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SEEN & NOTED

Sweet, surprise successes

Award-winning pastry chef, cookbook author and Chicago restaurant partner Gale Gand knows the measure of success down to the last gram. As long as you are talking about dessert. When it comes to career planning, Ms. Gand, 55, doesn't believe in working from a recipe.

As she described somewhat apologetically at a Professional Women's Club of Chicago luncheon just before Thanksgiving, Ms. Gand does not have her career plotted out by any of the short-term, long-term, seven-step success strategies popularized in business books promoting the latest system for getting ahead.

It was probably not the kind of advice her audience was used to hearing, as Ms. Gand later acknowledged. "That's my fear," she joked. "Their entire life is going to plummet and it's my fault."

Still, Ms. Gand says her own experience has left her convinced it is impossible to imagine the opportunities that arise over the course of a career.

"It will all work out in the end," says Ms. Gand, who is traveling around the country promoting her seventh cookbook in between television appearances and her responsibilities as executive pastry chef at Chicago's Tru restaurant, where she is a partner.

Ms. Gand was a 19-year-old art student and waitress when she was recruited into the kitchen after a line cook failed to show up for work.

"The options for chefs have increased so much beyond what anybody could have imagined—we became rock stars," she says. "Why maintain this fallacy that we have control over all of our options?"

The key, she believes, lies in having the courage to take advantage of opportunities. "I'm not so self-centered to be able to set that as my goal," she says of culinary stardom. But, she adds, "I'm not afraid to act on it."

Pat Dunnigan