

Stan Sorensen:

Hey, everyone. Welcome to Altabanking, a business podcast for anyone interested in elevating their financial future. I'm your host, Stan Sorensen. And together, we're going to hear interviews, and information, and insights for making great financial decisions. It's Small Business Month this month. And today, it is my great pleasure to sit down with long-time Altabank customer ... We'll come back to that in a minute ... Fred Titensor, who is the president of Valley Implement & Irrigation up in North Logan, Utah. Fred, welcome.

Fred Titensor:

Good to be with you, Stan.

Stan Sorensen:

Great to have you here. Valley Implement is probably ... In fact, we decided earlier that, in fact, it's pretty irrefutable that you are Altabank's longest tenured commercial customer in the Cache Valley.

Fred Titensor:

Sure.

Stan Sorensen:

Right? So it's great to be able to sit down with you. We're going to talk a little bit about history and all of that. But first, before we do that, why don't you go ahead and just tell us a little bit about you.

Fred Titensor:

Sure. Maybe I'll just start off by telling you just a little bit about our company, because with that intro, that helps you understand a little bit about where we came from. But our family lived in Lewiston, Utah right there in the community where they started the dealership. That was about 70 years ago. In that town, there was a local bank, there was a bar, and there was the dealership. We started out as a J. I. Case dealership. My great-grandfather actually had a small farm. And he traded his farm to his brother-in-law who owned the dealership. And they just made a handshake swap. They made that move and we opened the dealership there.

Fred Titensor:

So back your comments there on our commercial background with Altabank, that's where we got our roots was with that. Anyways, our family's done that. I'm the fourth generation. I've done this for about 20 years. The business has changed a lot along the way, but a lot of things just haven't. There's a lot of core fundamentals of just working in agriculture, work in the areas of Cache Valley and the surrounding areas that are just pretty timeless. And we work with some great people up there.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. I always love when I get a chance to go up and visit and talk to some of our clients that are up there. And spend time with our officers and all. As we were talking earlier ... We had mentioned a lot of our conversation today is going to focus on agriculture. When people think about the industries in Utah, they always focus on technology and Silicon Slopes. Or you hear a lot about construction with the airport and the prison, and all that sort of thing. But Utah's really diverse economically. A lot of the state is rural. We have a lot of agriculture, and production and agriculture that goes on in the state.

Fred Titensor:

I think agriculture is alive and well in Utah. And there's a lot of support networks that even work outside of Utah. So there's a lot of industries that support ag, and those ag may have influence all the way over to Wyoming, up to Idaho, and over to Nevada. So we find that we're just a little bit of a hub in a pocket

where we can provide some service to all communities in agriculture. But there's a handful of counties here in Utah, where there really is a lot of good production agriculture, that I think it's really important to the state.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. I agree. I completely agree. As you just talked about being a hub, as you shared with me before we started recording, that you've got folks that'll go out on calls all the way to Wyoming. I mean, your customer base is really broad.

Fred Titensor:

Yeah. I mean, just as agriculture has changed and evolved, there is not a small-town farm equipment dealership on every single corner. And most of the people in our industry have had to make that same change. So it's not uncommon for us to need to drive a bit of a distance. And we have vehicles that we service our customers for. If you get in a vehicle today and start driving towards Wyoming, you're going to be four or five hours before you get to another farm equipment dealership. So it's not uncommon for us to get phone calls and help people over there.

Fred Titensor:

Now, as you get over to some of those more mountain towns, they got a pretty short growing season. So there's no way you could make a small business work in a town of 600 or 700 people that only have maybe 45 days that are frost-free in the entire year. They got a real short window. And that's what's helped us in the Northern Utah area. We have a little bit better growing season. So in the areas we operate, that helps us.

Fred Titensor:

It's really hard to take a small business and run in an area that just has that short, short window. So we're grateful to be over here on the side that gives us just a little bit more growing season. That's why we were located here.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. The balmy weather side, we might say.

Fred Titensor:

For some. For some, yes.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. I've been snowed on in May up in Logan. I know you have as well.

Fred Titensor:

We're grateful for it.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, every day. Yeah. It's a little bit overstated, but I'm going to state it anyway. Last couple years, as we had talked about, have been challenging for a lot of folks. Been challenging for businesses. What have you seen? What sorts of challenges have you seen your customers have been going through? What sorts of potential pivots or changes to your business have you made over the last couple years?

Fred Titensor:

Everyone has had those changes, and they're just there. We didn't have as many changes as you would see in metro areas in terms of how to manage spacing and things. Because I mean, I work in a building with 24,000 square feet and I got about 24 people in that building. So in terms of just spacing and things, it wasn't super difficult. What probably hit us later on just general supply chains became difficult for us.

Fred Titensor:

And a lot of these things that were a little trendy years ago of just-in-time delivery and things. But those phases are gone. Maybe they're not gone forever, but they're gone right now. So when you're trying to forecast what you need for parts, or replacement pieces, or pipe, or whatever, you just can't live in those short windows, because those are getting spread out. So we just had to view timing different. We're in a very seasonal business, so we can plan ahead. But we just had to plan more ahead. I don't see that changing in the short term. I think we've really got to stay the course of making sure we have what people need. You got a short window to do there.

Fred Titensor:

Now, in the world of just how we managed people, it was my goal to try and make sure people did not have a giant culture change. Our culture in our company is a really big thing to us. So if people wanted accommodations to whatever level, if they needed to work from home, or if we needed to help them with whatever made their workspace feel comfortable, I had no problem making those changes. But for people that just said, "I want consistency in my life when everything else is changing," I tried to accommodate that too. I think that was really important.

Fred Titensor:

So my whole goal through the last two years was not to have a disruption to our culture. We got great people. I've worked with them, in some cases, my entire life. I just don't want those disruptions to hit them. To the extent I could insulate them from some of those, I was happy to do that.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's really important. You have seen businesses where the culture's basically been sort of torn apart. You've got the whole work-from-home culture. And now you've got people that are resisting coming back to work because they like working from home. You've got companies that are strong-arming some of their employees to come back. We won't name names. But you hear about it and you read about it. It's nice to actually talk to somebody, you said, "Look. Yeah, there's going to be a little bit of disruption, but we're going to manage it as well as we can. And we're going to-"

Fred Titensor:

Sure. As I tell you that, Stan, I'm not in any way saying that was the only way. I wasn't running a restaurant. So I didn't have to respond quite as dramatic. I mean, we were in season. We had people out in trucks taking care of people in large, open fields. I had it a lot easier. So I'm not, in any way, saying how people handled that on another level of business didn't need some type of different response. It was one that worked for us. And frankly, I just got it easier than some people on this one. Yeah.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. And grateful for it too, right?

Fred Titensor:

It was wonderful. It was wonderful.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. You mentioned the supply chain issues. Certainly, within your business, that makes a lot of sense. What have some of your customers seen with respect to supply chain issues, or how have they impacted them?

Fred Titensor:

Well, customers have done a good job. I think they have done a really good job trying to plan ahead and forecast. And they had grown accustomed to being able to have stuff on the ready, as they should. They

should expect that from us. They should expect it from most businesses. But they could see some of the challenges we were up against. So sometimes we've had customers where, in the past, they would wait for us to contact them for a preseason order for particular consumables they knew they were going to need.

Fred Titensor:

They were finding us in advance, saying, "Can I get on the list? Can I tie it up?" And that tied for, I believe, two reasons. One, you had people that wanted to get the product. Two, they were hoping that there was some type of product that maybe was priced pre-inflationary times. So they were just trying to say, "Let's tie this up." Because next year's batch of twine ... Let next year's batch of chemicals that we need, next year's batch of pipe. It might just be more money.

Fred Titensor:

You had a few people that were just trying to be proactive that way. So I think customers did a great job just trying to anticipate and say where they were at. And we tried to be lock and step with them on that.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. So I want to add on to the comment that you just made regarding the planning, that the farmers and the ranchers that you work with are doing. I wonder if people sort of fail to appreciate just how much planning and preparation really goes into the agriculture industry overall.

Fred Titensor:

Farmers and ranchers are amazing that way. I mean, they plan ahead. I see them making good decisions for the long term. I see them making 20- and 30-year investments. And when they're out making a decision on how they're going to rotate a field, or how they're going to plant, or what they're going to invest in to bring the crop off, these guys are really doing a good job, just trying to envisioning where they're going to need to be. And I think we've got people that have done a great job upping their game on that over the course of the last 20 years.

Fred Titensor:

But people have great logs and good systems to track it technologically. They know what fields are going to give them the best production. They know what fields are going to need to sit fallow and things like that. So they've really thought that through. And I think they've just had to. I mean, the margins that agriculture produced live on is very, very tight. So they got a short window that they can either get the crop off or get maximum production. And they do a wonderful job at that.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. They're also required to be, out of necessity ... But I also, I think it's more than that ... to be good stewards of the land that they are farming.

Fred Titensor:

Yeah, the farmers ranchers we work with are great that way. I mean, they want to preserve the water. They want to use as little of fertilizer as possible because that all just impacts a number of facets. Their bottom line, or their productivity, or anything like that. So they've been a really good job. And the technology's advanced to let them do that.

Fred Titensor:

We used to go out and spray chemicals or do something along those lines. And we would spray an entire field. Then, we got down to where we were spraying an entire acre. Now, we're actually spraying by the square foot. So we can be very strategic of where we apply a chemical, where we apply a fertilizer, or anything along those lines.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, and what you were sharing with me, again, before we started recording, regarding that spray a square foot. All square feet of all fields is not created equal.

Fred Titensor:

Yeah. You get different productivity or different types of problems. Or if you have a type of a pest that gets in your crop or something, it is not going to be spread throughout the entire crop. So people can do a really good job managing that way.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. So it's really amazing. Let's talk for a minute about water management as well. Because again, we had talked about that. And I'd shared with you, the presentation that I was in yesterday with the atmospheric scientist and the hydrologist about some of the patterns and trends that we're seeing. Knowing that the farmers are thinking further ahead, what sorts of things do you see now that are allowing them to get ahead of the potential drought conditions and things, that we are worried we're going to be experiencing here?

Fred Titensor:

The State of Utah has done a good job with that. And a number of different government agencies have done a good job trying to support and promote that. So they will do all they can to help encourage a farmer who maybe is using a practice of flood irrigation, which is just not as common anymore. It's still done in some cases. But anything that you can do to just try and conserve the amount of crop or the amount of water going to a crop is becoming very commonplace.

Fred Titensor:

Used to have a lot of open ditches. And we put a lot of those in plastic pipe. The amount of water we were just losing in an open ditch, either to evaporation or through seepage, was significant. So when you see water going into a plastic pipe and buried systems, that just saves a lot of irrigation water. So these guys can do a lot more that way. So between that and using center-pivot technology. And in some other cases, there's even some drip-and-tape technology that's done. Although, the types of crops we generally grow here wouldn't be as extreme as you'd see in other parts of the nation.

Fred Titensor:

The types of crops that we grow, it works fine. The center-pivot technology is still good. The farmers and myself, we watch those snowpack levels. I'm as quick to watch those as anyone else, because we know that will anticipate what type of runoff we're going to work with. And still, even with that, we need some timely rains. So I can tell you, there's plenty of areas that we cover where people rely on the irrigation systems. But there are still some areas, either in pasture or some dry farming. And those are practices that are alive and well.

Fred Titensor:

And you simply are gambling of whether you get the proper rainstorm in June to get you the crop. We've had some years that were, that was great. And we've had some years, last year, it was tough. If you were doing dry farming, the amount of crop you were bringing up there, it was pretty close to a disaster. So whatever we could do to preserve water in those reservoirs and get the irrigation systems running, that proved to be very, very critical last year.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We could spend an hour plus on this topic because it is so critical. I mean, it's critical to the entire state, obviously. Critical to the farmers. Critical to the tourism industry and pretty much everything else that we do here. We might circle back around to it here in a few minutes.

Fred Titensor:

It's a huge thing. I think the State of Utah has done a good job responding. I think there's been a lot of government programs to help encourage that. I know people may flinch when they hear the phrase, "The government's here to help." But they have done quite a few things to just encourage the conservation. And help systems get in place to let there be more growing capacity with the water we've got.

Fred Titensor:

If we hadn't have put those in, last year would've been an absolute crop disaster. And we got by. It was tight. But in some areas, we got by. Some areas, it was extremely tight. But we were really, really lucky those had been put in place. A lot of foresight 20 years ago.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. And that's back to that 20-year planning cycle, which is really great. Super. Let's shift a little bit. Come back to the business itself and talk a little bit about Valley Implement. One of the items that's in the news a lot is the difficulty in hiring folks. I see it a lot in Salt Lake County, Utah County. Summit County, when I head over east. You talk with a lot of small business owners up in Cache County, Box Elder County, and all. What's the experience been up north?

Fred Titensor:

So I think our unemployment rate, and you'd have to check me on these numbers, but is under one and a half percent in Cache County right now. So that's pretty extreme. You've got a lot of manufacturing. 20 years ago, again, there was not the level of manufacturing. There were a few manufacturing plants in Cache Valley. But now we've got a number of them. And a number of them have had quite a demand through the last two years. Their products were really needed.

Fred Titensor:

So we, in some ways, compete for production labor. But what's a little distinct about us is we have people that have maybe a draw to agriculture and a draw to the land. And why we do what we do is to help feed the world, help give crops. And there's a lot of people that have ties to ag roots and ag communities. And those are the type of people that generally find us. So if someone's going to find us, the College of Ag at Utah State is a huge, huge draw for us. We have a lot of people that come up there. And they want to have an agricultural college experience. And they end up staying on.

Fred Titensor:

So a lot of our staff has some Utah State background. That's a big deal to us. So the one thing we can tell people is the why on why we do things, is the tie of the ag and the love of the land. So that's something that's a little different. So in terms of what we've done to deal with the labor shortages, I don't think it's been quite as extreme. Because some people maybe can't return to the family farm that has been consolidated or grown into a larger multi-acreage farm. So we've been able to work with those type of people.

Fred Titensor:

Almost every single person I work with has some type of tie to agriculture, through either their heritage or their, just, love of the ag community. So we participate in just trying to make sure that we're involved in ag to that same extent.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. I imagine as well that the workforce then becomes very stable as well, right?

Fred Titensor:

Yeah. I don't know the exact number. But our average tenure is quite a bit higher than you would see, from someone who has recently started to, we have people that have worked there 40 and 45 years.

Stan Sorensen:

That's awesome.

Fred Titensor:

They're just wonderful. I mean, truly, I've worked with these many people my entire life. And I consider them just dear friends and family.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. I love to hear that. I really do. As I shared with you, I mean, I grew up in a very small town, isolated, in California-Nevada border. And same type of thing, right? A lot of tenure. A lot of loyalty. So I just love to hear that does still exist.

Fred Titensor:

Great people that we get to work with. And they understand what an agriculture producer's going through. I mean, sometimes these phone calls do not come 8:00 to 5:00. There's certain times when you're harvesting around the clock or you're needing to do something. So we just had to work our way around that. And the people that come with an ag background, they appreciate it. And I appreciate them working those long hours. They just do a wonderful job.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, and then, you've shared with me, of course, you talk about the long hours. There is obviously quite a bit of seasonality in ag. We've talked a little bit about harvest. We talked a little bit about planning. This is not really the slow time per se, but it's different time, obviously.

Fred Titensor:

Sure. This is our preparation time. I always say, "When the time to perform is present, the time to prepare is past." So we're trying to do our preparation right now. The one nice thing we have going for us. If you went back to the Midwest and you just saw fields and fields and fields of corn, that corn is probably all going to be ready within a relatively short window. We have enough diversity here in agriculture that we may be working with the potato farmer that's harvesting in Idaho. And maybe our onion farmer in Box Elder County, Utah was harvesting at a different time.

Fred Titensor:

Maybe our beef ranchers were putting cattle out on the range or putting up their hay for next year. And they work in little pockets. I'm always surprised around the 1st of April or maybe late March, I can move from Salt Lake and move north. And I can just to see blossoming plants and trees coming out here. And I can actually drive to the tundra still and get on some of the Front Range area there across the mountains, that they're not even started. So the one thing we have going for us is harvest and planting doesn't all happen at the same time. We can ease into that and we can work our way as the snow starts to melt.

Stan Sorensen:

Okay. And I imagine that as you're doing your prep, that also allows you to manage the preparation. Because the types of equipment that you need is going to vary depending on what that crop is, that's ready to be planted or harvested.

Fred Titensor:

Sure, yeah. They have different applications and we can vary that. There's a few timeless crops in all the areas we deal with, and that is hay. Hay is a huge, huge business because we grow really, really good hay in this state. It dries fast. And if you go looking around, our hay will ship all over, I used to say, the nation. But now it ships all over the world.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. Bit of a tangent, but I am curious. I grew up with quite a few of alfalfa farmers. I remember, of course, having to manage that moisture content before you bale. But there were a lot of days where their morning would start at 2:00, 3:00 in the morning. So they could bale till 6:00, 6:30. And then, they were done and on to something else. Is that the experience we have here?

Fred Titensor:

That's still really common. It's a little different, depending on what part of the state you're in. There's some technology in Central and Southern Utah where they actually are injecting steam onto the hay because they just don't have the proper moisture content to bale. There's a company down there that invented a type of steaming technology that works really well. But if you come up into Northern Utah, it's a little different.

Fred Titensor:

We're not necessarily needing the steam. Our dew comes in sometimes too heavy. And so we're trying to bale around a different type of window. But yeah, sometimes you still need to bale in the middle of the night. That's common. But a few technologies have helped that. We also have a type of chemical, which is not a dangerous chemical at all. But it lets you maximize those windows. So I can bale on front and back end a little bit better.

Stan Sorensen:

Okay. Okay. Yeah, that is fascinating. That then comes back as well to technological advances and things. We were talking about that also with respect to the being able to manage a field or all. And I sometimes think people tend to forget that in addition to long-term planning, there's a lot of technological advancement that takes place in the ag industry.

Fred Titensor:

We call it prescription farming. A lot of people will hire an agronomist to say, "What should we do on this rotation? What should we plant here? What type of applications would work?" So our equipment has just really been designed to work around that.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. No, that's really great. Really great. Okay. I'd mentioned in the introduction that Valley Implement has been with the bank ... I'm not going to use the name yet, but has been with the bank, really, the entire time that you've been in existence. So over 70 years. You started with Lewiston State Bank. Lewiston State Bank merged with Bank of American Fork, as we know.

Stan Sorensen:

Then, there was a name change to Altabank. And a little bit, there's some growth that took place in other parts of the state. That always has an impact. Now, Altabank is part of Glacier Bank. That's a lot of change. We both know, that for reasons that I fully appreciate, there are some folks up in Cache County

that are not real excited about these changes. I see the feedback. I talk to people. But you've really never wavered.

Fred Titensor:

Well, I can just tell you, Altabank has been good to us. Every time we've needed something, they've been able to grow with us. And I don't know exactly where we were at you in terms of size and scope to a customer, to Lewiston State Bank. But my guess is we were probably pushing the maximum amounts that they wanted to have tied up with one customer. So the growth of Altabank was probably well timed for our growth as well.

Fred Titensor:

And we fully acknowledged that banking has changed. Not only has there really relationship changed with our banks, but our relationships have changed with a lot of our manufacturers. And things that just have to look at things with a little bit more detail. And we've had to look at things with more detail. We cannot just wing it. I've always said, "The bank was growing, but we were growing too." So we knew we would have to have someone that could keep up with the type of lending limits we needed and the type of services we needed.

Fred Titensor:

So we know that sometimes someone would say, "Well, we wish we had this small bank." But in some cases, that just was not going to work. That's not just a relationship that's changed with our banks. It is a relationship that's changed with our manufacturers and our suppliers, and things along those lines. But some of that stuff just needs a little bit more scrutiny. It's not as convenient. I can fully acknowledge that. But at the same time, it was probably a way it was going to have to happen.

Fred Titensor:

So I say to people, "If you start shopping for a different type of bank, you're going to find that these controls and these scrutinies are just part of the business. And it's not going to change." I remember as a young man, my grandpa and I were traveling together. We weren't traveling out of state, but we were traveling out of the community. He wrote out a company check. We were on company business. And the person said, "We don't know you. We cannot take this check."

Fred Titensor:

And he said, "Why don't you call the president of the bank? He will vouch for us." I actually watched as that took place. That was probably 30 years ago. Of course, that is never going to take place now. But we've got some systems in place that allow us to do business in a wider area and things like that. So we acknowledge that banking's changed. And to the extent that we've needed, Altabank has up with that.

Fred Titensor:

They've been able to get us the types of products we've needed, the types of loans. And the type of, just, controls and security. That's a pretty big deal too. So we have needed those types of things. And they have been lock and step with us on that as well.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, that's great to hear you had shared over email earlier this week. As we talk about security controls, you'd shared a story with me regarding a fraud attempt.

Fred Titensor:

I've had fraud attempt on our checking account twice in the last 12 months. The first one was not very sophisticated. They did try and make an attempt to cash fraudulent checks with our name on it. The second group is quite a bit more capable. The checks, when you actually look at them, they have my

signature on them. The check number varies. So in some of the old ones, it was just the same check number every single time.

Fred Titensor:

This is a scheme that is spanning coast to coast. We have actually been working with the FBI to try and help them track down. We submitted the types of paperwork that they need. But I can tell you, there were a few controls and a few systems that Altabank had in place, that we had already used. One is called Positive Pay. I'm just here to tell you, if there's any small business that is not on Positive Pay, they will get burned.

Fred Titensor:

This is not getting any better. I've done my homework on this now because I'm on round two of this. Positive Pay actually prevented every single one of those checks from going through. I think last time I checked, we were over \$2 million in fraudulent checks that tried to clear our bank account in the last 45 days. Positive Pay stopped every single one of those.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. I mean, at the risk of making this a product pitch, which we don't want to go too deep into it. But in maybe explain what Positive Pay, what you saw, did.

Fred Titensor:

I'm probably going to have to refer you to some bank people on how to do the details on it. But here's how Positive Pay works for us. We take all the checks that we intend to fund, and we upload that into the website. And we tell the bank, "Here's the checks we will clear. We'll clear check number this for this amount, to this person."

Fred Titensor:

If there's any type of deviation from that, Positive Pay flags it and says, "Here's a check you did not alert us to. Is there something that we missed? Do you want us to cash this check?" We have the option to say, "Oh, yes, that was a handwritten check or something that didn't get properly uploaded. Please fund it." But if it doesn't meet that criteria, it actually does not fund. So that caught every single one of those.

Stan Sorensen:

That's great.

Fred Titensor:

It sounds complicated, but once we got our system in place, and we're doing the uploads, or making a habit to cross-check it, it works fine.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, good. That's good to hear. That's what those systems are designed to do. It's great that they work as advertised.

Fred Titensor:

I can tell you, when we reported this to the FBI, I uploaded it to the website. I never got a phone call. I'm just telling you, I think something of this size doesn't even get on their radar screen. So I think they're out looking for bigger problems. So we've reported it to the authorities, but we were on our own on this. We had to have our own system in place because nothing else was going to save us.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. You had mentioned that the second attempt is much more sophisticated than the first attempt. And I know, from other conversations, things that we talk about in the banking industry and all,

the bad guys are getting really sophisticated, they're getting really good. Yeah, your protection is only going to be as good as the systems that are in place to offer it.

Fred Titensor:

Yeah. The homework I've done on it, I know sometimes I go, "Oh, I hate these passwords and I hate this extra security control. And I hate this token key and getting a text message." I get it all now and I am not complaining because those are the things that saved us.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, that's good.

Fred Titensor:

If people are not taking those precautions, they will get burned.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. And it's just ongoing education. We talk about it all the time. Yeah, you're right. The people that pay attention and they adhere to some of the best practices that we're sharing, less likelihood of getting themselves into a bind.

Fred Titensor:

Yeah. Yeah. We don't think we're immune from it. But so far, with the two hits we've had, we've been safe.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, good. Hopefully, there won't be any more hits. That's the ideal, right?

Fred Titensor:

Yeah.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, no more hits. Awesome. Before we move on to something maybe a little less business-focused-

Fred Titensor:

Yeah. Let's talk about something besides a bank fraud from overseas countries.

Stan Sorensen:

Exactly. Yeah, yeah, please. Are there any other words of wisdom as a long-time small-business owner and manager, anything that you can or want to share with folks who are listening?

Fred Titensor:

Well, I mean, we've done this long enough that we've worked with people in multi-generations. And I think, know your people, know your customers, and know your industry. And try and not get too far out of that. We've had to expect, we've had to grow, and we've had to alter a little bit how we've done things. But we've tried to stay with some of the core things that we knew. And anytime we get on a tangent and decide to try something that's a little bit outside of our expertise, I get a reminder of saying, "Let's stay with the core things we know."

Fred Titensor:

That being said, we have had to expand. I have referenced a lot in this about large agriculture. But as the communities grow that we service, there's a lot of lifestyle farmers, people that want a 5- or 10-acre ranchette, and things along those lines. And we've had to learn to adapt and do that business. So not in any way am I saying, don't adapt. But I'm saying, you've got to understand your core business and make sure you take care of that.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Well, you had shared ... We were talking about phone systems, which people listening may go, "Why were you talking about phone systems?" We won't get into all of that. But you talk about sticking to your core business and your core principles. Tell everybody what you told me, your rule on the phone.

Fred Titensor:

Well, I just believe people need a friend in your company. And they need to be able to call in and have recognition of, "I know this person. This person is in my community. This person is someone that I recognize. This person is someone who could maybe ask how my family is." So we do have a very simple system on, in some of our facilities, to just route them to one department or the other. We try and put it down to a two-system option.

Fred Titensor:

But we still want someone to be able to answer the phone and say, "This person is tied up. This person's unavailable for a moment. Are you okay to hold?" So phones are a really big deal. I'm not telling you, we got it perfect. I'm just telling you, I cannot believe how important that is.

Fred Titensor:

We're also seeing that people want to have more options to text message with the customers. That's particularly important for us, because sometimes we need to share a schematic drawing. Or we need to share a photo of the piece that's damaged so we can help isolate the problem. So that type of technology's been really important for us as well.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. But again, never getting away from the contact, and the personalization, and all, which as we had talked about, I mean, on a business level, the ROI is almost immeasurable.

Fred Titensor:

Yeah. You cannot quantify that one. But I think it's super, super important.

Stan Sorensen:

And the retention and the customer sat, right? Both absolutely critical to any business really.

Fred Titensor:

I mean, I'll tell you again, we just work with customers that truly we've worked with for two, three, four generations. We're grateful for them and there's not more farmers coming into the area. So we're grateful for the ones that we're still able to work with as their operations or families have grown and changed.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Yeah. That's fantastic. I know that Cache Valley and that whole surrounding area up there is equally grateful to have a great business partner as well. So thank you for that also. Yeah, we'll deviate a little bit off the business path and banking path. There's a question that I ask frequently when I interview candidates that I've actually now turned into a question that I like to ask as we do these podcasts. Because I think it's revealing and it always leads to great conversations as well. What books are on your nightstand right now?

Fred Titensor:

So I have just a little habit of how I rotate books so that I don't get just down the wrong rabbit hole where I just am doing the same thing. So I try and read either a business or a self-help book. I try and

read a book on public policy or something about the economics of how things are playing out in our world. Then, I also try and read a classic. Sometimes I'll even force myself to pick a classic and work my way through it. Then, sometimes I'll just pick up a book and just read it for fun.

Fred Titensor:

So in my rotation, I just try and make a habit. And I'm not perfect. I can get off a little bit, but I try and bring back to rotating around in those little groups. Right now, I have a son who's a high school senior. And he is reading Les Miserables by Victor Hugo. I had previously read that. I think he got tired enough of me sharing little excerpts from this, that I went back and I'm rereading that right now. That's just a delightful book.

Fred Titensor:

And that's one of the most moving novels I have ever read in my life. So I'm reading that right now. That's the particular one that I've just said, "I'm so glad I get to pick this back up."

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, that's really great. Define classics.

Fred Titensor:

I have tried to do that myself. I Googled, "What are the top classic books?" So I've tried to stick more with the classic authors. So I went for a time where I read all of the Hemingway books that I could get my hands on. And some of those were an easy read and some of them weren't. But I've tried to just find something that I say, "This is a timeless book that you could have a discussion with on." And something that leaves an impact on you.

Fred Titensor:

So if you are reading a book like that and you find yourself thinking about it two and three years later, I'm saying, I don't know what website published that as a classic. But it was a classic to me. So when I hear people talking about a classic book, I want to make sure I've just acquainted myself with, "Is that one I want to read?"

Stan Sorensen:

Is there a particular author that you have said, "I want to read every single thing that this particular author has written"?

Fred Titensor:

Not necessarily. I've found some, and some I've had to just work my way through.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, Hemingway.

Fred Titensor:

Precisely. Precisely.

Stan Sorensen:

Faulkner. Yeah, anybody that writes in really, really, really long sentences.

Fred Titensor:

Yeah, and some of those just are a bit of a commitment. But they'll leave a longer impression on you, the longer the book is, I think.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah, most definitely. Most definitely. Okay. Any final thoughts? Anything else you want to share?

Fred Titensor:

No, it's been great to be with you. Great to talk about agriculture. Great to just recognize what a part of the state it is. We've been grateful to have Altabank as a partner with us through the years. So I appreciate you having me.

Stan Sorensen:

Yeah. Well, again, I appreciate your coming all the way down from Logan to spend some time with us. And being able to learn a little bit more about the business and your long-term relationship. I mean, at the bank, we all appreciate that as well. So there we have it. Again, Fred, I want to thank you for joining us for Small Business Month. It's been great. Hopefully, a lot of really interesting and hopefully new information that people can take away as well. So I want to thank you again for that.

Fred Titensor:

My pleasure. Thank you.

Stan Sorensen:

Also, I want to thank everybody for listening to Altabanking. Until next time, please subscribe to the show on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, Pandora, Google Podcast, or wherever you happen to get your podcast, because I'm sure we've left somebody out. And we'll talk to you again next time.