

## MVP AWARDS

MOST VALUABLE PROFESSIONALS



Charley Meng

Meng said. “And all solid business relationships are built on a foundation of trust.

Meng called macroeconomic disruption the “greatest challenge as a business leader.

“COVID-19 was the first shock and has, directly or indirectly, created numerous and significant aftershocks that have impacted the industry, including the current supply chain crisis and inflation,” Meng said. “We are navigating these challenges by building transformative partnerships with our suppliers and customers. The only way we can overcome these challenges is to do so together.

Meng’s advice to someone just starting out? “Find what you do well and work diligently in that area,” Meng said. “And always act with integrity.”

**Lucas Olinyk** is president of Harvest Solar, a family owned and operated solar sales and installation company. Olinyk is responsible for the day to day operation of the business.

An effective trait for a leader, he said, is the ability to make “effective decisions at the 30,000-foot view, while empathizing with the 1,000-foot view.”

Olinyk called building a high-functioning, culture-rich team “a hard job.”

“Often, we get in our own way, even though the opportunity is great,” he said. “To



Lucas Olinyk

navigate this, it is important to prioritize effective training, team building and goal alignment, so we all move together as a unit in the same direction.”

His advice to someone just starting out? “If you wake up in the morning and dread going into work, you are in the wrong place,” he said. “You won’t always make the right career decisions, but be patient. Take the time to figure out what you truly enjoy so your “work-life balance” is less of a balance and more the lifestyle you desire.”

**Brad Pettiford** is Director of Public Relations at Homepoint, one of America’s largest wholesale mortgage lenders, partnering with independent mortgage brokers in all 50 states to help people achieve the dream of homeownership. Pettiford manages and executes on external communication strategies to raise visibility of Homepoint.

One effective trait of a leader, Pettiford said, is “being nimble.”

“Effective leadership can’t be a one-size-fits-all approach, in my opinion,” he said. “It’s about the ability to genuinely listen to the people on your team and understand how both internal and external factors can provide opportunistic or necessary reasons to deviate from your original vision.”

His advice to someone just starting out: Commit to learning, not just doing. “It’s easy to stick to your general list of job-related duties and responsibilities, but you can enhance your own professional development and increase the value you provide your company by gaining a broader understanding of the business you’re in,” he said. “The more you learn from people in different areas of your organization and even your peers throughout the industry, the more effective you become at developing new ideas and strategies that can make a difference.”

**Courtney Smith** is chief executive officer of the Detroit Phoenix Center, a nonprofit organization that responds to the needs of underserved and street-connected youth in Detroit. As the founder and CEO, Smith provides visionary leadership and financial oversight, in collaboration with the board of directors, by soliciting donations, major gifts and grants to expand programming and build capacity.

Smith believes one of the greatest challenges is “working to meet the growing



Brad Pettiford

demand and needs of those we serve, with very limited resources available.”

“We tackle this challenge by continuing to become innovative — such as the development of an app and a youth-led podcast, with the goal of empowering young adults by giving them the knowledge to access resources to improve their health and well-being,” Smith said. “With a few taps on a smartphone screen, homeless youth can now use the YouthUp mobile app to access critical resources and information.”

Smith’s advice for someone just starting out? “Know your why.” “A strong sense of purpose will always carry you when your career path becomes difficult,” Smith said. “If you can always remember why you are doing the work, it will provide a grounding that will withstand those days when you are not particularly motivated to do the work.”

## Most Valuable Young Professionals

**Gabriel Bedoya** is a partner at Honigman LLP, representing private equity firms, international manufacturers and closely held businesses in complex commercial matters, shareholder disputes and government investigations.

As a first-generation American and attorney, he said he appreciates a workplace cul-



Courtney Smith





Gabriel Bedoya

ture that “values the diversity of all employees, both in diversity of backgrounds as well as diversity of thought.”

“Although I may not agree with all of my colleagues on all points, we remain a family that supports each other through our professional and personal challenges,” he said.

In five years, he said, he hopes to remain a partner at Honigman LLP, “having further expanded my practice in the regional community.”

His advice to someone just starting out? Don’t give up. “Although everyone may face difficult times throughout their career, develop a network that will support you through the good times and the bad,” he said.

**Matt Cook** is vice president of community relations for Lake Michigan Credit Union, Michigan’s largest credit union and the 13th largest in the country. Cook oversees the organization’s philanthropy, community involvement, sponsorship, and volunteerism.

Cook called an empowering and supportive workplace culture “critical.”

“A workplace allowing innovation and new ways of thinking promotes growth, even when you fail,” he said. “Celebrating success and sharing team wins, while also sharing learnings from obstacles and moments of failure, allows for amplified impact. Also, a



Matt Cook

supportive culture that encourages personal wellbeing and balance is imperative for getting the most out of everyone.”

His advice to young professionals: Build your network and be open to a variety of experiences. “The connections I made as a young professional have been instrumental to my growth,” he said. “Where I am today is in large part due to some of the connections I made very early in my career. At the same time, I could never have known that I would end up in philanthropy and marketing at a financial institution. Being open to roles and experiences that stretched me, led me to where I’m at today.”

**Chantal Cornfield** is regional director of operations for American House Senior Living, the 32nd largest senior living owner/operator in the country. Cornfield oversees daily operations of 13 senior living communities, composed of independent, assisted and memory care.

She values a workplace culture where everyone is working uniquely toward the same goal.

“It is about delivering excellent service to our residents, employees and investors,” she said. “A warm, family-like atmosphere that welcomes all opinions and ideas, which is evident through our melting pot of culture and diversity.”

Her advice to someone just starting out? Be a sponge.

“Consistently show your willingness to learn and lend a helping hand and provide value to every situation,” she said. “Learn what works, be humble, work hard, take ownership over your wins, your losses and consistently build from there. You don’t know how to win if you don’t know how to lose, so own your faults and always be open to continuing to grow.”

**Andre Ebron** is senior director, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the United Way for Southeastern Michigan, a nonprofit organization that works with public, private and nonprofit partners to help families become stable and ensure children have the support they need to thrive. Ebron curates safe and brave spaces that foster authentic inclusion and belonging.

Organizational climate and culture, he said, is “shaped by shared language, values, behavior and practices. It is important to me



Chantal Cornfield

that I work in a diverse, equitable, inclusive and restorative environment that values people first,” he said. “This environment challenges and supports their team members’ professional growth and development and creates clear career pathways for promotion.”

His advice to someone just starting out? “Listen and observe more than you speak, exercise self-agency in matters of pay and promotion, seek mentors early, participate in fellowships and other learning opportunities/professional development, add value to very environment to which you are given access, be intentional, selective and decisive, remain teachable, be authentic, be honest and keep your word.”

**Chris Economeas** is director of Community and Social Responsibility for the Detroit Pistons basketball team, overseeing day-to-day operations of department employees, while managing community programming for both the Detroit Pistons and G-League affiliate, Motor City Cruise. He also assists the Detroit Pistons Foundation in fundraising and distribution of charitable funds.

“Success is accomplishing a goal that you have set for yourself, no matter how large or small, and making a positive impact on those around you along the way,” Economeas said.



Andre Ebron