

# The Boston Globe

## THE THRIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Founder and CEO of Panera Bread Shares the Digital Tools He Relies On Every Day  
*Ron Shaich on the book that changed his life and the last time he overcame failure*

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*When you have the opportunity to ask some of the most interesting people in the world about their lives, sometimes the most fascinating answers come from the simplest questions. [The Thrive Questionnaire](#) is an ongoing series that gives an intimate look inside the lives of some of the world's most successful people.*

**Thrive Global:** What's the first thing you do when you get out of bed?

**Ron Shaich:** I check the sales scorecard reflecting Panera's sales from the day before. It arrives very early each morning and sets the tone for the day.

**TG:** What gives you energy?

**RS:** Two things: Great comps and figuring out how to solve a difficult business problem that leads to competitive advantage before anyone else!

**TG:** What's your secret life hack?

**RS:** There are actually two. Pocket, an app that lets me save interesting articles for reading when I have time, and Toodledo, which helps me organize thoughts and prioritize tasks. I'd be lost without these digital tools.

**TG:** Name a book that changed your life.

**RS:** *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi. It's about life, death and the inevitable transition from one to the other. The author, a young doctor with a deep love for literature and a gift for writing, wrote it after he received a diagnosis of terminal lung cancer.

**TG:** Tell us about your relationship with your phone. Does it sleep with you?

**RS:** I'm very close to my phone – my team would tell you I can't put it down – but I still manage to set it aside when I sleep.

**TG:** How do you deal with email?

**RS:** I receive a lot of emails – some more important than others. I set up a system for prioritizing it, so I can take care of pressing issues and ignore or save the others for later.

**TG:** You unexpectedly find 15 minutes in your day, what do you do with it?

**RS:** I read the articles I've saved in Pocket or answer the less-pressing emails.

**TG:** When was the last time you felt burned out and why?

**RS:** At the end of each year, I visit a Caribbean beach. It's not so much that I'm burned out as that I need time to think and recharge. We pack a lot into a year at Panera – and 2017 has been particularly busy. We continued to rollout initiatives like delivery, went private through our deal with JAB and entered a definitive agreement to acquire Au Bon Pain. I'll be headed to the beach with my family in a few weeks and I'm looking forward to it!

**TG:** When was the last time you felt you failed and how did you overcome it?

**RS:** August 2014. We had been working so hard on several initiatives at Panera, but our results weren't showing it. I felt like I'd let everyone in the company down. That same day, my daughter Emma, who was 11 at the time, asked me to visit her at summer school because she'd had a tough day. I went, and as I was giving Emma a pep talk, I realized I was also talking to myself. It worked for both of us.

**TG:** Share a quote that you love and that gives you strength or peace.

**RS:** Nelson Mandela said, "It always seems impossible until it's done." My family visited Mandela's hometown in South Africa during the summer of 2016. Everything he accomplished seemed impossible – now it's done. I remind myself of this any time what's in front of me feels insurmountable.

*Ron Shaich is founder, chairman and CEO of Panera Bread, a groundbreaking restaurant brand that today has over 2,050 bakery-cafes, 100,000 associates and more than \$5 billion in annual systemwide sales. In addition to founding Panera, which established the high-growth fast-casual restaurant segment, Ron earlier in his career founded and grew Au Bon Pain, establishing the bakery-cafe segment. With both companies he disrupted an existing industry paradigm and found new pathways to building companies of value and with values. The result: Panera is the best-performing restaurant stock when measured over the last 20 years.*

*Over the last five years, Ron has developed and executed a powerful strategic plan to make Panera a better competitive alternative with expanded growth opportunities. The strategy tapped into powerful themes that are reshaping the restaurant industry and are only now being adopted by competitors, including digital, wellness, loyalty, omni-channel and new formats for growth. In July 2017, JAB Holding Company bought Panera for approximately \$7.5 billion. In November 2017, Panera entered a definitive agreement to acquire Au Bon Pain as part of an effort to intensify growth in new real estate channels, including transit, hospital, and university locations. Effective January 1, 2017, Ron stepped down as CEO. He will remain Chairman.*

*Ron received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Clark University and a Master of Business Administration degree from Harvard Business School. He is also the recipient of an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Clark University.*