

It's (Still) All About Boomers

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as Usual

Second Acts

Call it a career crisis. What if a six-figure paycheck is no longer a motivator? The urge to follow a dream has led some former bankers to more meaningful careers where they feel they're making a difference. Tribeca Treats founder Rachel Thebault, a former BofA executive, is among those who found success outside of banking.

THE RISE OF ATM FEES

Two more large banks have joined the club for \$3 ATM fees for noncustomers. Are Internet banks exploiting this?

SANCTIONS ON IRAN

As the Bush Administration slaps another set of U.S. sanctions on Tehran, it continues its long-term policy of pressuring banks to pull out of Iran. Something is working.



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30 Cover Story: Life Beyond Banking for Those Who Follow Their Instincts

Many would consider it sheer lunacy to give up a plush corner office to follow one's inner voice. Stories of those who have given up their six- and seven-figure jobs to follow a higher calling are well-known, even cliché. But what about those without a socially acceptable catalyst? For Rachel Thebault, a former vp at Bank of America, going to culinary school was her dream, and Allan Woods, a former vice chairman and CIO at Mellon Bank, found his bliss by becoming an emergency medical technician. For those who take the leap, success in their second act is defined more by fulfillment than by money.

cover photograph: Sam Yocum

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Tribeca Treat's
Rachel Thebault,
formerly of
Bank of America

A Tough Act 2 Follow

The stories of those who rise to the top of banking are well known. But what about bankers who burn out, choose to pursue another passion and leave banking altogether? Yes, there is life beyond the corner office. By Rebecca Sausner
Photography by Sam Yocum

RACHEL THEBAULT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE NERVOUS ON THAT LATE

August day in 2003 when she walked into Joel VanDuesen's office at Bank of America, ready to announce to her boss and the investment-banking world the conclusion she had taken a long time—years, really—to admit: She was no longer interested in banking.

What she really wanted to do was go to culinary school. While going from investment banking to baked goods seems like a stretch, Thebault wanted to do something that she could pour herself into without burning out. Worried she'd get cold feet, Thebault put down a deposit at a Manhattan culinary school the day before she resigned, "just to be sure I wouldn't back out," she says; today she is the owner of Tribeca Treats, a gourmet bake shop in Manhattan's hip Tribeca neighborhood.

Make no mistake, as a banker she loved the camaraderie of the office, the thrill of the deals, and the excitement of watching her bank unit climb in the league tables. But there was another side. At 27 she was a vp, but the hours weren't getting better. She wasn't in the office from 7 a.m. until midnight anymore, but she was traveling more than she was home. And when she looked up the ladder, she saw that it would be harder, not easier.

"I didn't really feel like I saw an end point to the crazy hours," she says. "Even the head of our group was traveling once a week to Europe and once a week to the West coast, and all over the place. It was an expected part of the business and

it was really draining. I got to a point after I had been a vp for a year where I said, 'I don't see where this is going for me.' I just didn't see how I was going to fit this career."

In many ways Thebault had been groomed to be a banker from birth. Her dad, Rick Schifter, was in the private-equity industry, and she'd always felt she'd follow in his type-A finance footsteps. But she was also a born chef—she tells of receiving her first Easy-Bake Oven; her first business venture was in 8th grade when she and a friend were paid to cater a dinner party for the friend's parents.

Her love for cooking didn't diminish, but she continued on what seemed a predestined path. After her junior year as an economics major at Colgate University, she got a coveted investment-banking internship at Merrill Lynch. She didn't know much about it, and took the job offer and its two-year commitment. "I said to myself, 'It's only two years; it's a great stepping stone for a lot of other jobs,'" she recalls. "I still didn't know what I wanted to do with the rest of my life."

Although she seemed a predestined banker and rose quickly through the ranks, Thebault's urge to cook kept bubbling up. She tried changing jobs, moving from the equity capital markets desk at Merrill Lynch to Bank of America's reinvigorated retail investment-banking group.

She tried cooking in her spare time—although "spare time" isn't typically part of the investment-banking lexicon—baking fancy desserts for friends and parties. All to no avail, which is how she found herself in VanDuesen's office that day, offering her resignation. "It was really difficult," she says. "I loved the people I worked with so much. I didn't want to let them down in any way."

The story of a person who wakes up one day and views the world from an entirely different point of view and becomes dedicated to a new mission in life is nearly cliché. After September 11, the world heard many of these stories, of people who decided life was too fragile, or unpredictably short, to continue as cogs in the corporate machine. But without a socially acceptable catalyst—the death of a loved one, a world-changing event or a brush with mortality—the decision to abandon a lucrative, stable or just comfortable career for the unknown can seem impossible.

Yet Thebault, and lots of others like her, are living the "man bites dog" story. It's not news when someone chooses an altruistic or humble career; it only seems exotic when someone walks away from a six- or seven-figure paycheck to do it. Great examples make the press all the time: Connie Duckworth, the former Goldman Sachs managing director who founded Arzu, a non-profit that acts as a conduit between Afghan women who make rugs and U.S. rug buyers; John L. Thornton who retired as president and co-CEO of Goldman Sachs to become the director and professor of the Global Leadership Program at Tsinghua University in Beijing; and Raj Manhas, formerly of Security Pacific Bank Northwest, who went on to become Seattle Public Schools' COO and then Superintendent and recently accepted a post as executive director of Seeds of Compassion, devoted to the healthy development of children.

Each of these people, no matter how they came to be bankers, eventually faced the reality that it was time to move on. The truth creeps up in moments of clarity, frustration, optimism or the exhaustion of daily demands.

Allan Woods knows what this truth feels like. He talks about his decision to leave banking as "a calling," but one that he tried pretty hard to ignore. As the 57-year-old vice-chairman and CIO of Mellon Bank, Woods says he started to feel "uneasy" in 2003. He was at the pinnacle of his career, both at Mellon and in the industry. In

addition to being CIO and member of the management committee, he was COO of the bank's transaction-processing business, handled crisis management, and was on the BITS board. All told, he had 7,000 employees in his reporting structure and enviable access to the board. And he loved being a leader.

But something wasn't working. "I just felt very, very uneasy. Something just wasn't right," said Woods, pausing to lean forward on the frayed couch where he was seated. He halts, needing to explain where this Brooklyn-born Vietnam vet and Tae Kwon Do blackbelt is coming from. "I believe we all do things based on fundamental beliefs. I believed for a long time that the reason we're here is to help other people. And good leaders in a corporation who believe they're there to serve, not to be served, are going to help the company and the community. And, certainly, I looked at my role in corporate America like that."

And with the earnestness and confidence that accompanies a fundamental truth, Woods concluded, "I just got this overwhelming feeling that I was supposed to be doing something different about this belief. ...And I just kept pushing it back, saying, 'Yeah, I'll think about it some other time.' But I couldn't sleep."

Thebault, too, felt the weight of this struggle for many months before she could admit it. "The competitive side of me was saying, 'This is great, I'm 26, 27 years old. I'm a vp in the investment-banking world. I'm a woman,'" she says. "All these things were contributing to me keeping going with it, but the other side of things was: How am I going to work this into having a family and having a life outside of work? So it was hard."

This struggle around what to do next is what author Sara Davidson calls "the narrows," a reconsideration of what's important in life, and a transition to a new phase. "Like the insect in the cocoon, you'll be turned to soup and reforged, but it won't be sudden and complete like the butterfly emerging with new wings," Davidson writes in her 2007 book, *Leap! What Will We Do With the Rest of Our Lives?*

At the other side of the narrows, Woods was brought to a double-wide trailer in a Summerville, SC, parking lot, where he and a 26-year old single mom—whom he reported to on this particular 24-hour shift—waited for their ambulance to be summoned by the high-pitch tones of a two-way radio and the squawking directions from a 911 dispatcher. The first call that day for his services as an emergency medical technician was for a nine-year-old boy experiencing testicular torsion. Liz Mero drove the ambulance; Woods calmed and distracted the patient with talk of SpongeBob SquarePants and the never-ending annoyances that siblings can present.

The path from highly regarded and highly compensated CIO at a major Pittsburgh bank to riding an ambulance in South Carolina wasn't linear. "I keep saying, 'I wish I had a more profound answer,' like there was this blinding glimpse of the obvious. But it just seemed like what I needed to do," he says, with a tone that says he's offered that same non-explanation explanation a hundred times.

The back story goes something like this: The restless Woods knew he wanted to help people, but his 12 years as a hospice volunteer and service on the board of Holy Family Institute in Pittsburgh weren't enough. A mix of soul-searching and the kind of analysis one would expect from a CIO brought him to the conclusion that people who were most in need were those who were least prepared, least expecting to have something terrible happen to them. And while this line of thinking could lead to any number of choices, it led Woods to the Community College of Allegheny County, where he began his EMT training in August 2005. His last day at

Mellon was in September 2005.

These stories are the tales of bankers who embarked on second acts; the tension comes in examining what the protagonists gave up, and what they received in return. In Dorchester County, SC, the closest Allan Woods comes to a corporate jet these days is when a patient needing critical care is taken by helicopter to the trauma center in Charleston, like the call he responded to a few weeks ago when a hunter fell out of a tree stand deep in the woods. And the executive dining room during a recent shift was an Arby's, where Woods made the best of a chicken-salad sandwich. Mostly what he left on the table back at Mellon was the money: his salary and a generous pile of options that would have vested had he stayed another six months.

Part of the nobility and meaning that Woods found in his career at Mellon was in leading. So now he's gone from, as he puts it, "breathing rarified air" to being a "newbie," humbled by his surroundings, and in awe of the 20-something paramedic he might report to on any given shift. "On one hand, [I was] used to being vice chairman, a big muckety-muck. [I] knew everything about everything," he says. "And now I'm the newbie, and I know jack."

But the next part of what he says is a point he comes back to over and over. No knock on his banking colleagues, but to hear him talk you'd think the paramedics and EMTs that Woods works with walk on water. "The other thing that's humbling is when you work with people who do this and you watch how courageous they are, how skillful they are, how dedicated and selfless they are," he explains. "They are doing things under extraordinary pressure, sometimes with family members around or in life-threatening situations. These folks have to go back and think through the skills and be able to apply them."

Thebault, too, has moments in her new career that are humbling: dealing with customers so difficult she'd like to lock the doors of her shop and quit, vendors who don't deliver, or appliances that break. And she gave up the legendary compensation of investment banking for a goal that is considerably more humble—break even.

So if the give-ups are mainly financial, with a bit of ego reduction thrown in, the rewards that Woods and Thebault claim from their second acts are best termed emotional—or even spiritual. Thebault's days aren't any shorter than when she was an investment banker; on any given day, she's still trying to answer email while she eats a quick dinner and plans the next month's orders at 11 p.m. What's different is what she's able to work into that still long and tiring day—breakfast with her two-and-a-half year old daughter, Marin, before the nanny shows up, and time in the afternoon to observe Marin's preschool class, and a book-launch party in the evening for a recently published friend.

"The hours are not really better," she laughs, perched on a chair in the middle of Tribeca Treats. One can almost see her tabulating her to-do list for the rest of the day, having just finished explaining that she's contemplating expansion into other markets, writing cookbooks, even launching a TV show. But she goes on with the upside. "I get to manage my own time and do it on my own terms," she says. "It's only as successful as the amount of work I put into it. So it still is a lot of work, but it's nice because it's all up to me."

For Woods, his second act is the difference between a job that is meaningful and one he loves. "Part of what you get is an element that you did something that was totally selfless," he says.

He speaks with a rare peace that says he's where he ought to be in the world. "After every shift, when I go home, there's no doubt about why I'm doing what I'm doing and why it was the right thing to do," he says.

The Volunteer Banker

Harris Berger recalls the admonition he got before he embarked on his first volunteer mission to Egypt: "Don't tell them you're Jewish," he was warned. Well, on the very first morning the Egyptian bankers he was training in credit-risk management determined his religion, and every lunch and coffee break thereafter they peppered him with endless—but decidedly not hostile—questions. "I've taught rooms full of Muslims in Egypt, in India a room full of Hindus," Berger says. What's he learned? "They're just like us. ...The people I met just want to have good careers, send their kids to school, and live in peace, and I have a lot of fun with them."

Not many bankers bring home real-life experience with the Arab-Israeli conflict after a day's work. Berger's missions to Egypt, India, Indonesia, Algeria, and, most recently, Ghana, are volunteer gigs he's taken on for the Financial Services Volunteer Corp, a non-profit founded in 1990 by the late former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and John Whitehead, former co-chairman of Goldman Sachs, with a mission to help build sound banking and financial systems in developing nations.

Berger, 59, isn't fully retired, but his frequent volunteer FSVC trips are part of the second act the former Fleet credit officer created when he took a buyout in the wake of the bank's merger with Bank of America. "At that point I had 31 or 32 years in the business, and when I looked around the lending floors I didn't see a lot of gray hairs," Berger recalls. "I said, 'if I can negotiate a package, this is a good time for me to go out and hang a shingle'.... I didn't need to go become a second-class citizen at a big bank, which many of the Fleet people did."

In his long career at Citibank, and then Fleet, Berger enjoyed mentoring and training opportunities the most, particularly a stint at Citibank's training center. So when his offer to retire was accepted, he started a consulting business that would allow him to work two or three days a week doing what he loved best. Before long, he was teaching a few classes a month for the Risk Management Association, and last January he began doing FSVC missions.

FSVC CEO Andrew Spindler, a former banker and supervisor at the Federal Reserve Bank, says the organization helps many volunteers attach meaning to banking jobs that often seem focused solely on quarterly goals. "Going on an FSVC mission really will force you to wrestle with some basic notions, like: What is the role of a banking system? What is the difference between sound credit analysis and non-existent credit analysis on an institution and a system?" says Spindler.

"When I made my first trip to Bangladesh, I was able to meet with top management of the central bank," Spindler says, clearly enthusiastic about the experience. "Within five minutes, they were pouring out their problems, their hopes for their country. That's tremendous. You're never going to get that from sitting in a lounge chair at the local beach resort."

Berger is an atypical FSVC volunteer in that he truly is a volunteer. Most of the more than 8,000 bankers who have gone on missions to more than 50 countries and trained more than 30,000 of their global counterparts are mid-career experts, typically on paid leave from their banks. Citibank, Bank of America, and JPMorgan Chase offer support to FSVC.

"As long as I can put up with the airports," Berger says, he'll keep it up. "It's been great. I don't look back at all. I can't sit in an office anymore. It's tough to describe that feeling, but I have to be out and about." —RS

