

Strategies: Find your ikigai

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Like many in the financial services industry, I did not grow up dreaming of becoming a banker. As a college student, I was driven by a desire to make a difference — helping to solve big challenges like hunger and inequality. But after graduation, I took a banking job as a practical starting point while figuring out my next steps.

Two decades later, I'm still here — and I love what I do. Why? because I discovered my ikigai — my sense of purpose.

Ikigai is all about aligning what you love, what you're good at and what the world needs. For me, it's helping clients succeed and mentoring my team. These guiding principles have shaped my career and transformed banking into something more meaningful than I could have imagined. If you are unsure of what your ikigai is, start by thinking about what excites you and where your natural talents lie. Look for ways to bring those passions into your current work.

As I began to define my ikigai, I realized that the environment around me mattered just as much as the work itself.

Sometimes, finding fulfillment means aligning with a company whose values mirror your own. After two decades at one firm, I made the decision to join a regional bank, ABOC, that better reflected my core beliefs. This shift didn't just rejuvenate my passion for banking—it also deepened my commitment to serving the community alongside colleagues who shared similar ideals.

This sense of alignment also led me to a deeper connection with my colleagues. I found that sharing your ikigai openly can spark powerful connections with others. When you begin discussing your passions, you might

be surprised by how many people around you feel the same. Once you find your “tribe” at work, you can join forces to champion initiatives, creating a fulfilling and collaborative environment.

One of the most fulfilling aspects of pursuing my ikigai has been the opportunity to take on leadership roles outside of my core job responsibilities. Over the years, I’ve had the privilege of leading DE&I Councils, Employee Resource Groups and volunteer committees. These experiences have not only provided personal fulfillment but have also helped me develop skills like leadership, project management and executive presence—skills that have enriched my career in ways I hadn’t anticipated.

When the time comes for you to explore new opportunities, it’s important to have a record of your accomplishments ready to go. The skills you have gained by following ikigai — whether through leadership, community work or collaboration—can translate seamlessly into other roles. Having these examples on hand will make transitioning much easier and will help you approach new opportunities with confidence.

In summary, even if your career isn’t exactly what you had envisioned, it can still provide a powerful sense of purpose. By identifying your ikigai and seeking ways to integrate it into your current role, you might just find that the path you’re on is the one you were meant to take all along.