



In Conversation with John C. Lettera, **RealFi Financial LLC** Founder and CEO: ‘We Endeavor to Provide more than Mortgage Lending, and in that Same Vein, we Realize that our Biggest Asset is Our People’

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John C. Lettera is the founder and CEO of RealFi Financial LLC—a leading, technology-driven, alternative investment management firm with expertise in real estate credit strategies. Through its subsidiaries, RealFi is an originator of qualified and non-qualified residential home mortgages. And through the RealFi REIT—a leading real estate finance company—the firm is a direct lender focused on originating commercial real estate bridge loans in major markets throughout the United States. John has over two decades of legal experience and over 30 years of experience in real estate debt originations and acquisitions as well as equity investing.

John began investing in real estate in 1990, during the nadir of the real estate market. Access to capital was severely restricted, and investors were genuinely panicked. Space in the capital stack was opening up as institutional lenders were sticking with safe loans. John capitalized on the opportunity as a lot of real estate sat below that top tier, falling either into the value-add category or in secondary or tertiary markets, currently off the radar screen of the most risk-averse lenders. Fast forward 30 years, and RealFi is now recognized as one of the nation’s leading mortgage companies, employing hundreds of professionals and continuing to grow exponentially.

John is also an adjunct professor at the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University as well as a proud Veteran having served in the U.S. Marine Corps.

RealFi Financial is headquartered in White Plains, New York.

**John C. Lettera,
RealFi Financial LLC
Founder and CEO,
spoke exclusively to
The Silicon Review.
Below is an excerpt.**

What are the various technologies leveraged by you in your lead generation efforts?

We are using technology to solve longstanding issues in the mortgage industry. We employ the latest financial technologies to streamline the traditionally out-of-date and non-transparent lending process. Our data-driven algorithms and SaaS platform sifts through the sea of data to bring transparency and responsible decision-making tools to loan originators and underwriters. This system removes friction, compresses turn times, and streamlines the lending process. It’s fast, efficient, scalable, and always improving. We’re all innovators here, so it doesn’t end with technology.

How do you contribute to the growth of the real estate segment?

RealFi represents the future of real estate lending. While we experienced significant growth, we understand that to stay relevant in a changing market, we need to diversify continually. Our real estate debt business provides creative and comprehensive financing solutions across the capital structure and risk spectrum. We originate loans and invest in debt securities underpinned by high-quality real estate. We manage RealFi REIT, which originates loans collateralized by commercial real estate, and RealFi Home Funding, which originates qualified residential home mortgages.

Financial institutions often have a stringent application process for a commercial loan. How do you see this, and are there any ways to make this process more transparent?

The demand for commercial mortgage loans arises from borrowers in need of funding within a short time frame and from borrowers seeking to acquire properties when either the borrower or the property falls outside the lending criteria of institutional mortgage lenders. Underwriting guidelines used by most conventional mortgage lenders currently prevent

them from participating in such loans. We do not expect such underwriting guidelines to be modified at any time in the foreseeable future. Institutions only slowly re-enter the market at a time when a flood of borrowers needs refinancing and recapitalizing. Our objective is to fill that gap on assets with a lowered cost basis, thus allowing us to obtain excellent risk-adjusted returns up and down the capital stack. RealFi REIT is predominately an asset-backed lender and is more interested in the underlying collateral than the sponsor. This allows us to be creative and employ more entrepreneurial techniques such as cross-collateralization, mezz debt, or preferred equity.

What would you say are the top three skills to be a successful business leader?

I am often asked this question. I am a firm believer in self-awareness as well as situational awareness. It's important to recognize and understand your strengths and weaknesses. It's equally important to be fully aware of the events happening within the company as well as the industry environment as a whole. Finally, your business is only as successful as the people working in it. I always surround myself with smart, talented, courageous people.

What would you say is the single most influential factor of your business' success?

What an interesting question. Success, however you choose to define it, is a continual work in progress. While many factors come into play when building a business, I believe that the most important ones have nothing to do with innovation, balance sheets, finance, or marketing. The most important variable to your success in business is you. You are the author of your own life, and it's never too late to replace the stories you tell yourself.

What other leaders do you look up to, and why?

I look up to those who can smile in the face of adversity.

If you had one piece of advice to someone just starting as an entrepreneur, what would it be?

As I previously stated, the most crucial variable to your success in business is you. Experience has taught me that if we go to work every day on the internal, the external success we crave will undoubtedly show up along the way. The remarkable thing about working on ideas like inner passion and purpose is that your progress comes out so authentically in all manner of external interaction. When people can genuinely feel that you care about what you are engaged in, you are a persuasive salesperson, without actually trying to sell anything. It takes a lot of courage to work on the internal, but as Anais Nin so eloquently put it, *"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage."*

If not a business leader, what else you wish to be?

I have always had a passion for teaching. My love for learning fuels my passion for teaching. I am addicted to the challenge of how to get students even more engaged in learning. I can't teach every student in the world, but I can make a difference for the ones I teach. Knowing that the impact I can have on their lives can stay with them throughout their years of schooling and beyond is incredibly inspiring.

What does the future hold for RealFi and its employees? Are exciting things on the way?

We're constantly transcending and



John C. Lettera, Founder & CEO

growing, and we're hiring to support this growth. We are in the final stages of launching a company stock option plan where every employee will own stock in the company. We endeavor to provide more than mortgage lending, and in that same vein, we realize that our biggest asset is our people. So, while the rest of the mortgage industry is interested in short-term gains, we're investing in technology and training, always having one hand in the future.^{SR}

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