

LEADING WOMEN IN BUSINESS: **HOUSTON**

A Women-Led Bank for Everyone

Tech-focused and primarily owned and led by women, **Agility Bank** brings diverse voices and big-bank resources deep into Houston.

Banks are fairly straightforward operations—until a new breed breaks the mold. Agility Bank is that new breed. Its digital tools are the envy of the industry, yet its focus is decidedly human-centric. As a commercial community bank, it helps small- and medium-sized businesses take flight while connecting many bigger banks and companies deeper into the Houston community. Agility also looks different: More than 70% of its team is female, from founders to staff, making it a designated Minority Depository Institution (MDI) and an ideal partner for big businesses and financial institutions who share Agility's "profit with purpose" mission. "We have a huge opportunity to work with business owners who are entrepreneurial

mindful—as we are," says Lauren Sparks, Agility's founder, chairwoman, and CEO. "There's just no metric to gauge the kind of value we bring to these relationships."

Amplifying the Message

Sparks is, in many ways, the perfect person to launch Agility. She's a veteran banker with over 35 years of community banking and risk management experience. She's also an entrepreneur, having founded a woman-owned consulting firm specializing in risk management and compliance issues for community banks and financial services firms.

Given her experience, Sparks was able to envision how a women-owned bank might do things differently. "Women tend to be more collaborative and view risk differently than men," she says. "What we're doing at Agility

is fostering a culture that invites diverse perspectives. We're primarily women-owned and -led, but we're a bank for everyone."

It sounds nice—and it's good business sense. Studies show that diversity in boardrooms and C-suites correlates strongly with higher profitability. Sparks takes this metric a step further. "A successful business is not just about the bottom line," she says. "We believe in profit with purpose, and we're confident that other businesses that are committed to their own diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives will want to bank with us and amplify this mission."

"Purpose" is the key word. Community banks like Agility are vital to the incubation and survival of small- and medium-sized businesses—especially minority-led ones, which may be underserved by larger institutions. Agility fulfills this obligation in a number of ways, including a tech-forward, customer-centric experience with tools such as next-level cash management functions and a digital business suite.

As an MDI, Agility gives big banks an offramp to reach new demographics and helps them meet Community Reinvestment Act requirements to delve more deeply into their communities. It's a win-win all around, says Sparks. "We're perfectly positioned to bring the right players to the table and direct big bank resources to our clients—particularly the women- and minority-owned businesses that we're committed to supporting," she says. "And we can help large corporations show their stakeholders, employees, and customers that they are firmly committed to Houston."

This level of collaboration is something only a new breed of bank could achieve. "We're a channel for our business and banking partners to be visible and active in our community," Sparks says. "If we are all in the same market, it amplifies our impact."

Lauren Sparks
Founder, Chairwoman,
and CEO
Agility Bank



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