



A collection of observations, ruminations, predictions, and random thoughts from Cornerstone Advisors

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## GonzoBanker of the Month: Marc Schaefer, Truliant Federal Credit Union

*GonzoBanker* recognizes Marc Schaefer of [Truliant Federal Credit Union](#) as our November *GonzoBanker of the Month*. In a time when platitudes often trump action and the way toward fiscal well-being seems muddled at best, Marc gets a *GonzoBanker* shout out for employing a smart mix of communication, education and political activism to promote a financial dialogue that's more about common sense and less about suspension of reality.



**Name:** Marcus B. Schaefer

**Official Title:** President & CEO, Truliant Federal Credit Union, Winston-Salem, NC (Assets: \$1.2 billion)

**Gonzo Title:** Ambassador Schaefer

**Previous Gigs:** Marc joined Truliant as president & CEO in 1995. Previously, he served as Controller at U.S. Postal Service Federal Credit Union and then CEO of FDIC Employees Credit Union.

**Alma Mater:** Marc has a Masters of International Business Degree from the American Graduate School of International Management (Thunderbird) and a BA in Political Science from UCLA. This may explain why Marc's career activities extend from Winston-Salem to the halls of Congress to Suriname.

**"You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."** Marc says good-humouredly about his long tenure in financial services and credit unions: "Once you're in, it's hard to get out." The getting in was unexpected. His father worked for Continental Bank, so he cut his teeth on finance. The plan after graduating Thunderbird was to pursue a career as a banker in Latin America. He came close, accepting a marketing position there, but ultimately decided it would be wise to explore options stateside. This led him to interview with the CEO at U.S. Postal Service FCU, who offered him the controller position on the spot, based in part on his strong computer skills. The Postal Service FCU position served as entrée to the CEO spot at FDIC Employees CU. "I had a lot of fun working at FDIC," said Marc. "It was a pivotal time during which the Resolution Trust Corporation was formed and lots of interesting things were going on." From FDIC, Marc moved on to head up Truliant.

Marc didn't let his international aspirations languish, however. Over the years, he has been involved in numerous projects for the [World Council of Credit Unions](#) and [USAID](#). Most recently, with members of the [North Carolina Credit Union League](#), he assisted Godo Credit Union in Suriname with technology upgrades geared toward protecting members and their savings.

### ***A Passion for Customer Service***

So many financial institutions talk about "customer service" being their secret sauce but few actually

put metrics around the concept and then measure it. Well, Gonzo thinks Marc's service tracking system is one of the most unique we've ever seen. Let's check it out.



**When it's Good, it Glows.** Video kiosks and smart cards are old hat compared to Truliant's Ambient Member Satisfaction Orb, introduced in 2006 to gauge and display customer satisfaction. Every fifth member that transacts business with Truliant is asked two questions: 1) Are you satisfied?; and 2) Do you feel a part of Truliant (meaning, do you feel like an owner)? Responses are sent to a database in the building, picked up by satellite and then transmitted to the orbs. The Ambient Orbs are located in front of headquarters, inside each Financial Center (or branch as they are more commonly known), and in Marc's office. When satisfaction is high, the Ambient Orbs glow like blue beacons, changing to green and then yellow if satisfaction levels diminish. Satellite data is updated every 15 minutes. Readability of the headquarters Orb is enhanced by a 64 foot tower and extra lighting. "The Orb creates a sense of commitment and a little mystique," says Marc.

**Household Finance 101 – with Tools.** In an era of fiscal irresponsibility, GonzoBanker likes the fact that Truliant vigorously promotes common sense financial best practices. One way it does this is via [TruDifferences](#). This is a campaign that, among other things, provides the education and tools that make being fiscally smart a little bit easier for members. Take courtesy pay, a cash cow for financial service companies that can be a big convenience for the consumer but expensive due to associated fees. As administered through the lens of *TruDifferences*, Courtesy Pay becomes an opt-in feature that is thoroughly discussed with members before they sign on. It works like this: when someone opens a checking account, they are offered a \$300 – \$500 credit line called *ChecProtect(SM)* to cover overdrafts. "If you decide you would prefer the courtesy pay type product instead of *ChecProtect(SM)*, you can opt in to it, but you have to understand what you're getting into and decline the line of credit," said Marc. While Truliant has foregone fee income dollars, it believes educating its members on the importance of saving money and financial responsibility wins customer loyalty.

**Advice for GonzoBankers:** Marc advocates prefacing decisions by asking, "How does this impact the customer?" Marc believes he has steered clear of mistakes using this strategy, recalling Truliant's decision to forgo participation in the popular Centrix auto program as one example. (Centrix blew up and hurt many credit unions). "We did not believe the program had a component to help consumers develop financial responsibility or avoid usurious loans in the future, and it ultimately failed," he said.

**By the People, for the People.** Marc is an energetic advocate for educating members, making sure they realize the significance of their member-owner status and calling on them from time to time to exercise their political views vis-à-vis their ownership stake. "It's a valid way to participate in the system," Marc stated.

**Staying Constructive in a Deconstructed World.** Nowadays, it's easy to point fingers, but Marc feels this is not the time to criticize each other. "I think the competitive marketplace for financial services is healthier when you have a variety of types of financial institutions," he said. "There are plenty of community banks and credit unions where a monopoly doesn't exist; consequently, consumers have many choices." This is not to say Marc's not out there fighting battles for the credit union movement every day. "We are active politically and have to be because banking has more money and more lobbyists."

**Extracurricular Activities.** Marc plays guitar and boasts a recording studio to boot. He also collects guitars and counts among his treasures a 1965 red Fender Mustang and a custom Les Paul. Marc quipped, "How many guitars do you need? The correct answer is, the number you have. For me, it's six." Marc also enjoys travel and will visit Argentina in the spring.



**Super Cinema.** Marc's favorite movie is *The Last Detail* with Jack Nicholson. "It's about finding your way through the challenges of life. Plus, it's an interesting blend of calling out authority and finding

the correct balance between right and wrong.”

**Feeding the iPod.** Lately, Marc has been listening to Argentine pianist and composer Guillermo Klein. He also has a solid collection of classic AI Stewart.

*GonzoBanker is inspired by Marc’s commitment to the greater good of the Truliant community and is proud to donate \$250 in Marc’s name to [United Way of Forsyth County](#). “United Way has done a good job of evaluating and prioritizing needs,” said Marc. “They are able to focus scarce resources so they are applied in the best possible way.”*

*Article written by Diana Ferguson*