

profits & passions

Sandy Gross

Looking for a few good recruits

By BOB CHUVALA
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When Sandy Gross graduated from William Smith College in 1985 with a double major in psychology and religious studies, she did what many college graduates do — she took a job totally outside her studies. She joined a bank, “making absolutely no use of my degrees.”

“I had thought I wanted to get into psychology or human resources,” Gross said, until a friend of a friend of her parents opened a door to Manufacturers Hanover on Wall Street in Manhattan in its money market operations. She stayed at “Manny Hanny” for seven years in Manhattan and Los Angeles, squeezing in her marriage and an MBA at Pepperdine University. “I met Steven at a banking conference in Washington,” she said of her husband. “We were with competing banks and were trying to avoid each other because they were stealing all our clients. But he turned out to be a pretty nice guy.”

They met in 1987 and he was transferred to California in 1988. “I wasn’t going to go out there until I was married,” she said. “He came back east and we were married at the Long Shore Country Club,” where she had been a life-guard when she attended Staples High School in Westport, where she grew up.

When the couple moved back to Manhattan, she joined FINS Group, a startup management consulting firm founded by partners from Ernst & Young that focused on back-office integration of banks and brokerage firms. “I split my time doing business development, bringing in new clients, and on consulting engagement.”

She stayed at FINS for two years, then joined Bankers Trust — “My husband was still there” — as a senior relationship manager for the bank’s largest mutual funds clients. But after three years she began searching around for another career. “I did kind of fall into banking,” she said, “and I was not really in love with what I was doing.”

“I went to an interview at a search firm and they said I should think about executive recruiting,” she said.

Something fun

She joined Spencer Stuart in 1997, commuting to Manhattan from the couple’s home in Greenwich for a year before she was transferred to the executive search company’s Stamford office, staying in the investment banking and asset management practices section until four years ago, when she was recruited by Amaranth Advisors hedge fund in Greenwich.



Occupation: Executive recruiter
Passion: Career coaching
Works in: Greenwich
Lives in: Greenwich

“When I got the call, I said, ‘Wow,’” about the chance to join a growing hedge fund, which at the time was managing \$3 billion. “My initial job was to run the front office, recruiting and working closely with the management team on building out new strategies,” she said. In less than a year Amaranth grew to \$6.5 billion in capital “and I hired about 110 people,” she said. “We grew from 150 to 260 people, and for a short time I was running human resources and recruiting people.”

While she was at Spencer Stuart, she had become more and more interested and involved with career coaching and counseling and succession planning and development, she said. But at Amaranth, “I learned very quickly that a fast-growing hedge fund is not the place you can spend the time to coach and develop people. There’s only time to build a business and do it quickly.”

She left Amaranth after a year to form her own strategic recruiting and executive search firm, which she called Pinetum Partners. “Our house is on the edge of a 100-acre pinetum,” she said, a tract where pine trees are the

foundation for the forest. “We are a boutique, retained executive search firm dedicated to hedge funds, investment banks and other securities firms.” She has an office in downtown Greenwich, her husband is a partner and chief financial officer, working out of their home, and two others work remotely.

That house at the edge of the pinetum, by the way, “is the house kids come to because they know there’s always something fun going on — arts and crafts or cooking and baking or woodworking,” Gross said. She finds time to be “the biggest cheerleader for our daughters for swimming and everything else they participate in,” she said. “They are one of my passions.”

Jamie, 15, and Dana, 11, are both on the swim team and tennis team at Roxbury Swim Club in Stamford, and the girls, until recently, would join their mother as a trio of clarinetists. “We’re down to duets because Jamie wants to spend more time with her friends and on the Internet,” she said.



Really rewarding

When she’s not at Pinetum and doing family things, she spends time at another passion, career coaching and development, “a lot of it with younger people graduating from college,” she said — a backpack-to-briefcase kind of coaching. “I love helping people.”

A few years ago, she said as an example, she worked with a college student “who wasn’t doing very well and didn’t have great grades but who wanted to get into investment management,” Gross said. “Sometimes parents aren’t the best ones to have a discussion with their kids, so I had their son meet me in my office.”

“We discussed his career plans and aspirations, and I told him it’s a very competitive field and that he needed to show he was a good student, tenacious, goal-oriented and driven while he was in college to show he had a passion for investment management.”

She urged him to join a college investment club, intern with a brokerage firm and turn his grades around. “His father was amazed that I could have such an impact on his son, being an outsider,” she said. “That was really rewarding.”

Successful business people have many dimensions, they even manage to have some fun.