strategy and the business model that will be employed to convince the banker of the validity of the overall plan.
- **Purpose.** Bankers want to know for what purpose the borrowed money will be used. You should never request a loan with the argument that having more money is better for the business than having less money. You should clearly identify how the money will be used, such as purchasing a piece of capital equipment. Having done that, you should also indicate how the acquisition of the capital equipment will positively affect the bottom line of the business.
- **Amount.** It would be extraordinarily inadvisable to begin a request for a business loan by saying "I need some money." It is very important that you specify the exact amount of the loan and also justify how you determined this amount of money. As an example, you might want to identify a particular piece of capital equipment that you plan to acquire. How did you determine its

price? You should be able to address what additional expenditures might be required—such as training on the use of the equipment. The greater the degree of precision that is brought to this proposal, the greater the confidence the bank might have in granting the loan.

- **Repayment.** This refers to demonstrating an ability to repay both the interest and the principal. Again, detailed documentation, such as sales projections, profit margins, and projected cash flows, is essential if you wish to secure the loan. It is important when generating these data that you try to be as honest as possible. Extremely positive projections may be misleading. Worse still, if they are misleading and inaccurate, it may result in the business defaulting on the loan and perhaps losing the business.
- **Insurance.** Even the most scrupulously developed sales and profit projections might not pan out. It would be extraordinarily useful to show contingency plans to the bank that would indicate how you would repay the loan in the event that the scenarios that you have identified do not come to fruition.

One should recognize that a good relationship with the bank can yield benefits above and beyond credit lines and business loans. Bankers can serve as interlocutors, connecting you to potential customers, suppliers, and other investors. A good working relationship with a bank can be the best reference a business could have. This is particularly true in the current business climate where bankers have significantly restricted lending to small businesses.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Any business owner must be aware that bankers consider several factors when considering a loan decision.
- Business owners should be aware of their own and their business's creditworthiness.
- Business owners should be aware that bankers appreciate precision, particularly when it comes to the exact size of the loan, its purpose, and how it will be repaid.

### EXERCISES

1. Arrange an interview with a loan officer at a local bank. Ask him or her what factors are considered when evaluating a small business loan for
  1. a start-up business
  2. a line-of-credit
  3. an equipment purchase
  4. a real estate purchase
2. Ask him or her how the bank evaluates the risk associated with these loans.
3. Ask the loan officer what might constitute a “red flag” that would mean that the loan would not be approved.

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