

FEATURED ADVISORS

Heightened Responsibility: The Evolving Role of Today's Financial Advisors

Whether it's the stress and anxiety created by the pandemic or the rapid greying of Canada's population, there's little doubt that many clients today are turning to their financial advisors for additional support.

Assuming the role of financial first responders, many advisors have adapted to the new reality, performing additional services, like regular check-ins with elderly clients or mediating in family matters to ensure the well-being of the next generation of clients. *Advisor Magazine* recently spoke with Katherine Parsons, who has embraced the challenges created over the last two years by forging deeper connections with clients – a decision that has provided immense rewards, both personal and professional.



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More than just investment management

As the daughter of Waterloo financial advisor Joe Hagerman, Katherine Parsons has a very unique perspective on the evolving role of financial advisors. “I grew up in the business,” says Katherine, who started in 2005, working part-time during her summers away from university. Thanks to the mentorship of her father's partner, Greg Bencina, Katherine learned “the business from the ground up” and was well prepared when she stepped into a full-time role in 2014. Roughly five years later, in December 2019, she officially acquired the business.

Although the arrival of COVID-19 unfortunately delayed the new office's grand opening, the pandemic also forced a reappraisal of how best to serve clients. “Especially through the start of the pandemic, we found that it wasn't just conversations based on finances and investments. I think what we really uncovered was the importance of digging deeper to find out what's really important to clients – understanding their goals and how they envision their future.”

With that new perspective, Katherine says they were able to build more of a team approach, not just within the office, but by reaching out to a wider array of partnered professionals to offer clients a deeper level of service.

“I think clients have found a significant benefit in us acting as their financial coach and gathering all those resources under one umbrella. Some clients didn't realize that we could facilitate many different aspects of their life. I think that's where the true value is,” she says.

At Parsons Financial Group, the team can bring in all of the necessary partnered professionals – whether it's an accounting team, legal team, or specialized estate planning, which has been a major focus as so many clients revisit their estate plans throughout the pandemic. The practice offers many different services to younger clients through referrals to their partnered professionals, which includes help with debt consolidation or working with mortgage brokers to facilitate the purchase of a first home.

But it doesn't end there. Because of travel restrictions imposed by the pandemic, some elderly clients found themselves without family support, as relatives were unable to travel between the U.S. and Canada. As a result, Katherine's team helped one elderly client secure placement in a retirement home and also performed regular check-ins, as they do with a number of aging clients. Although the client eventually passed away during the pandemic, Katherine's team was able to help the client's son settle the estate without having to travel from the U.S.

Being able to offer such in-depth service really begins with the firm's focus on financial planning – or what Katherine more accurately calls “family planning.” “We have multiple generations of families within our practice. That is our key focus and building relationships with children, grandchildren to ensure that everyone's goals are met. It's been quite successful in terms of the succession from one generation to the next, and building out plans for our family of clients,” she says.

The larger focus on families has also helped the firm alleviate many clients' major worry: helping their children in an era of skyrocketing home prices. “We're seeing that more and more frequently – where parents are helping their children in acquiring their first property, whether it's a condo or their first home. We're absolutely seeing those trends change in the last couple of years. The wealth transfer is maybe taking place a little sooner than it otherwise would have.”

While the pandemic has definitely caused a realignment of priorities for many, perhaps the biggest trend Katherine has noticed is the more expansive role many advisors are taking on, beyond just managing clients' accounts. “I would say 90% of our meetings are not focused on the investments. The investments to me are a commodity, and you can access those anywhere. The 90% of what we spend our time on is the rest of the financial plan, which helps us to understand so much more.

There's a real value in having an independent party to run those ideas by and say, “‘Now, is this the right decision for me?’ Thankfully, we've assembled a team to ensure clients get the answers they need.”

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