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After Groundwork At Goldman, Entrepreneur Takes Flight

By Harold Davis
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Becoming a successful entrepreneur doesn't happen overnight, and it often requires making some tough decisions.

Valerie Cooper, president of Picture That LLC, launched her business in 1992 but didn't make the transition from part time to full time until four years ago.

Leaving a 15-year tenure of accomplishment with global investment bank Goldman Sachs was difficult, Cooper said.

There, she said she had excelled as vice president of technology, an area that few women have successfully navigated. Cooper later became senior vice president of workplace diversity.

"I liked Goldman Sachs. I knew it was a phenomenal fit," Cooper said. But she felt another calling.

"I thought, 'Where else would I work other than for myself?' " she said. The question contained its own answer.

"I started selling art part time on the side, and what started as a hobby I made into an enterprise," the Stamford resident said of her "cultural fine art consultancy."

Developing that enterprise took time. Cooper needed to craft her business model and build relationships with clients.

Picture That consults on and acquires art for companies interested in running exhibits and events. Some of Cooper's corporate clients include Diageo, Citigroup, Deloitte and Pitney Bowes.

She sells the work of 15 artists, including that of Cora Marshall and Rosa Colon. She also offers diversity graphics, such as stock photographs of multiethnic workplaces for company brochures and other materials.

Cooper said that being a minority has helped her business. In exploring African-American art, Cooper said she learned history that was not covered in school and she felt strongly about sharing this history

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with others.

Her business arranges minority art workshops for corporate clients and other organizations.

Picture That has grown considerably in sales and customers since Cooper took it full time. She said she would like to expand it further while maintaining a high level of expertise and customer service.

"The last four years have been extremely intense. How do I grow my company to meet the demand, that's my challenge," Cooper said.

When time allows, Cooper lends a hand with A Better Chance Inc. in Darien, which works with inner-city minority youths and fosters their education. She also speaks to youth groups and to business students at her alma mater, Columbia University.

"I like to be there for the student that wants to really go (far)," she said.

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