

Secrets of 10 Successful Financial Advisors In India



With Best Wishes from
CafeMutual to all IFA members

Contains **200+ sharing's** of 10 successful financial planners
from India with **100+ yrs** of combined experience.
Has sharing of their journey, success and challenges
faced in their business

By – Jagoadvisor.com

About this Book

This eBook is lethal because it has the power to change your professional life forever. What your eyes is about to scroll is something that you may have never read before. This book is not mere compilation of words it is compilation of many years of experience, practical insights and practice building ideas put together. With an open heart all the people who are featured in this book have shared everything that they have learnt over a period of time. Every word in this eBook is authentic and backed with commitment to contribute.

You may be a new entrant into advisory business or experienced this eBook has something for everyone. If this eBook has reached you it means you are about to experience a radical change in your business life. This eBook is interesting in two ways; First, it helps you to learn the most real and practical business insights from 10 most thriving financial planners of India and second it is brief and impactful at the same time.

The idea of creating this eBook took birth a few days back and we immediately started sending invitations to few friends and colleagues whom we admire and trust in the industry. We take this opportunity to thank each one of them who accepted our invitation and for being our partner in creating this eBook. Each financial planners journey in this eBook is unique, is full of breakdowns and breakthroughs. The sharing done by each financial planner will touch you, move you and inspire you.

Advisory Business has several dimensions attached to it and it is extremely important to learn about them from the masters. This profession has a lot of potential but still many struggle to make it big. With this eBook we want to communicate the message that you can learn many business lessons from other financial planner's experience and the path of service can lead you to greater heights in advisory business.

We saw the urge to create this eBook and we are excited sharing the same with the world. Time has come to take a stand for our profession to grow, we can't wait for some regulatory body or some association to do something for us. We need to be a stand for each other's success and need to learn and grow together. We would like this eBook to be read by each and every advisor of India so feel free to share this eBook with those who can benefit. This is the second eBook that we have created and you can expect many such initiatives in future.

About JagoAdvisor.com

Jagoadvisor is run by Manish Chauhan and Nandish Desai, who also run successful blog on personal finance www.jagoinvestor.com. They have their own financial advisory practice which helps investors in living an awesome financial life.

The core idea behind starting jagoadvisor is to create an online space where quality practice building content is available to learn from. This profession has given us a lot and with this blog we would like to help other financial planners in building their practice. It is a space where we share our day to day business experiences and knowledge with other financial planners. Let's all learn, grow together and become prosperous.



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read their Answers



Sumeet Vaid

Ffreedom Financial Planners, Mumbai

Family

Wife : Menka Vaid , Son : Sumer Vaid (16 Yrs old), Daughter: Misha vaid (13 Yrs), Parents : Retired and Chilling.

About your business and team

Ffreedom Financial Planners, our Business is to help our members live/achieve their Life Goals we do this by using Financial Planning approach and we are in business of Financial Advise Delivery. We have a team size of 127 Financial Planners (Partners 114 salaried 13), with Ffreedom Financial Planning Support Team of 55. We have branches at Mumbai (HO), Delhi,Pune and Chennai. MF Assets under Advice are 286 Crores and Pure Term life Sum Assured recommended of 300 Crs plus along with 100+ Estate Planning/Wills for our Partners members. We are known for

- Our Proprietary Technology Platform “ Advisor Factory”
- Scalable Financial Planning model built on PPT i.e. People ,Process and Technology.
- Client Centricity with help of process and Technology
- Partner Financial Planner model of helping large number of IFA;s to graduate to become Financial Platform with help of Ffreedom Platform.

Personal Interest

Human Psychology/Power of Human Mind, Gymming, Harley Davidson Fan, Percussion instruments, Wanna be Golfer.

Into the Business of personal finance since

1995- 1998 : Bajaj Capital Delhi

1998-2001 : Prudential ICICI MF Head of North Zone

2002-2005 : Country Head Retail Sales Prudential ICICI MF

2005-2008 : Chief Marketing Officer & CEO Designate ING OptiMlx

2008 Onwards Ffreedom all the way.

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

Our Belief at Ffreedom is to help our members live/achieve their Life Goals we start this process with our proprietary **"Art of Financial Freedom"** Seminars which focuses on basic financial education bundled with complimentary Financial Health Check-up i.e. Ffreedom Financial X-Ray.

Post this Financial Health Check-up, we enrol our members with membership fee of 16545/ First Year and renewal fee of Rs 10,000/ per year followed by one on one counselling with Ffreedom Financial Planner >> Data Collection >> Financial plan writing & Approval >> Action Plan creation & Approval >> Action Plan execution >> Regular Review & Monthly reporting with Login Access to our portal for anytime access to reports >> Yearly Review and rebalancing resulting in Renewal of membership. All this is done within the aegis of Member Engagement & Member Success Team.

We do not do anything, but what I have just mentioned above i.e. we never do any transactions until we write a Financial Plan for our members. No transactions/No distribution. Our Core model is Partner Centric. We are already 100 plus partners all India and are looking for more Financial Planning oriented partners to whom we provide complete know how, Infrastructure, Compliance (now RIA compliance also), Technology and knowledge to become successful Financial Planners.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

As part of this industry, I knew that the only way this industry can and will grow is through Good Quality Financial Advice, which is client centric and not Financial Manufacturer centric and for this to happen, Indian clients have to pay for advice.

With this insight - we started Ffreedom in 2008/9 and we are following the same model, developing and growing and our belief that Indian Clients are keen and open to pay is proving right day by day. Even the latest regulation of SEBI on Registered Investment Advisor is the step in this direction. We are very excited and want to register ourselves with SEBI.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

We all at Team Ffreedom, feel that our direction is right and our distance will come over time. With that intent, as a team we are focussed on our Member Success.

1. We are continuously developing and investing in our Proprietary Technology Platform **“Advisor Factory”** . Our vision is to make it 360 degrees platform with focus on Members , Partners and Core Ffreedom workings.
2. We are currently scouting for expanding into other geographies. We just opened Chennai and are looking to open in Bangalore and Kolkata soon.
3. We are constantly working on improving member engagement and focus on Goal accomplishment for them this means new process’s being developed regularly.
4. Partner Financial Planners constant skill enhancements through workshops and personal engagements.
5. Knowledge enhancement of Team on regular basis with Member centricity in mind.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

We feel nothing is Impossible. Everything is in MIND, if one is clear about his WHY of Life and PURPOSE than its great fun and enjoyment. We follow this philosophy @Ffreedom and are enjoying every bit of what we do. As a result we are constantly improving on our model. So our message is simple - if your Why is client centricity that Fee based Financial Planning is Fun and full of contentment.

Recent Registered Advisor Guidelines by SEBI will make Fee Based Financial Planning more recognised and acceptable to individual investor but at same time will increase compliance/paperwork and funding requirement of this business model . We feel this is good that over time, only serious players will enter this business and those are not qualified or opportunistic will stay away this is very very good from client point of view.

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

- The First one : My own Financial Plan written by Gaurav Mashruwala addressed my uncertainty/Fear mental queries which were stopping me from plunging full time into this field . I owe this journey to Gaurav Mashruwala and will always see him as some who not

only influenced me, but also the whole Indian Financial Planning Industry in my view. He is the Father of Indian Financial Planning industry.

- Power of Technology : Very Early I understood that, If we have to fulfil our Vision of Profitable and Scalable Financial Planning oriented Model, we have to understand and Invest in Technology, which we continue even today. We are investing disproportionately in Technology.
- People are the most important ASSET of Freedom. Without them we are nothing. I have very high Gratitude and Humility towards all our Team members as our Industry is all about Human Trust.
- Last but not least, the latest SEBI guidelines on Registered Investment advisors is big turning point it will give our industry much required legitimacy and recognition, which it requires to reach masses of India and help them in Financial Freedom.

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

I will reiterate what I said earlier - it's not about Easy or Tough . It's about what you Want to Do with your LIFE. To me Human MIND is supreme. God lives within us . It empowers us to climb Mt Everest or Cross Seven Seas single headedly in sail boat. So if you are very Passionate about being a Financial Planner, then it's Fun and Fulfilling. But if you want to do this because you have a CFP and its Fashionable being Financial Planner, then it's almost next to impossible. Mahatma Gandhi defined Happiness as **"When what you think>> what you Say>> and what you Do is in SYNC, then you are Happy"**

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

- Its fulfilling. It gives you opportunity to give it back to Society.
- Huge Growth Potential.
- It's Kind of Conscious Capitalism. A true WIN WIN For all
- There is no retirement Age. In fact with age you will become better.
- It is the best entrepreneurship opportunity for anyone, who wants to be genuinely interested helping Indian Clients in achieving Financial Freedom.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor’s doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

TRUST is cornerstone of our profession. TRUST comes from 2 qualities

1. **Competence** : Which Means

- a. Capability
- b. Results given

2. **Character** : Which Means

- a. Intent
- b. Integrity

We at Ffreedom continuously keep evaluating all of us on these parameters. In fact, our Hiring Motto is “Hire for Attitude, Train for Skill”. Last but not least, one cannot prepare for being Trust worthy. It’s in your Character, which is fundamental for our profession.

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

We are big believer of Process. Infact our Success Mantra is PPT i.e. People>>Process>>Technology. We have well defined Process for Client Acquisition which is

Art of Financial Ffreedom Seminars >> Financial X Ray >> Complimentary Financial Health Check-up and Report >> Minimum 5 meetings/Calls with prospects (Our experience is, 60% of the time financial advisors stop after 3rd call and 70 % conversion happens post 3rd call).

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

PPT i.e. People -> Process -> Technology is the way for us to serve our clients we give them enhanced personnel attention with continuous assurance. Technology is very important tool for

servicing our clients and referrals are the by-product of good work you do. You can't have referral strategy without the content and with right content referrals are auto.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

I have already answered. It's not hard/tough or simple. It's about what you as Financial Advisor WANT and what is your WHY?? The Nitty Gritty of Money making is in Client engagement and continuity. It has to be WIN WIN for you to make Money

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

Technology is not a choice. It's must for our business and the most basic requirement is to improve your (TQ) Technology Quotient and that can be done through Reading and using Technology. As Financial Planner you should not delegate this function to someone else.

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

There is no single tool or software which does all. We have adopted a "Build your own Platform" strategy as per our need. It's definitely expensive in short term, but over long term its scalable and flexible. Remember one thing - Technology is ever evolving and changing. What we are doing today will be redundant tomorrow. Be comfortable with this and you will enjoy Technology a lot.

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

Key to Success in this Profession is Clarity of your Thought Process in your MIND.

One Needs to Know WHY>> HOW>> WHAT of his life before he jumps on to this profession. Many times youngsters do CFP without knowing WHY are they doing it and then they try to become Financial Planners without knowing WHY. Many a Times I meet qualified CFP;s who want to sit in office and write Financial Plan and not do Client engagement. This is what I Mean by not clear about their WHY.

Q15 - How important it is for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

In the new Regime it will be impossible for New Planner to start on their own . They should start by joining Financial Planning Platforms Like Ffreedom and gain experience and then Decide

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

All my Reading is Thru Twitter. I am very active on Twitter and that connects me to Global Knowledge sources. Other than that my Favourite personal finance author is NICK MURRAY

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

Qualifications are must from SEBI Registration point of view, hence they are important.

Knowledge is good starting point but application of knowledge is key for success. So my message is get right level of certification and associate with Platform/organisation to set up your practise.

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

I will love to see/design a program which is covering both theory as well as practical side of this business with emphasis on client engagement skills.

**Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession?
What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?**

Future of Financial Planning is very bright in India as our country's GDP grows the wealth in hand of Indians will grow and they will need Financial Planners to help them manage it. In fact this is going to be the one the most promising opportunity for budding entrepreneurs to make it big in short amount of time. There is huge demand for good quality Financial Advisor and very less supply.

Q20 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'.....

"This is Just the Beginning Best is Yet to Come"

“Follow up! Follow up!
Follow up! this is the
key to building
relationships with
others”

- Joy Weaver



Lovaii Navlakhi

International Money Matters , Bangalore

Family

Wife, and two children, a daughter & son

About your business and team

In the business of fee based (since 2003) financial planning cum investment advisory services for individual clients since 2001. Major Accomplishments/ Known for - Being in the first convocation batch that was awarded the CFP certificant qualification in India; Starting fee based financial advisory services in Oct 2003; actively promoting financial literacy through the media (financial plans in Outlook Money); recently, Institutional financial planner winner of the 1st Money Today FPCIL Awards.

Personal Interest

Continuously learning (believe strongly that “Learning Never Stops”), mentoring people (head a team of 35+ today; believe that people have greater potential than they credit themselves with), teaching/ training/ talking/ debating; travelling around the world.

Into the Business of personal finance since

1998; started “Money Matters” in 2001, and converted it to a private limited co (International Money Matters) in 2005.

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

I did some sort of financial plan for myself when I was 38, and wished someone had told me what to do when I was 28. The core of our business is based on ensuring that our client is an informed client, that he understands what his money is doing, what are the risks he is taking.

We are in the business of helping our clients (individuals) meet their financial goals. We need to get details of our clients' income and expenses (and hence savings), their assets and liabilities; and most importantly, what their goals are. We then apply scenarios with variables such as inflation rate, returns to ensure that risks are protected and goals met. Along the way, we continuously track how we are progressing towards the goals and if acceleration/ deceleration is required.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

By chance! After my MBA from S P Jain Institute, I worked for 18 years in different corporate across Mumbai and Bangalore, in the field of Finance. The initial 13-14 years were in field of Corporate Finance, and it is in the last 4 years that I was exposed to personal finance. My last job was with a dotcom, where I was heading personal finance and helping a few of my colleagues with their mutual fund investments. When I left in November 2001, I scouted for employment options right away, but I was fortunate that the job market was dead – just after 9/11 and the dotcom crash. I did get a job offer from a private bank to set up and head personal finance in India, but that was 5 weeks later; and a bit too late for me to change my mind – as I was thoroughly enjoying my investment advisory role with my ex-colleagues and friends.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

Today, I have a team of over 35 across 3 locations in India, managing assets of over Rs. 350 crore from nearly 400 fee paying families, including non-residents. My key role is now to open doors for new clients, mentor the team, focus on strategy/ new possibilities of business and be the external face of the organisation. I feel privileged to be playing a pioneering role in developing the financial planning profession in India.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

There has to be an inner passion and interest to change the lives of individuals. You need to be prepared for the long haul, as relationships take time to be nurtured, mature and grow. There are many knocks that you will take on the way, and many times, you may believe that you are being used and abused. Your proposition and offering needs to be distinct, and you should be able to say no to business that does not fit into your scheme of things.

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

My initial set of clients asked me as early as in year 1 that I should be charging them some additional fees for the work I was doing – monitoring the portfolio, helping in tax reports on gains, etc. It took time building my confidence, and about 6-8 months of personal market research among my clients to determine what fee structure would work. So, the first turning point was charging fees from October 2003.

The second obvious one was in 2004 when I enrolled for and completed the Certified Financial Planner course. Being in the first convocation of 25 others gave me a standing that I would not have imagined.

The third but possibly the most important was the decision to build a team – provide them a learning environment, and allow them to explore and expand their own limits. This has been the single largest driver to allow me to grow and pursue my personal dreams vicariously. Hats off to my team!

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

Not really sure. It may be true that there are planners whose paths they may follow; and that the awareness of financial planning is growing. So it may be easier for the new entrant to understand the scope and potential of the business. But if the passion and hard work is missing, success cannot be taken for granted.

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

Oh, without doubt, the thrill that you can change people's lives.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor's doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

There are black sheep in every profession, but that does not make everyone black. We have to establish how we are different. I am often asked how I may be different from other distributors. The questioner expects me to cite returns, or service; but my simple answer is that we are honest.

I do not have a standard sales script but I do know what I need to convey to my prospect. I like to take my time to listen to my prospect, have a conversation, answer questions, ask questions; and during the course of this chat, ensure that I convey what I need to.

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

Most of our clients are got through referrals; many other are a result of our presence in the media. Once we get a lead, we seek a personal appointment to meet or talk to explain our process. The most important thing is to give time to the prospect and answer all questions in an unhurried manner, and being as honest as possible. We prefer to meet clients at their work place, their home and our work place before we sign them on (so two or three meetings are quite often the norm). What I have discovered along the way is that de-selling sells!

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

The strongest source of business is referrals, but you need to ask for them. There are certain minimum service levels that we follow, like a personal meeting with a client every quarter and a communication every month. Taking care of client portfolios is not enough – they need to know that too; and that's where communication helps.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

You do not get into this profession to make money: you are here because you want your clients to make money and sleep well at night. Money will follow. There has to be a strong belief within you of the good that you are here to do. Clients must appreciate and be able to evaluate the benefits that you will provide – your competence and honesty, and the systems you follow (service) will do the convincing. Once this is established, you must tell your client that the only way he can continue to get this quality advice is if you survive first – and thereby convince him to pay your fees.

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

It really depends on the segment that the advisor is focussing on. Do the clients use technology? Are they comfortable online? So far, I have not got clients using social media; but I am sure the image that it creates can only help.

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

As a first step, the new planner/ advisor must do the calculations in as manual a manner as is feasible. That allows him to understand the workings in detail; after that examining the technology that makes your work simpler will definitely help. The basic requirement will be to have more than just a working knowledge of Excel.

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

What is the real purpose behind the advisor's entry into the practice? If the reason is money, or success, it may not bring enough money or success in the long run. How do you define success? Is it

targeted in the long run or in the short term? Defining success correctly would be the #1 key to success.

Q15 - How important it is for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

Apart from certification and qualification, some amount of practical experience may be essential. It would be ideal if the new planner was able to shadow an experienced financial planner. The new CFP program has an option of a 12 month internship in lieu of a three year work experience to try and bridge this gap.

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

Personally, I do a fair amount of reading online. The biggest learning's for me come from my practice – meeting different clients in different circumstances; and the next from conferences. It is very important to attend such events with an open mind and with a quest to learn. Practice oriented conferences will be best. If possible, do make it a point to attend the international FPA Experience which is held annually in the USA. The biggest success in this profession comes from the ability to converse with your clients. Hence, picking up areas of their interest and reading about them definitely helps in deepening the relationship.

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

Theoretical knowledge alone can never be enough; experience is the best teacher. Without certification (and continuing education) though, practice alone will also not be sufficient.

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

We should teach honesty in the course. We should teach planners how to let go clients and business (which does not fit their profile). We should teach them to focus on the long term.

**Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession?
What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?**

The future is extremely bright. There is greater wealth in India; there are lesser tax benefits. Awareness and the need for financial planning is increasing. Complexity of products and access to global options exist. Life expectancy is rising. Each planner can pick a niche area that they wish to capitalise on, say retirement planning, or planning for single parents, etc. and develop the market. True asset allocation could be one key area new planners can focus on.

Q20 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'.....

I will share what I believe in: Don't get the client first; get him last. That way you get him to last. Do not ignore client retention while targeting client acquisition – getting a new client costs manifold the cost of retaining one. Be in the profession; believe in it as not just a career but a way of life. I do wish you all success.

“When I train entrepreneurs, I tell them that good selling means asking questions and listening to the customer. I tell them, “If you talk for more than one-third of the discussion, then you are selling badly”

- Neil Rackham



Brijesh Dalmia

Dalmia Advisory Services Pvt. Ltd , Kolkata

Family

Wife Alka & 2 Kids – Ayushman 13 years and Swarnima 8 years.

About your business and team

I run a boutique financial services and wealth management services company named 'Dalmia Advisory Services Pvt. Ltd.' There are seven back office employees who take care of entire operations and client servicing.

I was one of the early CFP's (2005) who started fee based practice. Among the top advisors in the country in terms of Assets under Management. Coach to several financial advisors across the country..

Personal Interest

Reading, Surfing, Hollywood movies.

Into the Business of personal finance since

Year 2000

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

Indian's are making a lot of money these days but they are not aware how to save and where to invest. Financial planning is something they can't ignore for long and as such there exists a huge potential for planners.

I offer financial planning, goal based planning and wealth management services to my clients. I am also doing meaningful training programs across the country for advisors and educating them on various facets of investment and financial planning. Till date I have done over 300 programs for financial advisors where more than 10,000 advisors have participated.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

I started my career from Patna, selling bonds and public issues in early nineties. Later on, when equity markets went bad, I used to sell company fixed deposits. I shifted to Kolkata in year 2000 and started my advisory business. Things have been good thereafter.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

As things stand today, business is settled. I work with limited clients and focus on providing complete solutions to their investments, financial planning and wealth management requirements. My team is quite capable of handling complete operations and my job is just to meet clients, review their portfolios and advise them.

We are also the Education Provider of CFPCM Certification Program in India under my sister concern 'Mandar Learning Academy Pvt. Ltd.' Our books for CFPCM course are among the best sought books in the country today. This profession has given me a lot of time to pursue my other goals like reading, surfing, social service activities (I am an active member of Round Table India and currently the Chairman of my Chapter # 34 in Kolkata), etc.

Apart from this, I am trainer/coach on Life, Leadership, personal growth and business development. I have till date addressed over 20,000 people through my programs across the country.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

Nothing is easy. But it is not difficult either. The only concern is that financial planners today are in a hurry to set up their practice. In the initial years it is definitely demanding, as one has to find new clients, educate them on the need of financial planning, and learn new skills every day, deal with different client psychology and above all – manage their own cash flows of business and personal life.

Most of the clients start small and with time they grow. As such, another challenge for planners is to justify time and resources allocated to acquiring new clients and service them. However, all this is a process underwent by all leading planners today.

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

- ✓ Shifting to Kolkata from Patna in year 2000 – It increased my horizon and vision.
- ✓ Completing my CFPCM certification in year 2005 – It improved my advisory process.
- ✓ The habit of reading – I started reading a lot (industry stuffs as well as self-help books) after relocating to Kolkata. This helped me immensely in shaping my business as it is today.

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

The primary reason is more awareness among public these days about personal finance and security in life. Media has also done its part to promote financial planning. Add to that increasing number of advisors talking to their clients about it.

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

The scope is immense. Personal relationship and disciplined planning ensures higher degree of loyalty among client-planner relationship. Over the years client grow and their portfolio keeps on growing, whereas the time spent by the advisor do not go up proportionately. This allows planners

to handle more clients, more volumes which ultimately results in higher revenues. Since there is no active management involved, the planner gets a lot of free time which is not available in many other profession.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor’s doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

The initial days were tough as the awareness was low and clients were apprehensive. However, the mantra was to meet more and more prospects and get talking. The law of average works and you get some clients irrespective of market perception. Then you do a good job for your clients who become your ambassadors. They refer you more clients which makes a planner’s job easier to convert them as client.

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

There were two stages for this – initial years and currently.

Initially, I used the strategy of ‘target marketing’ with members of several club members in my city. One of the things I clearly remember is that I never started a meeting with a product pitch. I talked about my services, how they can benefit with my services and enquired what they were looking for. It worked. Regular mailers / emails / follow-ups for months and years also helped in converting many clients later on. Generally, I have seen planners not pursuing older prospects regularly. A Contact once made is far fruitful than a newer contact.

Currently, the pitch remains the same. The only difference is that each new addition is a referred client which makes my job much easier since there is already a recommendation attached with my name.

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

There is only one way to grow – reference. I make it a point to ask for reference after each and every of my client meetings. It has yielded good results and I would recommend the same to budding planners. I also send target reference mailers to my existing clients to generate more referrals.

Over the years I have developed an excellent client relationship management tool in excel which helps me keep control of my practice. Each client is graded as per loyalty, vintage, profitability, volumes, etc. and a final grade is given. Although we serve all clients to the best of our ability, we give priority to our top clients.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

Understanding the psychology of the client and complimenting it with other aspects of his financial plan is the hardest part. With experience it becomes easier over a period of time.

Asking a fee is not difficult if the planner himself feels he is providing value for money.

There is only two way of making money in this profession – fee and commissions. If a planner is able to earn a gross revenue of 0.75% - 1.00% of the assets managed by him, it should be good enough. This can be from commissions alone or a combination of commission & fee. Anything beyond this may not be sustainable over long term as well as with increasing AUM's. The current environment in India allows planners to earn a decent income by distribution of products. It is not necessary to charge a fee as a compulsion. However, to safeguard from future regulatory changes and increase revenues, fee may be charged.

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

Technology plays a vital role. A robust portfolio software and CRM software is required to be successful in this profession. Online presence may not be a must for planners having select client model. However, if the advisor is dealing with retail and NRI clients, online presence is a must.

I have not focussed on social media for client acquisition. For me, reference from existing clients remains the only tool for adding new clients and I am quite happy with the results.

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

In India, there is no single software which stands out as complete in the area of financial planning. As such it's an individual choice of using the software after analysing the pros and cons of each software. I use a combination of 2-3 software's to provide reports to my clients. For day to day management, having tried several tools, I zeroed in on Excel. I extensively use excel for managing my clients. It's the cheapest and best software in the world.

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

Most financial planner think that writing a comprehensive financial plan is the only way and the right way to start practice and grow. They are quite rigid about it. In my opinion, while a written plan is good, it may not be always correct to start with writing a comprehensive plan. Sometime a client needs time to understand what financial planning is all about. Starting with some simple investments or goal based planning may set the tone for comprehensive financial planning.

In my opinion providing solutions to clients is the # key to success even if it does not require writing a comprehensive plan. It is hand holding which is required more than anything else. It will automatically pave the way for long term planning and plan writing.

Q15 - How important it is for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

Financial planner are in a hurry to set up their practice. It doesn't work that way. It takes time. At least 2-3 years. Most planners think that getting certified in financial planning is all that is required to set up a practice. Most of them do not have any first-hand experience in writing a plan or dealing with a client. Doing an internship with an established planner may be a good way to gain that

experience to set up own practice. CFP program does give sufficient knowledge but practical insights are also required to become a successful planner.

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

I read a lot of self help books, biographies and magazines including Forbes India, Entrepreneur, and Readers Digest etc. I would give more weightage to meeting peers in the industry and sharing views than just reading. Rather than suggesting what to read, I would simply suggest anyone to read for 1-2 hours a day. They will find their way to good reading which will help them in their personal and professional life.

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

Certification is extremely important as it endorses professional capability. But it is not the end of all. Most of the programs in India today deals with theoretical aspect only. There is nothing I have come across which teaches practical learning's.

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

As I said, there is enough of theoretical programs in India. I would stress upon a program which deals with practicality and real life situations. Relationship management and personal coaching programs by established players in the market place will do a lot of good to budding financial planners.

**Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession?
What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?**

The future is very encouraging. Having just 100 families as a client for 15-20 years can be quite rewarding for a financial planner. The assets under management will keep growing which will take care of the revenues. Just a piece of advice – in order to grow with the client, the revenue of the advisor should be linked to the assets under management in one way or the other.

Q20 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'.....

Put clients interest first, be an expert, read every day, meet a lot of people, think long term, be in touch with clients regularly, employ people for back office and best of all – Keep it simple. All the best.

“Your clients know colleagues,
friends, and their customers
who will benefit from knowing
you...”

Asking for referrals, in all its
forms, serves your clients by
helping them help others.”

- Bill Gates



SURESH SADAGOPAN

Ladder7 Financial Advisors, Navi Mumbai

Family

Consists of my wife Yamini, who is a Senior IT Manager with Glaxo Smithkline Pharma. My son Anirudh is in Eleventh standard. My parents live in Mumbai too and shuttle between their home, my residence and my sister's residence at Baroda.

About your business and team

I have a team of four financial planners (who have all completed the Certified Financial Planners course)and three back office personnel & one person for accounts and other work. There are other people we retain for various work we outsource. Have been able to establish myself into comprehensive financial planning practice and have been able to sustain this practice for over eight years.

Personal Interest

Reading is my primary area of interest. I read books across the spectrum – fiction, self-help books, spirituality, management, non-fiction. Music is my other area of interest.

Into the Business of personal finance since

Into the business of personal finance since 2002. Came into financial planning practice in 2004.

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

We are focussed on Comprehensive financial planning services and we look for seriousness in this respect. We do not have any criteria regarding their AUM, earnings etc. to take them as clients. We tell people who come to us that they will for the first time know what they are worth & where all their investments are, whether their goals are feasible given their situation and what they need to do now to sort out their finances and their life itself. We educate them that what we offer them is a blueprint, which will give them clarity & peace of mind. After the exercise, lot of our clients breathe easy as they know where they stand & what they need to do from now on to reach where they need to go.

We commit three planners for every financial plan (one of them always involved will be me). The plan is created by a lead planner, who does a plan walkthrough at every stage. It is checked by a second planner and is validated by me. We interact with the clients a lot in this period and ensure that they understand what we have done for them. We also explain our recommendations and why we have suggested certain investments/ insurances and how it is relevant for them. Our planning cycle is about 45 days and at the end of it they get a pretty detailed plan that has taken into account every single detail that they have discussed with us.

When we are doing this, it is also a bit of education that we need to do for our clients. Some clients have wrong notions about investments, which we will have to dispel if they need to implement the plan we create. So there is that hand holding & education, that is part and parcel of our job. Also, some clients have highly anxiety levels and worry about every turn in the markets. We need to repeatedly engage with them and make them understand the long-term return potential of equities. Some have a major affinity towards property, Gold etc. and would want to make major allocations to these. We again need to moderate these tendencies and assist them in going ahead as planned.

We are fee-only planners. Many clients require assistance in implementation, which a trusted agency takes care.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

I started off with ICICI Pru as an Insurance Advisor in 2002. I wanted to do my business in a way that is different from the traditional high pressure sales approach. I wanted to follow the consultancy approach. ICICI Pru had come up with an excellent presenter and a good data sheet, which I used to the hilt. Then, I would prepare a small report for each client, based on my understanding of what would be useful to them. Of course, my horizon was limited to insurance and I suggested appropriate insurance plans, based on their needs and their cash flows.

With this approach, I was able to get extremely gratifying results. When the average conversion in insurance was 1 in 10, I was able to convert 4 in 10 on an average. I knew my process was right. That is why when I came across the CFP program in Dec 2003, I enrolled immediately for it.

Even before completing the certification, I launched into the practice in 2004. My first financial plan was delivered on 28/9/2004 for which I got paid a princely sum of Rs.1,750/-! I was more than happy about it as someone had trusted me to do a plan! After that I slowly started refining the plan and it became better, over time.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

The awareness about financial planning is much, much more today as compared to when I started off. So, life is a lot easier now. Also, since we have been in this space for a long time now, we are recognised for the work we do and get clients without too much effort. In my case, since I have been regularly writing in the media, there are those of them who come to us after reading some of what I write.

I have an excellent team of planners and back office support people who are able to assist clients and ensure excellent response times and good service standards. We now look forward to increasing the number of plans we do and would want to take the business forward.

We however want to only focus on fee-based financial planning. We also believe in servicing our clients from our office in Mumbai and use technology (which is available and easy to use today) to service clients, wherever they are.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

There are pluses and minuses. Since the awareness levels are high these days about financial planning due to good coverage in the media, aspiring financial planners would find it that much

more easy as people have at least heard of financial planning. If they have a good proposition, the prospect can be converted now with lower effort.

The other aspect is that there is a bit more competition now than before and prospective clients have more options. Some of them will feel this pressure at some points. But, the market is so vast that this is not such a serious problem. And it is not a problem in most cities and towns across India.

The only thing the planners need to understand is they have to be realistic about what they can charge and what kind of revenues they can generate at the start. If they charge Rs,25,000/- at the start, they may not be able to get clients. They should charge a fee which is commensurate with the level of their plan, which they are in a good position to evaluate for themselves.

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

The first is that I made the decision to be full time into financial planning in 2004. This decision looks scary to me now! Without knowing if it will work, I had plunged in. But, in retrospect, it was a good decision.

The second is recruiting planners early in my practice. I recruited planners in 2007 and it proved to be useful in my practice. Being a lone ranger has its advantages, but has its limitations as well. Having financial planners also helps in discussing the client cases from all angles and helps in bringing in a holistic approach to our financial plans.

The third is the shift we made from Fee+ commission to a fee model. I took this step as in my opinion this entailed raising the bar for myself as a planner. It was a difficult option as I was only charging a fee for the plan and allowed the client to go wherever they wanted for execution. This required a leap of faith as I was dependent on the commission income too. But this decision also panned out well.

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

I think the answer is Yes. There has been a lot of work done by media and those of us who write in creating awareness. This has prepared the ground and today many more people are aware about financial planning than in the past.

Also, there are far more people today who are willing to pay a fee as they are hard pressed for time and have good earnings. Many of the households are two income households. Lots of professionals do not mind paying a fee and slowly the mind-set of taking “free” advice is changing to a willingness to pay a fee for advice.

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

This is a profession which can positively impact every single individual. Everyone is trying to earn to achieve some of the goals they cherish. As financial planners, we have a sterling role to play in helping clients achieve good outcomes. When we are helping people do this, we will also get paid. It is hence something which is larger than just doing a MF investment or taking an insurance. Ensuring that the client’s life is financially secure gives great satisfaction than just the monetary rewards, which is anyway there. There is an altruistic angle in our profession, I would say, for those of us who want to truly help clients & live up to the high standards that the CFP Certification expects us to live up to.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor’s doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

I would say that this is the biggest challenge in our profession. Financial planner/ advisor is an abused term. Any one today can call themselves a financial planner/ advisor. That is about to change, somewhat. Lots of distributors have missold products or sometimes downright cheated clients by false promises/ fraud. This is a big problem as well as an opportunity.

It is a problem because they would automatically bracket you with the carpet baggers. But once you are able to do the long walk with them and are able to convince them that you have their interest at heart and you are trust-worthy, they will see you as a lighthouse in a sea of serpents. That clearly is the opportunity today and we should raise the bar and not worry too much about the nay sayers.

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

We are currently not using any specific sales technique and are depending entirely on existing clients to bring in new clients. The other path is inquiries based on my writings. These are keeping us busy at present. But, in future we may have to do a bit of prospecting.

However, for those inquiries which come to us, we do have a sales process. We talk to the clients initially to understand what they are seeking from us and explain in fair amount of detail as to what could we do for them and our process. Then we follow up with a detailed mail which would include a document about our service offerings, the steps we follow and the fees. Once the client shows interest, we walk them through a plan and offer references if they do want it. We offer to clarify any doubts they have. Then we keep them on the mailing list for some time. From time to time, we follow up to three times. After that we assume they may not be interested in our services, if they have not already converted into clients.

When the client wants to engage with us, we send across the information sheet and our bank details. When they send across our information sheet, we expect them to make our payment. After that we send a letter of engagement to formalise our relationship and the planning for the client starts.

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

In our case, it is client referrals and inquiries. This has been reasonably strong channel and has been able to sustain us all these years. To grow the client list, we would need to improve the conversion which hovers around 25-30%, which is low and have to start other sales efforts, if we have to grow.

We have clients across the country and service them over the net. The client walkthrough of the plan happens on the net and most clients have been pretty happy with this experience. We of course share this right in the beginning. Apart from this, we use telephony and emails for communicating with clients. Many clients also come to our office as they are comfortable interacting personally. We welcome them, though we are a bit reluctant to go and meet people outside office as it involves hours of travelling and lost time for us.

We use courier service extensively to send and receive documents from clients. We do not go to client's homes or offices to collect any document. Even this we explain to them right in the beginning. This has worked wonderfully well for us. We have found that setting the expectations right in the beginning works well and there are no complaints in future.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

The hard part of financial planning is not asking for fees... it is the boredom which sets in doing plan after plan , over time. Thinking about how we can improve the plan and the client experience and working towards it, makes the planning process more interesting as we are thinking of ways to improve the plan for the client's benefit. This takes away the boredom to an extent.

If convincing clients for fees is a challenge, one should see if one has a good value proposition and whether it is being communicated well across to the client. Then, one has to do a reality check of whether the fee is high for the services rendered. One needs to answer the question as to why a prospect should come to you at all – what is unique about you or your offering. One of the mistakes aspiring planners are making is setting the fees pretty high.

The other aspect may be regarding knowledge and trust. Knowledge is the currency in this business and one needs to be current & updated in our area of activity. Trust can be more challenging. If someone comes with a good reference, it is mostly taken care of. Else, one has to be able to communicate trust and build trust by consistent actions that display your strong intent to help them overtime.

For new aspiring planners, they could launch portions of the overall service in modules. Like there can be an insurance advice module, investment advice module etc. Goal based planning also offers scope for limited engagement and slowly building the client relationship and proceeding to a more holistic relationship in future. Many aspiring planners also have income coming from product distribution. That sustains them till the fee income builds up. With Investment Advisory regulation, that will get interrupted. One of the things one needs to keep constantly in mind is to keep overheads low at the start and add on expenses later when the income builds up. That will ensure sustainability in the initial vulnerable stages.

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

Technology is important for a financial planner. Beyond a certain level, software for handling client investments and reporting, CRM, Risk profiling, online Platforms, social media managers etc. will play an important role. Also, technology as an excellent enabler for voice communication as well as remote working & collaboration and should be used by planners.

Today social media presence is important. But one cannot expect direct dividends from social media in the sense that they may not give you a steady stream of clients. But, they may facilitate and assist in client acquisition over time.

Blogs have been used very effectively by some. It is important to however realise that it is very hard work. A good blog receives tonnes of comments and needs to be answered. Social media is a proxy for face to face interaction. Hence, if you do not respond to comments it is like ignoring someone who is talking to you. Tremendous patience & hard work and good content is required for this. But the rewards are fantastic for those who can pull it off.

We get clients who have seen us in social media. But, it is not the way we directly get clients. We see social media helping us to gain some visibility rather than as tool that gets us clients.

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

Those operating on a solo basis and who have established a decent practice will find a FP software and a CRM tool useful. Other tools for tracking client's portfolios and reporting on them, research & analysis tools to assist clients in getting better quality inputs will also help.

Emailing software and responders also help in assisting clients get information on time and helps the planners push marketing materials without much manual intervention.

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial

planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

The #1 reason is that people tend to think that if they have to be counted as financial planners they have to charge a high fee. This is flawed thinking and will result in pricing themselves out of the market.

Just like in every field, the newbies will have to peg themselves lower on the totem pole, focus on meeting and engaging clients, getting their inputs, augmenting their services and improving them, before increasing the fee. A gradual increase in fee commensurate with the level of service offered will ensure that the planner will be able to enter the business and slowly start charging higher for better services, overtime.

Q15 - How important it is for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

CFP program equips one with academic knowledge. Whether one can launch forth into practice immediately or first work under someone and then come into practice, is debatable.

Both these have their own advantages... In the former, it is like jumping into the pool and learning swimming. Though it is difficult to start with, the learning's gleaned the hard way may be very valuable when one builds the business. In this way, one may actually come with breakthrough innovations in their practice, as they are not coloured by what someone else is doing. I believe in this and firmly believe I have gained as I started my own practice right after the course and have built the business based on the experiences along the way.

Working with a planner and later on launching forth has it's attractions as well as one will already know how a financial planning practice is run. However, what works for one may not necessarily work for another. On the whole, this may be a safer route to take.

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

I believe in the power of knowledge. When engaging with clients, an excellent general knowledge helps in engaging them in an engaging and interesting conversation, which they could relate to. This immediately gives credibility and clients start relating better. I believe that an advisor should be well read across subjects, not just personal finance. That gives the advisor the imperceptible upper hand and the prospect has a good image of you to start with. I would recommend all aspiring advisors to read across the board. It helps build one's communication skills by augmenting one's vocabulary and powers of expression.

I read from the net. There are a whole lots of sites which have good content, which one can subscribe to. Sites like financial- planning.com has good articles. One should also read international sites like wall street journal, financial times etc. to get an international perspective. Some of the consultancy firms like McKinney have good content on diverse topics, which are interesting. Apart from this, there are a whole legion of Indian sites one could check out. Normally, I Google and go to the sites it throws up and not to some specified sites.

Programs and conferences which upgrade the skills of the planner in the professional or other related domains would be those one should attend. One should be willing to spend on oneself for the returns from this investment would give the best returns.

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

Any education program that is available today can take a person to some extent. It equips one academically. Even here, most try to take short-cuts. People go to tutors or education providers who "discuss" questions that would most probably be asked. That way they miss out on learning and focus on clearing the course. They would be at a serious disadvantage in real life and they cannot blame the course.

Certification however ensures a basic standard, however low it might be. Real world is different and the experience that one gets in the real life is what shapes the planner, more than what any course ever can. Those who take planning career seriously will be committed to learning continuously and upgrading themselves. These are the people who are going to come out on top in future. So, instead of blaming a course or certification, we need to see what we can do after the certification. The question to ask is – Are we committed to ourselves?

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

A course which covers all relevant topics a planner in real life is expected to face along with skills to design a financial plan is what would be desirable. A mandatory internship would help immensely. But, there are not too many practising financial planners who have experience, who can guide the mentees and that is a real problem today. In my opinion, more than any course, a mentorship/ internship program would help in creating good quality financial planners. Unfortunately, most people who complete CFP Certification are looking for a “job” rather than honing their skills further before searching for a “job”.

Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession? What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?

The financial planning profession will do well. The pace of regulation is blinding today, which is bound to have collateral damage in the short-term. It will get worse before it gets better. The regulations are driving out distributors away from the financial services space and there would be a vacuum left behind. All those clients who now need any kind of advice will have to turn to the financial advisors/ planners. Hence, the future is indeed bright.

The new planners should focus on knowledge, understanding clients better, engaging with them and ensuring good outcomes for them. When clients see that a planner is really committed to them, they automatically become willing to pay. The new planners should be involved in educating the public about the merits of quality advice. It will benefit them in the long-term. They should invest in themselves and be willing to experiment.

Q20 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'.....

Set up your practice. It may be difficult in the short-term. The opportunities in the long-term are very good indeed. The really committed ones will do well. Keep an open mind to try out new ideas. Be on the side of the clients. You will have ensured your glorious future in this profession, by doing all these.

“How can you have
charisma? Be more
concerned about
making others feel
good about themselves
than you are making
them feel good about
you”

- Dan Reiland



Dilshad Billimoria

Dilzer Consultants , Bangalore

Family

Husband Kaiwan, Myself, Sheroy nine years, and Danesh 3 years

About your business and team

All Woman's team of four back office operation girls and one office boy. I am an independent Certified Financial Planner CFP^{CM} based in Bangalore, India and provide Professional Investment Advisory and Financial Planning Services and offer services to execute the plan to Resident Individuals, Corporates and Non Resident Individuals. Our Investment Advisor services is in the area of Mutual Funds, Risk Management, Investment Planning, Wealth Management Tax & Estate Planning and Retirement Planning.

Rated among top 0.1% by Million Dollar Round Table - Top of the Table which comprise of group of dedicated investment professionals worldwide. Groups and associations - FPSB, AMFI, IRDA, LUTCF, Zoroastrian Anjuman Association.

Personal Interest

I am an exercise freak. I do long distance running.. I have been training for the half marathon and will run the Mumbai 21KM in Jan 2013! . I attend dancing classes for salsa, jive on Saturdays. Complete revelation! . I like singing to myself ☺ . I Like reading books on personal finance, investment advisory and my learning never stops from the industry stalwarts.

Into the Business of personal finance since

I was in the mutual fund and insurance business since July 2001, and did half-hearted financial planning, for clients, without putting numbers correctly in place. I became a CFP since 2008 and have been practising financial planning since then in a detailed and comprehensive manner.

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

Out Services include...

1. Financial Plan construction process
2. Service Execution process and delivery for AUM clients.
3. Services execution and delivery for NRI clients.
4. Financial Plan annual goal review and coverage and why review is so important.
5. Investment execution process.
6. Service delivery schedule showing the frequency and type of services provided throughout the year.
7. Newsletters on market conditions and how they would impact the client portfolios.
8. Policy decisions and how they would impact portfolios.
9. Hedging against market volatility.
10. Asset Allocation
11. KYC updation
12. Capital Gains reports
13. Transmission of Assets.
14. Feedback

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

I was keen to pursue a career in hotel management but my father spotted my knack for numbers. He encouraged me to get into finance and I agreed. I attribute my success to my father's timely advice. After graduation, I earned a Bachelor's in Business Management majoring in Finance. I began my career in 1998 with a large distribution firm for a brief stint of 1.5 years. I was always keen on setting up my own advisory firm and so I floated Dilzer Consultants in 2001.

Starting with insurance and mutual fund advisory, I became a CFP to offer full-fledged financial solutions. Many of my clients whom I was catering to at the large distribution firm continued to take advice from me. Newsletters and referrals helped me grow the client base further. Referrals came to me without any solicitation. "My client base has been consistent from 12 years and gets new clients mainly through references. Though my clients are spread all over India, a majority of them are in Bangalore. I have a few NRI clients too in Dubai and US," says Dilshad.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

Today we are well settled, with 120 fee based clients on AUM basis. Our main objective is client retention and not so much client acquisition. Having said that our strike rate for new client acquisition has been about 23%. We focus on Service as top priority and ensure turnaround times of 24 hours are maintained on all services requests. We follow up with the client on satisfaction of service rendered and ensure there is no dissatisfaction.

We follow a fixed process driven service to our clients, so all employees are in sync with what needs to be done every month as per our service delivery schedule. Our client disengagement rate is 1.20% only. We follow up with a client disengagement letter requesting for reasons of disengagement and remedy action if the same can be taken.

We follow an in-depth employee review in March every year and discuss various parameters of employee performance, future prospects, growth in our organisation and how they can contribute their ideas towards overall organisation growth and performance.

Our challenges

- Requirement of good CRM technology to apprise with new SEBI guidelines on advisor regulations and deliver more focussed and tailor made advisory services which can be tracked and recorded for future use.
- Our focus is to increase the number of annual reviews conducted by for our clients.
- Increasing our space in WILL Creation for clients.
- Increasing Employees in our organisation without compromising on quality and ensure they maintain the company philosophy and Mission Statement.
- Identifying CFPs that will work with us for years.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

Each case of client interaction, each financial plan, each review, analysis is different and needs to be tailor made. Therefore, we don't believe in Financial Plan software's to fix this.

Client Interaction and Engagement is the key to success in creating lifelong relationships. Keep in touch with their lives and help them in related decisions. That way, they will always remember and come back to you in the future.

Honesty is the best policy: We stress on the fact that our recommendations are on the basis of what we would have done for ourselves if we were in the similar situation of the client.

Be confident of your business model and stick by it. We have many clients who want to twist and turn us to change to their needs, of course we do, if we think, it would help them, but if we are not satisfied with that, we simply ask to leave the client and discontinue relationship.

Continuous Learning/ Up gradation: If you cannot accept change, it will take the better of you and somewhere along the way you will lose the benefit of growth, since change is imperative to growth. Constantly upgrade your skills, your organisation technology, your thinking, your practise, your approach and your employees.

Reading: Reading can help the most in understanding human relationships. Financial Plans are more than just numbers. Understand the behaviour and the reasons for underlying decisions made by clients. This will help in suggesting what best suits their needs. Read positive and engaging books about your industry and about life.

Exercise and Pranayam: Exercising not only helps in creating positive endorphins but provides a sustained metabolism throughout the day for you to maintain energy levels and be fresh in mind body and spirit

Create A Business Strategy and evaluate it on a regular basis, just as you review your client's finances and lives.

Follow the 80: 20 rule. Focus on 80% of your business from the top 20 clients. This would help in working with the clients you want and provide for satisfaction of work done.

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

First turning point was around 2006-07 when I realised I was winning all awards and still not happy. This was the time, when I was "selling" Insurance without understanding the meaning of it☺!

Second, most beneficial turning point is realising I needed some professional course to take on track for helping my clients realise their dreams by showing them exactly where they were today and where they wanted to go and “HOW” we could help them achieve that.

Third turning point, which brought more focus on our business model and helped us help our clients better, was abolishing of entry loads which made us sit and create a business model that was sustainable and mutually beneficial to the client and us. This saw some unhappiness and why's , what, what ifs among our clients initially for about 6-8 months, post that, there was no hesitation and now we follow a semi-annual billing cycle.

I have learnt if you learn not to sell, you will make a sale somehow, because the client knows you are working in its best interest and return of gratitude will automatically follow.

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

Yes and No!

Yes because, there are more tools, techniques, more proven methods, more information and more people like us talking☺

NO: Many clients are not only looking for CFPs, but persons who will work in their best interest, someone that they can trust and because people have been mis sold in the past they are more sceptical now and therefore, will ask you a volley of questions before they get that comfort factor and TRUST from you.

Believe me, you can fake trust once or twice but never for a long term relationship. That is the true test of your ability and your life long relationship begins then!

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

Meeting so many different kinds of people, lends different perspective, challenges, and sometimes even makes me laugh at the kind of people there are on this earth☺.

Some are confused, some think they are clear but are not, they know it all, want you to execute and dictate. The lazy want you to add that little push, some come to just talk to us about life and their problems and business translates after months. In behavioural finance there will be a jargon for each of these personality types, but unless you practice, encounter clients and gain experience by learning, you will not learn how to handle any type.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor’s doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

Clients are well researched today on what they are looking for in a financial planner. Right from the Welcome letter, to the engagement letter, I had one client pointing out what I missed and what I must include. Some suggestions were very good and we implemented the same, some did not make sense, so we left them. The point is, today’s client is more informed and unless the person can see through you and that takes minutes, they will not engage with you. Therefore, it is imperative what your personality type is which translates to your relationship with them.

One client asked us, if I give you all this information, will there be insurance companies haunting me? I told her, we mention this confidentiality clause in our engagement letter and even say it in our interaction with the client often.

Once you are confident of yourself and your objective to help clients, TRUST and client acquisition automatically flows..

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

We do not concentrate on Sales acquisition very much. We try to update our website often, so that especially in Bangalore SW engineers searching come across relevant information with good content. That is the starting point of interest and point of contact between clients and us.

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

We try to bring our useful content through our blogs to heighten interest in financial planning among our clients.

Sites, like Jago investor, (excellent work!) create more awareness among clients and show non bias of attitude to client queries.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

Like I said earlier, Create a Business Model and Stick by it. If you are good, people will realise your worth and automatically flock to you. Remember to always be honest and understanding to continue to enjoy client TRUST.

We had clients, who were selling one property and buying the other who wanted our help. Confused? Yes. They need a real estate broker not a financial planner!. We had a client who wanted to sell his mutual funds to buy a home. Confused? Yes! He needed a Distributor, not a planner!. Understand and demonstrate your value proposition upfront!

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

Technology plays a very important role in managing what you have built for your client over the years. That's why you need a Software to track the instruments you have recommended. A SW to track the conversations and advice you have given, a SW to help you in your analysis of investment products..

I would be delighted to see a SW incorporate all this and more. I will seriously look into it!. Social media is important is you can keep up with the myriad work to be done on it. But yes, to showcase your clients your work, it needs to be done regularly. LinkedIn, Twitter helps..

13 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

More than the certification, it is the attitude! Most financial planners complete their CFP and think they will have clients knocking on their door 😊 . And seriously ask, I did the certification, now why aren't the clients coming?

Well, you have to put the effort, you have to market, you have to plan, you have to execute, you have to monitor, you have to review and you have to get new clients 😊 at least initially 😊 Certification helps, but experience, training and field work is the best certification and learning process for you to implement your strategies.

Q14 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

Books are many

1. Lighting the torch - by G. Kinder & S. Galvan
2. The seven stages of money maturity - by G. Kinder
3. Questions Great Financial Advisors Ask. . . And Investors Need To Know
4. "Deena Katz on Practice Management: For Financial Advisers, Planners, and Wealth Managers"

The last 2 are my favourite and I have learnt a lot from them!

FPSB journal, listening to great planners at Network FP is another way to grow your business. Attending seminars on related topics provides for new introspection and perspective. Yes, you need to be a LISTNER and a good one and you need to be understanding.. That's why woman planners are said be more successful!:)

Q15 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

More focus on technology, behavioural finance will perk my ears for sure 😊!

Q16 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession? What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?

This professions is said to be the fifth most sought career in the world! .

The opportunities and growth are myriad and life lasting. One can never get bored in this profession 😊

Q17 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'.....

- Listen to your clients more than you talk. Often understanding a client's family history, approach to investing, approach to life reveals the answers and lays the foundation for the plan of action.
- Never be product centric. Understanding what the client needs not what he wants will go a long way in your relationship with your client. Be a part of his family's life's decisions and money decisions unconsciously.
- Say NO to clients who don't understand your value or what you do for them.
- Most of the time I'm thinking of what my client asked or what his concerns were or what is the immediate problem at hand and go back and address the issue with him / her to show them I care and that we both are working on a solution for this.
- Be goal oriented rather than transaction oriented. Lay the ground work that you as an advisor is in this for the long term and neither short term behaviour towards investing or making quick money is your cup of tea.
- There is never a one stop solution for meeting client's goals. Each client is unique and every action plan is tailor made. That's what makes this profession exciting! .
- Be honest. What you plan for your client today will need constant monitoring and no one likes nasty surprises especially if after what you have spoken and what the client really needs and ultimately gets are poles apart.
- Earn the trust of a prospect in a few seconds so that he becomes a client for a lifetime.

- Be open ,blunt and to the point in your advice. It might hurt initially but if the client understands what he can achieve and cannot and in what time frame, he can alter his priorities or you can alter your advice for the plan to be realistic and practical.
- Keep your clients focused on what is important for them Confront client's fears and emotions. It will help you plan your plan.
- Cut the jargon. Make it clear you have done your research and thus making recommendations or changes in his portfolio for his benefit. You need to reach a stage where your client accepts what you recommend because it is in his best interest after considering his goals. I have!
- What role risk plays and how the perception of risk changes is very important for different people and toward different situations. Understand the risk level and more important the risk tolerance for every client and communicate the equivalent reward or return expectation in advance.
- "Our USP has been 'deliver' more value than asked for, understand needs in detail, understand risk, provide for active portfolio management, engage with the client, share and imbibe trust, and walk through his/her goals as if they were yours!.

Thanks Manish and Nandish very much for helping me get an in-depth insight in my business and work on my challenges!

“People Hate to be
Sold, But they Love
to Buy”

- Jeffrey Gitomer



Vishal Dhawan

Plan Ahead Wealth Advisors, Mumbai

Family

Blessed to have a wife who is even more passionate than me about financial planning - Shalini, a balance sheet that is tallied with one son (Dhruv who is 9) and one daughter (Khushi who is 6), both of whom are still learning how to manage money for themselves, and parents without whose support during the initial years of my practice, things would have been so much harder.

About your business and team

About your business and team: Plan Ahead now enters into its tenth year of practice, and has grown consistently over the years. Over the years, we have significantly sharpened the focus in our practice. Whilst some of the founding team is still with us, some have moved on in life. Each of them has contributed immensely to where we are today. A big thanks to all of them, wherever they may be today.

We want to be known for creating a globally recognised institution that has successfully added meaning to their finances by integrating life goals with money. Hope to add to this on completion of 25 years of our practice.

Personal Interest

Team sports. Trying to understand how to apply the coaching and leader models of team sports in a financial planning practice. Particularly fascinated by the fact that in most team sports, coaches do not play the sport themselves any more, they only coach.

Into the Business of personal finance since

2003 as a financial planner, 1997 as a banker, 2008 as a leader.

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

We have tried to focus our practice on adding time to client's lives or adding meaning to their finances. If we are unable to add value through either of these propositions, we have found that our relationship with clients does not achieve the desired depth and we are constantly being questioned on the value that we add. Our services cover fee based financial planning and wealth management, with execution services available through our execution arm as well. Our personal finance education initiatives thus far have been driven through sharing our thoughts in mainstream print and television, and also through educating clients constantly on the thorns on the path to financial freedom.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

The planting of the seed to set up a financial planning practice happened whilst working as a product manager in a foreign bank. The sales process with products at the centre of the universe seemed to be contrary to my belief that the client needs to be the centre of the universe, especially with a three year experience in the hospitality business that I had earlier. In addition, the short term focus on client relationships scared me. So what if India has a population of 1 billion and growing. Our company name took many iterations over MSN Messenger, which was the most popular mode of communication at that point, with Shalini and me both serving out our notice periods in our respective jobs, though she was in Mumbai and I was in Delhi.

Plan Ahead seemed to be an ideal brand for a financial planning practice, and continues to be our brand though our original logo got replaced fairly quickly. Infrastructure was definitely not the focus – a brand new laptop, an old dining table, a computer chair in an office in a dilapidated residential building was our version of a garage start-up. Potential clients were a prized commodity and optimism a big virtue during this phase.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

Whilst we are still called Plan Ahead and clients are still a prized commodity, we have upgraded our offices (we have two in the physical world and probably many more through the internet), infrastructure and our thought processes around financial planning and wealth management, though the optimism continues as is. We don't work Sundays any more, and still get up on Monday mornings raring to go.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

From all of our experience, we have found that working with individual investors is actually the easiest, as your solution can be customised to the need of just one individual or his family. In environments with multiple decision makers, everyone believes that he is compromising with the solution provided, making it that much more challenging.

This can be extremely demanding whilst you are in the early phase of a relationship .If the first two years of a marriage are called a honeymoon, wonder if the first two years of a client relationship should be called honeylemon – kuch khatta kuch meetha as it is a process of self-discovery for both the client and the planner. Once this phase is over, our experience has been that trust would have been established and a partnership for the longer term would have been established.

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

- ✓ Clients are willing to pay for advice, even in India. It's just about asking and how you ask. Clients are all the same – they do not differ because of their nationality, their incomes or their wealth. All they want is value for the money that they pay.
- ✓ Having full data for a financial plan may not always be possible, as trust is not an easy thing to build. Rather than having inaccurate data given to you by the client whilst he has not yet established the trust, you are better off building the trust through every interaction in the first 2 years so that he is willing to share true data and you can create a true financial plan, not just a financial plan to tick off as a thing done.
- ✓ There is much more to financial planning than the numbers, just like there is much more to life than money.
- ✓ Last but not the least, when I first interacted with financial planners at the FPA in 2011 with 30 years + of experience, I realised that we are only scratching the tip of the iceberg. Financial planning in India has a long way to go, and is probably one of the greatest opportunities available to build businesses over the next couple of decades. Ultimately, we will learn that cannot be everything to everyone, so we might as well figure out whom we can be everything to.

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

Yes, for two reasons. Firstly, people have lesser time today than they had nine years ago in their lives, so they more are likely to need external help. Secondly, from 2003 to 2007, everything that you bought made a lot of money, so financial planning, asset allocations, rebalancing seemed like esoteric concepts with no real world value. The last five years have thrown up the benefits of these processes significantly.

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

Firstly, you learn to think long term which I believe is crucial for every aspect of your life. As I think back over the years, I find that most things that were so critical when they happened don't seem to be so relevant when you look back at them after a period of time. Personal finance is one of the few professions that force you to think long term.

Secondly, it creates great conversations with people – imagine if I manufactured iron pipes and went to a party. I don't think anyone would want to discuss iron pipes with me. Conversations create new learning's, new learning's create new opportunities, new opportunities create new perspectives and new perspectives create great conversations. Thank god I'm in the business of personal finance.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor's doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

Creating trust can never be a standardised process, though I think two things work like magic.

- a. Focussing on the end use of the money for the investor, and focussing conversations around those uses, rather than around the business of financial planning and how we are different.
- b. Ability to have conversations on a wide range of topics, so that clients become comfortable before opening up.

We try to get information about the potential client through the internet and through the person referring us before we meet, so that we can have conversations that are more personalised.

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

A significant component of our prospective clients come through referrals, so we typically send out both an introduction to our firm before our first meeting, as well as a thank you note to the introducer. We then set up a no obligation 1 hour first meeting wherein we introduce our services. We then have a cooling off period for 72 hours, after which we follow up enabling both the client and us to decide whether we wish to go ahead with the engagement. If there is an agreement on both sides to move ahead, we send a client agreement including details on the services model and fee model chosen. This then leads to a data gathering process, risk profiling and the plan creation process.

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

Over a period of time, we have found that clients love to deal with services where commitments are kept. Our entire team works, basis a client categorisation strategy, to deliver to that commitment depending on the services model that has been chosen by the client. Clients have a service manager to handle servicing requirements, whereas advisory requirements are taken care of by the planner. In our experience, we have found that referrals come through sharing the thought with clients that you continue to grow your business, and assurances that confidentiality and commitment to the referring client will not reduce in the process as you have created adequate capacity to handle the increased volumes.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

The hardest part of financial planning as in any other part of our lives, is walking the talk. Executing what we plan. The best way in our view to do that is to break up execution into minor steps so that progress can be tracked at each stage and is also visible. Ultimately, like in any other business, you make money when you keep your commitments on everything that you have said and outdo your commitments on some of them. There is only one way you can make money in this profession and it

is not an different from any other profession – create value, build long term relationships and ask to be paid for it. This proposition is universal for all businesses and will probably always be the case.

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

Technology creates efficiency, efficiency creates time. In a business where our only inventory is time, technology can help us use time far more effectively, thereby enabling growth. With clients across the world today focussed on using the internet to compare products, evaluate providers and then buy either online or offline, it is crucial to have a positive online presence. Social media can be a great tool to use, though it can take away a lot from your inventory of time. Thus, you have to be clear about your target market and their usage of social media, before you invest that time. For example, domestic investors in the 45+ age group may not be spending too much time on social media, whilst NRIs in the same age group use social media extensively. It is therefore critical to define who you wish to reach out to, and then use social media accordingly.

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

Software is only a tool to run your business efficiently, it is not your business. Sometimes, this reality is misunderstood. For starters, I believe Excel provides the greatest flexibility though it has some disadvantages. In case you wish to offer execution services, a reporting software would also be crucial. I would recommend that once the practice is beyond its initial stage, a CRM software, product research software, financial planning software and execution platform, would make your practice much more efficient. In addition, portfolio reporting should be made available online.

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

Businesses are all about adding value and being persistent. Businesses don't grow overnight, so it is crucial to do contingency planning for yourself when you set up your business. Give yourself and

your practice at least three years before you decide whether or not you wish to get into employment and close down your practice. During this phase, you will need to bootstrap, and at the same time, spend on upgrading your skills. It is a tightrope, difficult but critical. I want to quote Steve Jobs on this. "I'm convinced that about half of what separates the successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance."

Q15 - How important it is for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

Experience allows you to learn from others successes and other failures. It therefore allows you to reduce the time you spend in making your own mistakes. Therefore, it is critical to gain experience before you set up your own business in my view. A certification does not dictate success, but it is about applying the learning's that you gain during a certification process. However, it gives you self-confidence, which is absolutely critical when you are starting off. A CFP certification is enough to set up a practice, but after 5 years of experience.

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

Divide your reading into critical, nice to read and avoidable. Two business papers daily, a weekly publication that updates you on international news flow, and the financial planning journal are great starting points. Target to attend two paid conferences a year and four meetings on investment management. Avoid the daily noise of media, and focus on the long term implication of the news. Reading books on small business, entrepreneurship, and self-improvement are also crucial. Since our business is about conversations, we need to learn to speak about things beyond personal finance to break the ice and create trust. The Indian cricket team needs all-rounders, and so does the financial planning profession.

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

Certification gives both you and the consumer confidence in dealing with each other, and is therefore critical. Whilst programs in the market are focussed on the technical aspects, the

communication skills required are not given the required focus. It is therefore critical that both speaking and listening skills are taught in greater detail.

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

We think financial planners have three roles to play – one as mentors and partners to clients, second as business owners to their practices, and their third to society to increase financial literacy. Each of these roles will need to be emphasised and given due focus in an ideal program.

Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession? What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?

The future is brighter than the rays of the sun. However, like any other profession, it will go through its peaks and troughs. Just like a marathon runner paces himself differently during different phases, financial planners will need to do so the same way. New planners will have to focus on defining their ideal client, and working towards creating a value proposition that appeals to that segment. As long as new planners are clear that they cannot be everything to everyone, they should be able to run successful practices.

Q20 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'

“The ones who are crazy enough to think they can change the world , are the ones who do.” Not my words of wisdom, but these are Steve Jobs. Have fun as you build a legacy in financial planning that will be remembered long after you are gone.

“The Royal Road to
man’s heart is to talk
to him about the
things he treasures
most”

- Dale Carnegie



Vivek Rege

VR Wealth Advisors Pvt. Ltd , Mumbai

Family

Wife , Daughter and Parents

About your business and team

Our Enterprise runs with a team strength of 6 , operating from Mumbai , we run on pure referral model and only accept clients that route so far , clients are not geography specific since the advisory model is practised .

Personal Interest

Astronomy , Music , Cultures Global & Travel , Technology

Into the Business of personal finance since

Year 2003

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

Our core focus is delivering advice through adopting planning and understanding the client and also make him understand himself from a financial stand point , this discovery process is something where we think we add value , everything else is a function of this discovery process and the maturity in thoughts which make you function at optimal , this involves continuous education through clarifications seeked by the client which we encourage since continuous handholding and helping him understand the approach we adopt instils confidence , and there are no short cuts , yes since we work with strong referrals the trust factor is borrowed by the client from the client who refers this makes the process more robust , understanding that we are in the fiduciary duty and being aware about it in our advice and in our enterprise culture is paramount for us . Responsiveness to client requirements and support functions is one of things we consider important for overall client experience.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

Started this enterprise in Year 2003 as a Proprietor , since this was completely new for me is wanted to see the viability , is wouldn't be having more than 50k as my savings , and is started operating from home it all started with signing up with HDFC life and simultaneously giving exam for applying ARN as in those days it was made mandatory to have ARN and this change was good for me as I was coming from a financial education background when is studied Chartered Accountancy it was kind of blessing , as things picked up I used to travel by Train , and then walking in the Churchgate fort Area submit applications in various mutual funds , Xerox the forms , and then keep one set for me and the other for the client , that's how it all started , it was hard work if I look back but those days it was enthusiasm to do something different and prove yourself not to the world but to your own self that things will work out for better if you follow the right practices , so those days rebating was a given trade practice and after say 2 years Franklin Templeton arranged one session , this session was a game changer , as I was confused , people around me in community were coercing me to rebate and grow business , the session thought me and sowed the seeds.

COMPETE ON QUALITY AND NOT PRICE , IF YOU COMPETE ON QUALITY FEW WILL COMPETE AND YOU WILL ONLY GET BETTER BY THE DAY , BUT IF YOU COMPETE ON PRICE THEN IT'S RACE TO THE BOTTOM , even today I follow this mantra and there is no compromise here .

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

It's different now , it's now a question bread & butter , it's a serious commitment to my own self , to my team who look at me for their dreams in life and share our dream as well , to my clients who have trusted me all along , and it's like having the clients but the challenges are meeting expectations , delivering your promise , now taking more clients is not my challenge , how to continuously ensure they are attended , I have the time to speak and meet them , and the willingness to deal with someone other than me whom they perceive competent and trust worthy , it's like a specialist , the client wants to speak with you though the team behind might be doing most of it . But let me tell you it's a nice feeling , so today with our clients support , community recognises me , there is media interaction , clients referrals continue . We have to achieve scale in a more organised way in a model which is learned workforce intensive and there is a long way to go from here , a lot to learn from our community and young entrants and aspirants who want to make a career with their new thought process and vision .

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

I would rather say that it's a matter of why you choose to be a financial planner , what is that you like about this profession , the raw material is the client , and you need to learn to handle , counsel , guide , handhold , face unpleasant events arising out of greed or fear , one needs to be prepared for this . I am going one step ahead and saying that today we don't have very stringent regulations and client awareness but in times to come , litigant and regulations will be the reality , one needs to gear up and the role which we are in is pretty delicate where benefit of doubt goes to the client , hence it's not now but the times ahead are going to be the same for each one of us , it then doesn't matter whether you are a new entrant or an old hand , the externals will change .

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

Discovery 1 : Markets will always surprise you , don't over estimate your ability to predict and advice

Discovery 2 : Advisory is a double edged sword , risk estimation is a challenge , either ways you are in trouble

Discovery 3 : Clients expectations managing is a big challenge , you can never predict how expectations change , Clients will surprise you

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

I think the answer is No , this is because a Yes will give a wrong impression , and thus new entrants will under estimate the Risk in this Profession , market is now more mature , thus expectations on delivery is going up , process , systems , team , support , risk management , data security , will take precedence from here onwards , so it's going to be capital , time & People intensive and one should be working towards that , hence No .

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

This very profession allows you to educate through your advice some of those things where your clients come back to you again and again with that thirst to know , so it's a win-win relationship which fosters and you are paid for what you impart , that's some of the biggest benefits .

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor's doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

I don't over exert on this , you need to speak the natural way , and we convey the best in that mode , ultimately it's all about communicating right everything else follows , And don't expect everyone to understand respect the fact that everyone is not your client .

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

We don't accept clients without referrals that's our sales process , in this we try to ensure filtered audience is in front of me , closing is never an issue ever since I started , earlier days it used to be cold calls from list shared of prospects from HDFC life back in 2003 , that's how it began . Now market is more matured and time is a constraint , so the process has to be short

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

The only mantra we have followed is a strong responsiveness especially when they need you most and there is no business expectations , that's where it matters most , that's the way we get our referrals so it's pretty simple .

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

The most difficult part is to keep expectation managed , thought process changes and one needs to get that equation right , and let me tell you , I still don't have an answer to this .

Fees charging is never easy especially in a profession which is fairly new , what is important is to show value in your process and for that you should choose your audience very carefully , if you are in front of the wrong crowd then something is not right in your segmentation , once you segment then it's pretty easy job as you know exactly the issues involved , the manner to explain them , they should feel confident that you know your job well , then I don't see why anyone should deny a rightful fee.

You should be able to demonstrate your skills , your understanding , experience will help you understand the knack of getting this part of the equation right .

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

Technology to service your clients is paramount , to engage clients is the next level , and then to attract new clients is still the next level , is don't understand this the other way round , it may look fashionable but that's something you do for brand management and lead generation as a result of brand , new entrants should indulge less in these areas and understand the nut and bolts before venturing by taking adequate experience with an established firm .

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

Choosing technology work for you requires thorough understanding , there are no right or wrong answers here , and no easy ones as well , new planners will have to learn this the hard way , and always keep in mind that no one software can fulfil your needs it's a waste searching for the ideal , you need to start somewhere make some mistakes learn and improve , this is the only way decisions improve .

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

Impatience to learn and Patience to earn is #1 Key to success , most falter here I suppose , that requires a proper strategic vision and with current state there are firms who are looking out for people with this trait , no one is permanent but integrity in what you do , with whom you work , is something which will reflect in how you carry yourself in front of your client.

Q15 - How important it is for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

Important ingredient , and today as I said there is choice , some years back that wasn't the case , but new planners are reluctant or in a hurry to start their practice that's harmful for the client and the profession in long term if the experience isn't good , here the FPSB board plays a vital role on who can practice , so CFP is after all a certification , experience should follows for a certain require fore practicing is allowed .

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

FPA US journal is something which gives a broad perspective and issues involved in more matured markets , the practices involved , the ethics they follow . there is a lot to learn out there .

Subscribe to Blogs and Twitter feeds there is so much , that's good enough to orient yourself for this profession .

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

In my view the Programs can be improved keeping in mind the industry requirements and that does not only involve Insurance companies , Mutual fund Companies and Banks these are institutional requirements , small and midsized boutique firms will play a significant role in times to come the candidates should be industry ready , I don't think this is achieved .

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

Make functional experience mandatory with e learning modules , industry visits , internship , this should qualify for a certificate , one should make the Candidates be productive from Day 1 when he joins as an employee . Any prior experience should not be counted , this will improve the human resource quality and once these are absorbed Quantity will follow , reversing this can back fire .

Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession? What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?

Various specialists will emerge as markets mature , in a developing economy more people will respond to our services , fees charging will be seen as someone coming from an independent stand point and looked upon with more honour , it's specialisation areas and Interest which will create various practices and flourishing . E.g. Cross Border Opportunities viz with our Kids leaving and expats coming to this country to earn a living , managing and advising couples coming from different parts of the globe with Assets in the country of origin , so is mean the challenge is to keep continuous education active with collaborations .

Q20 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'.....

Be impatient in learning but be patient in earning , there are no short cuts , it's better to be right in long term than short term .

“You can close more business
in two months by becoming
interested in other people
than you can in two years by
trying to get people
interested in you”

- Dale Carnegie



Gajendra Kothari

Etica Wealth Management Pvt Ltd, Mumbai

Family

Spouse - Sweta Kothari, Son - Neel Kothari (3.5 years), Daughter - Aditi Kothari (2 years)

About your business and team

Etica Wealth Management Pvt Ltd. was founded in the year 2009 (Nov 26) with the aim to deliver best in class financial planning and wealth management services to our clients. Today we have around 350 families as our clients spread across India. We have our corporate office in Mumbai and representative offices in Jorhat (Assam), Kolkata and New Delhi. We have a total of 13 people spread across these offices. We are known for our financial planning and wealth management seminars which are a great hit amongst the participants. We have conducted more than 50 such seminars in the last 2 years at Mumbai, Kolkata and Assam. These seminars have been organized at various corporate houses, schools, colleges, stock exchanges, rotary clubs, housing societies, church associations etc. the participant really like these seminars and have benefitted a lot.

Personal Interest

Playing sports (Cricket, tennis, table tennis, carrom), doing adventure activities, exploring new places, watching movies.

Into the Business of personal finance since

I have been in this industry for last 9 years. I am very passionate about this field and see a great future ahead.

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

Our basic idea is that every individual should have these 3 things to start with

- Term life insurance
- Health insurance
- SIP investments linked to the goals

This is our basic proposition. Thereafter depending in the requirements we can create a simple/ comprehensive plan and offer different kind of services. We also ensure that the client is completely educated about the process and he takes full charge of it. We offer entire stream of services in the world of personal finance right from home loans to alternative investments. We believe that client should have a single point of contact (one stop solution) when it comes to their personal finance.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

The whole idea behind starting our venture was that we were fed up of Mis-selling happening in this industry. Way back in 2004 most investors were being sold high cost ULIPs and mutual fund NFOs. We were completely against these products. But then we didn't had much experience and client base so we thought lets work for some more years and make few loyal investors and that's how the seed of starting our own enterprise started. In 2009 when we started, we had 20 investors who reposed confidence in us and were quite convinced that we are the right people to deal with.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

We are very happy that in 3 years if time we have around 350 happy families. Life has become very busy now as we today really don't have to go out and scout for new clients. We get good amount of referral business (without even asking for it). We need to now expand our sales team so that we can leverage on the hard work we have been doing for past 3 years.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

Developing the complete trust on the client in the first few meeting is a difficult job. However once you provide him high quality service and focused on solving his problem, further business with him is

not an issue at all. And since we are very passionate about this and because we lead by example, it is not very difficult for us to win clients trust.

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

- ✓ Seminars at Corporate/or Social gatherings
- ✓ Getting client on-board through the Liquid fund strategy.
- ✓ Basic goal based financial plan free of cost

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

Yes certainly it is very easy for today's youth to become a financial planner as he is more updated, technology savvy, more products and clients are also more educated and hence the whole experience becomes much efficient

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

Over the period you meet variety of people. You got to deal with different people, grow you connection and network. If you help the client to achieve his goal – he will always remember you and will always be a good mouth for you.

It's very satisfying experience at the end of the day. The relationship with a client becomes more than a financial advisor. He looks up to us for almost all kind of advice.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor's doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

Most of our potential clients are either from reference or through our seminars, so the initial ice breaker is already done. We explain the client all the investment as well as risk cover option. On investment we normally strive to give a positive initial experience to the client on his investment by

either investing their money in debt scheme or balanced fund and later explain him the benefits of equity investment over long term. He gradually learns and starts having faith on us.

One of the best strategies we feel is to show our own investments and insurance policies which give our investors tremendous confidence in us.

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

We approach our clients with very open mind. As we don't know what requirement he has, we give him enough time to talk about his needs and then only we offer him the appropriate solution. We never try to close the deal in a hurry as we certainly know the client will always come back to us. We give him enough space to think and decide whether he want to continue with us.

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

Service: Wish him & his family members on their birthdays, festivals. Update and educate him on him progress with investment done so far. Keep sending him educational mails which help him to understand personal finance better.

We maintain the database of all the participants of our seminars i.e. email id, profession, contact no etc. We regularly send them small article on personal finance.

Our back office team does most of the servicing. We offer all kind of services like getting his bank work done, assisting him getting aadhar card etc. are some of the services which helps us score some more brownie points.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

The most toughest part is to keep yourself updated with regard to every nuance of the personal finance be it products update, taxation, nominations, etc. we spend almost 2 hrs. Every day to learn which helps us deliver better advice to our clients. Because we are 5 cousins in this business (we are

a joint family) we share our experiences, knowledge on a daily basis and hence we commit lesser mistakes than our individual IFA colleagues. This is a great advantage to us.

When we deliver value to our client, asking for fees than is a cake walk for us. Fortunately Mumbai is a great market for us and the investors here understand the value of time and efforts and hence asking a reasonable fee is never an issue here.

I think making money in this profession is initially very difficult but Over a period of time your business becomes really diversified clients wise, products wise , locations wise and hence it becomes a more balanced business

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

Technology is one if the biggest game changer in this profession. We use technology to the core in making the whole process very efficient (Infact I have drafted the complete reply on my phone as I am travelling). Our clients are really amazed to see as using the latest technology / gadgets to help them get the work done smoother and faster.

The more you are visible, the better it is. Social media as such has not worked for us or rather we have not focused on the same. One need to spend huge amount of time (like you guys are) if one has to be very active in social media as he need to revert to all the comments, regularly give updates on what happening etc. etc. We believe social media is very important but it's very long drawn process and one need to be very patient. The results come after a long wait. But it is worthwhile the effort.

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

For preparing financial plan initially one need to do the same on excel himself so as to understand the complete linking process. We believe that software on a standalone basis couldn't create a plan as every client has unique requirement and different cash flow structure. Hence we use excel to create a financial plan for our client. For portfolio management initially he can look for low cost back office software like Datacomp, invest well etc. Software makes the work very easy.

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

1: The primary reason many advisers fail to succeed is because they don't spend on upgrading themselves. For many advisers – spending from one's own pocket and going for seminars would be an expenditure, but I consider the same as investment.

I think the biggest capital in this business is human capital and we should ensure that this remains always at a premium.

Q15 - How important is it for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

CFP programmes give individuals necessary tools to start the business, but learning is a never-ending process in this field. Clients would pay you fees only if they see value in your advice and you have sufficient knowledge and speaking skills to explain to them in layman's language. But CFP program is certainly a good starting point.

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

Yes, keep updated on a wider variety of topics is of utmost importance. We read 5-6 different financial/business dailies and magazines on a daily basis. We make it a point to attend all good seminars / conferences even if it is expensive.

We should have a great amount of knowledge in all other areas including sports, politics, religion etc. as it is a good ice-breaker technique. In UK, I started following football because all my clients there would only talk about this in our meetings.

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

Well certification is good but it is not the end in itself. The programs available in the market are more theory oriented and does not deal with finer practical challenges. At the end of the day it's all about making the client feel satisfied.

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

My main endeavour would be to give them hands on experience about how to deal with client behaviour. Financial planning is not about numbers. It's all about managing client's expectations which many of us fall short of.

Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession? What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?

The future is immensely bright. This decade belongs to us. A lot of people would require our services and I think we are indispensable as this industry becomes more and more complicated. However we need to focus on the below things to enable us to grab the opportunities.

- New planners should focus on goal based financial planning
- Educating the client is very important (conduct free seminars for your clients at your office or hire a small boardroom)
- Advise him in other aspects like wills , trusts, alternative investments, etc.

Q20 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'

As our company's Tagline says: "Ethics before Everything", this is going to be the single biggest factor in the long term success of a financial planner.

Need we say more.....

“You know the value
of every merchandise,
but you do not know
your own value- That
is stupidity”

- Rumi



Narendra N Kondajji

Procyon Financial Planners Pvt Ltd, Bangalore

Family

Wife: Savitha S Dodderi, Sector Analyst with MNC IT Company in Bangalore, Daughter - Sirigauri , II Year BE (E&E) Student in Bangalore

About your business and team

Promoter Director of Procyon Financial Planners Pvt Ltd, Bangalore, founded in October 2006

- One of the few earliest practitioners of CFP profession in Bangalore.
- Have created financial plans for 60+ clients/families so far.
- We empower people with the power of visualisation of probable financial future and make them understand how to leverage the power of time value and appropriate assumptions in the financial planning framework. We create an environment where our clients visualise their financial goals with much clarity.
- We call financial planning process a leadership quality where the breadwinner has an opportunity to become a leader and a role model to her family members, friends and relatives.
- We had no significant legacy financial services business and we do not have to justify our past deeds that may be diametrically opposite to financial planning principles.
- We make all relevant disclosures including the commission/trail commission we earn if someone buys any products from us. Complete transparency is the bedrock of our relationship with the clients.

Personal Interest

Reading, Writing and blogging about personal finance and financial planning.

Into the Business of personal finance since

Year 2000

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

Services we offer

- Financial planning (including Retirement Planning, Risk Management and Insurance Planning and Investment Planning)
- Wealth Management
- Long term care and health care cost management

Products:

Equity, Mutual Funds, Fixed Income Instruments, Insurance and Alternate Asset Classes.

Personal Finance Education and support we provide

Educating the prospective and existing clients is a constant and increasingly important part of our process. We have given personal finance education to more number of prospects than we could acquire them. Our total time spend on educating a client before on boarding her is very substantial (at least 8 hours spread over 2 to 4 sessions). We also constantly keep feeding latest updates and inputs about financial planning and personal finance to our existing clients regularly.

Modes of education

One-on-One discussions, structured interactions during client acquisition and planning process, blogs, sending educative information through emails and newsletters and conducting seminars.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

My interest in personal finance started when I was thrust with the responsibility of handling employees' personal taxation and investments related issues as part of my official work sometime in the year 1997. I had to explain income tax options available as well as saving and investment choices to hundreds of employees. That is when I realised the extent of lack of awareness and mis-selling that was rampant in the area of personal finance. My search to find the right method of advising people led me to discover CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER certification which was not

launched in India yet at that time. During the period 2002-2003, CFP course was offered in India and I enrolled myself for it.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

I was successful in the 2nd batch of CFP Final Module examination in the year 2005. I was then working for a top IT MNC in Bangalore as Payroll Administrator. In 2006 June I quit my well-paying job to the utter dismay of my wife and few very close friends. I had no prior experience of running a business or profession but I was quite stubborn in my decision.

I and my fellow CFP Professional decided to come together and we started Procyon Financial Planners Pvt Ltd in Oct 2006 with just two of us as promoters and co-workers. I was idealistic, enthusiastic and a bit naive in my assumptions about financial planning profession. I thought people would stand in queue to get their financial planning done and also get their financial life straightened out. What a big surprise and come down it was to realise that:

- a) People were not much aware of financial planning and from our point of view slow to understand what it is!
- b) Most people thought financial planning is another 'scheme' to scam them.

Those were the days when ULIPs reigned supreme and mutual funds were raining NFOs.

I was neither convinced nor knew the language of dealing with these options. Some people, whom I can call as brave hearts, came forward to get their financial planning done – some of them were my ex-colleagues who thought that if it is Narendra who is doing this then there must be something good in it. Some of those colleagues who became my clients are still with us and they are all happy about what is happening with their money and financial life. Others have left us in between mostly to invest in house property or plot of land. There were hardly half a dozen practicing CFPs in Bangalore at that time. Even then I did not fully benefit from the first movers advantage. Mainly because I started with zero client base and acquisition happened very slowly. I can say we were reluctant marketers. A big shocker for me was the realisation that not everyone or not many people believed in financial planning. When I really made up my mind to start charging for financial plan (somewhere by end 2007), clients were even more reluctant. Then 2008 happened and markets crashed. Since it was a big crash and first experience for me as well, I was also confused what message I should give to our clients. I somehow recovered from the shock and took courage to ask people to stick to their plan, be it financial plan or systematic investment plan. Those who stuck to their plans are a much happier lot today. Many others discarded the process altogether but some returned after a gap. The real suffering came in the year 2010 when so called retail investors –

another euphemism for middle class salaried investors – completely lost faith in equity as an asset class and put their faith in either bank deposits or house property or gold. This trend has not been reversed till date. In early 2011 my friend and co-Director left the organisation to concentrate full time on training and teaching. I ploughed along and whether I am just being naive or passionate only time can decipher. Post departure of my friend, I started rebuilding my team and initial experiment went horribly wrong with wrong people in the wrong roles but has got stabilised for the past one year.

New client acquisition is happening at a moderate pace because we refuse to hard sell ourselves. We do not want to play on the emotions of the prospects, either greed or fear, and look forward to work with more sober and rational investors, a tribe very hard to find. From the time when only a few early CFPs used to talk about financial planning to a time now when everyone including newspapers, TV Channels, personal finance magazines, bloggers and their blogs, agents, advisors, name-hijackers and even regulators, virtually everyone on the supply side, are talking about it and there is a great deal of awareness building is going on, it is in the demand side there is very less traction. From the time of giving the financial planning for free to now charging a decent sum, we have come a long way. As an organisation, we still derive our sustenance largely through advising and selling mutual funds and health insurance with a minor concentration on fixed income instruments. We have faced all the problems a start-up would face: costs over-runs, cash starvation, and employee attrition and so on. We have overcome most of them now and see a smooth ride going forward.

My time is now fully dedicated to the cause of financial planning processes and ‘right advising’ the people. I am enthusiastic to share the secrets we have unveiled and an active participant in the professional forum in Bangalore. There is some change in the minds of the people and I can sense it. Prospects in their late thirties or early forties who believe in the financial planning process have become our good clients and ardent believers. This portfolio is growing and we would like to add more numbers here. Since we are still reluctant to hard sell ourselves and our services, we are using all other tricks such as website, emails, blogs, seminars, group meetings, mailers, asking for references etc. to spread the message of financial planning. We are able to reach out larger audience through these means and slowly but steadily new clients are being added. Our website provides us good leads and some of our very good clients have come to us through that route. Even here, we do not have any flashy content and keep it simple and sincere.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

I did not find it that difficult or demanding to set the profession up and running because of my confidence in our ethical practices. Working with individuals is of course a challenging and tough task for any one whether a newcomer or experienced. People have emotions and when it is about dealing with money and their financial future, the situation gets exacerbated. Two of the predominantly primordial emotions i.e., fear and greed, uproot all preconceived notions about rational behaviour. Peer pressure also derails the thinking in case of young investors. What worked for parents must work for their children is the basic assumption. Fears and biases also get transferred to the next generation intact. These emotions are not constant and they ebb and flow in an almost preordained cycle, that too at the most inauspicious time. I can go on narrating the stories and incidents to make my point but fact of detrimental effects of riding on the emotions remain a constant factor. From 1990s till mid 2000s people were bullish about equity and now they are all fearful about it. Now a days everyone is bullish about only two things - gold and real estate. Not even their career or job when it comes to it but they find immense joy and satisfaction when they book a tony apartment (second or third) or an outlandish villa discounting almost all their future income. Sometimes because of floating rate of interest their non-existent income beyond their retirement also gets included. It appears that people have decided to lead of a life of an 'Asset Rich and Cash Poor' person.

To come back to your original question, a financial planner has two options: either to ride the emotions along with her clients or to remain sober and keep educating them. The reward would be commensurately high or low. Look at it from the client's perspective: a financial planner has to be well read, analytical in thinking, good with numbers, widely knowledgeable, be an expert in two or three areas of personal finance, possess good communication skills – oral and written, be a very good listener, have a large heart to listen to their travails and still be calm enough to make a meaning and get the context quickly, be a mind reader, be willing to accept rejections in large numbers. I can go on adding points like this and you get an idea. Why such a person should choose financial planning as a profession when she can make it happen anywhere else? And choose to work in an environment where it is a constant friction of paying fee for advice or trying to elicit for free?

I and my team can visualise the needs and wants of the prospects and clients but it is entirely another thing to make them visualise the same in their minds. The same damned emotions arise every now and then in different proportions. Many people say that I take these things little too seriously and advise me why not just sell something or do some plan. I think there are many of us

financial planners who do not want our hands get bloodied doing un-financial planning kind of things. Whole point is clients need not give much meaning to words such as transparency, removing the conflict of interest, ethical practices, disclosures etc. if you are willing to cater to either greed or fear – let 'need' be the sacrificial goat. This stereotypical notion is being systematically removed through our constant efforts.

If you want to educate and enlighten your clients before on boarding or later as well, it is an uphill task with certain type of clients. Shortcuts are much easier and considered as 'smart' by vast majority of 'returns' centric clients – a route we seldom take. The emotion of fear haunts us as well as much as it haunts our clients. We have lost some clients and much business with existing clients when we told them that endowment policies could be toxic to their finances or not having emergency fund is a futile and counterproductive situation. Over a period of time our clients have understood the process and remain calm under volatile market scenario. We have also understood the pressure points of each of the clients and accordingly handle the issues through asset allocation and product selection. We consider ourselves grateful for the trust they repose on us and never take it for granted though.

Apart from frustration of dealing with the road blocks put by the emotions, a financial planner has to be on the learning curve always. This aspect of the profession is really costly and tiresome. I enjoy reading anything and many things I come across and feel elated when the clients appreciate the level of useful knowledge we provide them from time to time.

To deal with women clients you need utmost patience. Most of male fraternity do not involve their spouses in the decision making even when women also make significant economic contribution in the family and this situation is morally hurtful to us because we have to work with 50% visualisation only. There are many good female clients who are investment savvy, think independently and very conscientious and it is always a pleasure to work with an enlightened client.

The meaning of money to younger generation is quite different. They want to consume goods and services and have less notions about saving and investing. They seem to be negatively affected by popular media especially TV channels and think investing=share market and returns have to be astonishingly high to enthuse them. Consumption is good for the economy and if you are an investor it is even good if there are large numbers of consumers. But how to make this message reach to even economics and commerce graduates?

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

Discoveries we made:

- People are emotional about themselves and their money.
- If they cannot articulate their needs and wants clearly, they depend on your expertise and experience to help them in visualising the scenarios.
- Conscientious people are the best adopters of financial planning process but would seldom need it because they would have already internalised the principles
- Most others need financial planning process very badly but do not have the mind or visualisation ability to adopt it.
- HNIs assume that they do not need financial planning but they are totally wrong about it. Active investment process most of the time will not reward but cost is a sure factor. Aimless pursuit of wealth creation has its own pitfalls.

In our organisation, we now have a structured process of getting a handle on the emotions of the prospects. We also slow down the implementation process and spread it across several months in order to increase the level of absorption.

Turning point

We made few astonishing (but not really unexpected) discoveries based on our learning in the course of past six years. Every one need financial planning process very much but they do not know how to express it. People assume that financial planning is only for rich who can afford to pay the high fees a planner would charge and they would chose it when they also become rich. Whereas perceivedly rich people (HNIs) abhor financial planning process as too passive and 'un-smart'.

We realised firstly that young earners would like to go through the financial planning process but are reluctant because of cost structure and elaborateness of the process. Secondly, higher income need not necessarily result in higher discretionary surplus because of EMIs and extravagant lifestyle. These are obvious realisations but how does it matter in the financial planning framework? Both these types of people, distance themselves from the financial planning process by a good length. In early 2012, after a great deal of thought process and internal deliberations, we decided to divide the whole financial planning process in to two parts – **Foundational and Transformational**. I think this is a very unique way of looking at the application and delivery of the process anywhere. For the past one year, we have more or less standardised this process to our clients and the level of acceptance has gone up very much.

What is a Foundational Financial Plan? This is applicable in two of the cases I mentioned just before - a young earner or family with zero or low discretionary surplus. In both these cases, we ask the client to go through the foundational planning process for few years before the discretionary surpluses start appearing when she can attempt larger transformational goals. At the heart of Foundational Plan lies the family budget. When we do this we are careful to address the needs and necessities and put in place proper risk management options and provide for emergency needs.

With our Foundational Plan, we remove the negativity of creating an entire plan and then telling the clients **'you can't do this because you have no surpluses'** or **'you did it all wrong, now go and suffer'**. We start the process of reconstruction of net worth and setting the cash flow in order. This process makes the financial planning affordable and relevant to the client. The greatest advantage for us is that we get a believer and over a period of time she would realise the goodness of the process and would more or less start gaining control over the two damnable emotions.

In our Transformational plan we try and address the issues such as:

- Proper and logical assumption is more important than power of mathematics when it comes to personal finance – use of appropriate percentages and factors during different phases of life and when computing income growth, returns growth. These things can make great deal of difference to the quality of a plan. Use of personal assets in funding the goals without checking the reality, mis-match between the emotional needs and asset allocation are sure to derail the outcomes in the medium and long term.
- Establishing the likely cash flow scenario for entire plan period, moderating any irrational exuberance about future cash flows and growth opportunities which are almost like bubbles.
- Helping the clients visualise the difference between needs and wants. Knowing the problem is almost solving the problem itself.
- Sensitivity and what-if analyses
- Empowering the clients through healthy and open discussion and visualising clients' personal landscape. This is especially relevant in the case of retirement planning.
- Taking into account the real time and new age issues such as nuclearisation of family, managing the cost of health care, longevity risk, long term care and geriatric care issues, planning for seemingly luxurious things but actually necessities such as replacing the vehicles or tools and gadgets periodically.
- Flooring the retirement income and addressing the issue of longevity risk

For a client who has the ability to get in to Transformational Planning stage, our process spaces out the activities and level of absorption of ideas increases dramatically. In both the cases i.e., foundational and transformational, any crisis or tasks that need immediate attention are addressed first – for example putting in place right amount of life, disability, critical care and health insurance in place.

Splitting the process in to two parts gives sufficient time to both the planner and the client to interact and appreciate the nuances of the process well. It is a kind of acclimatisation. Financial planning costs also get spread across the time. Though our process increases the overall timeframe we feel it is worth in the interest of the client. Our process reduces client attrition and possibility of non-implementation of the plan.

As part of our financial planning process we create three documents primarily:

- a) Financial plan itself
- b) Risk Management Policy Statement (RMPS)
- c) Investment Policy Statement (IPS)

Investment Policy Statement is also a document that is common to our wealth management process. RMPS and IPS help to covert the intentions of a plan to specific actions based on products and options.

All the documents have a shelf life of one year and clients are strictly advised to get the plan and documents reviewed in one year's timeframe or earlier if there is any significant change in the situation.

I hope one day almost all financial planners would adopt this method as a standard and vindicate our belief.

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

Yes. Insofar CFP certification is concerned, when we started off there was no good indigenous study material, not much of literature or books on personal finance, no trainers or teachers. When I began my practice there was none to guide me (barring few close friends) and no one to tell us what may work or what may not. It was a wild-west story with only difference being there were no horses to

ride and no guns to shoot. Most of the study material was non-Indian and we had to learn and localise it. It was tough but highly rewarding. I am more confident today because I learned it the hard way.

Today education and examination process is much streamlined and competing choices are also available. There is good amount publicity and huge quantity of information flotsam on the net. Only clients' acceptance of financial process as a better way of handling their personal finance has to rise and I think it is only matter of time before that happens – one burst of real estate and gold bubble, the two areas that do not have any planner's role, and the investors would have come full circle.

Whether certified or not, from a practitioner's point of view, there are many formats and models available today and there is widespread dissemination and sharing of knowledge and experience – including what Jagoadvisor and FPSB India are doing. For us early starters it was tough and so it has made us tough as well.

Success, even if one were to define it purely on the basis of revenue and number of clients, I would say is relative and as is the case with any profession, it would take some time here as well. Even in a particular client's context, for her to realise the benefit of financial planning process it will take several years of patience and sticking to the process diligently. I have seen many financial planners with large legacy business achieving instant success in financial planning profession as well because they have the ability to sustain and bear overt marketing expenses. They also have the advantage of in-house supply of clients. Even then anecdotally and through personal experience, I find that all existing clients are not willing to adopt financial planning process immediately. I am yet to see a successful Financial Planning Division of a legacy player standing on its own legs.

A born financial planning practitioner like me finds it difficult and a time taking process to get established and break-even. A lone-wolf kind of set up can achieve success early but when you add people it would start straining. There are many people who believe in flashy and glamorous approach to financial planning practice. In my opinion, it will not be sustainable in the long run. Financial planning practice needs sobriety and cost management throughout. When you establish trust and relationship your business would flourish. There are already such models in existence in the areas of CA and Law Practice. None of these professionals are successful on day-one or day-two. My guess is that it would take anywhere between 5 to 10 years to establish a decent practice, this is when one does not account for market crashes or booms and regulatory dilly-dalliance. Financial planning is not a mandatory service and investors can simply drop out when they can't handle their emotions. A boom period would make the investors more confident about their own ability to earn higher returns.

I am not including such practitioners who are already successful in their legacy business, be it mutual fund advisory, equity broking, insurance agency in their various permutations and combinations as benchmarks. I have seen some financial planners failing because of their past practices. Question here is how you yourself define what is financial planning process? Is it a preface to sell some more product to the clients or it is what it should supposedly mean in letter and spirit?

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

Biggest benefit is a decent livelihood for myself and my colleagues and that is what I am here for primarily. Other than that, I derive immense satisfaction when people acknowledge my contribution as a value addition in their life. I am also happy that I have the opportunity to meet so many good and brilliant people, be it our clients or other stakeholders, who are using ethical means to create financial security firstly and wealth afterwards for themselves and their dependents. I also enjoy the process of providing my perspective and helping people in the application of financial planning processes in solving some of the problems they face.

Internalising the clients' individual experiences and offering right solutions is a gratifying feeling and I feel it is a good service to the people at large.

Obviously, if you are successful, you are eligible to receive respect and recognition from the public and different generations of investors and also commensurate levels of income.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor's doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

As I told earlier, we do not have an out-and-out overt marketing or client acquisition process to increase our business. Our process is more of educating first and then bringing the clients on board. Large part of our clients are internal referrals.

What we try and do in the case of non-referral prospects is:

- a) Provide them a sincere and un-embellished communication in the very first interaction about who and what we are, what are our value systems, what is financial planning process and how we adopt it in an individual situation.
- b) We explain our scope of work and cost structure clearly. We also give examples of some case studies.
- c) We do not force our point of view during any part of the conversation. We answer all the questions, trivial or important, with the same emphasis and attention for details. Most of our conversation is de-jargonised and is in simple language.
- d) We empathise with the prospects about their past experiences but we never tell them that we are better than anyone else. This is because, in the beginning, our assertions hardly matter and a chastened prospect will discount our embellishments very easily.
- e) Before we meet a prospect face to face, we actually ask some personal questions regarding their age, educational qualification and work profile just to get a broad background. However, we will have no preconceived notion about any of our prospects simply because most of the time there will be surprises. Where we thought it was a sure shot win, we have lost and where we thought our efforts were wasted, we have had a win. Prospects always spook us and we are therefore always on the edge.
- f) When we began our practice in 2006, we did not know what will work and what won't. Over the years, we have realised that there is no formula that works always. Our 'foundational' and 'transformational' process has found good acceptance. It is intuitively educative, flexible and inclusive. We have much hopes about its success.
- g) In our seminars we give lot of original thought process and we raise relevant questions and also provide a way to address the issues. Seminar is not an overt client acquisition tool for us. It is more of fulfilment of our social responsibility. It helps us because our concepts get tested with live audience.
- h) What we try to find out in the initial conversation is the kind of emotions the person has about money and her past practices and biases. Our success is less when people are either greedy or fearful.
- i) We do not compete with any other professionals nor do we bad-mouth them with our clients. We know there are good and bad people everywhere including the profession where we are. We only explain certain bad practices, their modus operandi and the likely outcome. No financial product is good or bad. It is all relative and especially in the regulated framework the ability of a product manufacturer to create a toxic product is very less. Products or processes become toxic in their adoptions and uses. Mis-selling and mis-buying are like twins. Even here we have found that prospects are unwilling to acknowledge their own mistakes. We had a case of a client who blamed a particular insurance company and its agent greatly for the wrong sales only to reveal in the end that he did receive a substantial amount, couple of lakhs in this case, as

pay-back from the agent! The whole world knows how a set of people demand a cut from the agent during the process of annual tax planning ritual. Mis-buying is real and more prevalent than mis-selling for sure.

After these many years, content or flow of conversation is not a problem. We have too many important things to say and we just keep doing our job. Rejection is no more an issue, we just move ahead without any rancour. One thing we have found for sure is that financial planning process is not for all. It requires certain mind-set and perception abilities even though I have said elsewhere that all people need it. This is not a paradox but a reality. Doctors tell daily walking can solve many health problems but a person may prefer not to walk. When in trouble may prefer medication to walking. People who are careful (not fearful) and like systematic approach to almost everything in their life are the best fit. Only they are rare in their availability.

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

Our client acquisition process is very simple and straight forward. We believe in the relationship between efficient and professional services and positive word of mouth. We receive the leads either from our website or through referrals.

In case of referrals, the process is very informal because the decision would have already been made. It is only the comfort of meeting in person and getting on with the process.

We have a very structured process of engagement for other type of prospects.

- First we set up a tele-call in which we get to know each other.
- We then send a set of softcopies of collaterals and ask for a face to face meeting.
- Before the face to face meeting, we would also ask the prospect to update us with minimal personal information and the Risk Assessment Questionnaire duly filled in.
- In the face-to-face meeting we give a complete download about our process and clarify each and every points or queries raised by the prospect.
- After this meeting, it is her call to decide if she wants to engage us or not. Sometimes some clients ask for another round of meeting and we are fine with it if it is useful to the prospect. But we have found such a prospect generally defers the decision.
- When she decides to engage us, we will begin the process with “Client Engagement Agreement” and initiate the process of data collection etc.

If you notice, we have nothing to help us other than our ability to explain our process with clarity and clarify any queries the client may have. We also largely underplay the possibilities of financial planning process in solving all their financial worries. We make our points clear through specific what-if case studies. If we fail in this process, it may be because we are not sincere or convincing enough with our message or explanations. It is purely our words and the process we follow that we use to overcome any reluctance or second thoughts the client may have. Since prospects are reluctant to give any feedback why they do not choose us, when we lose a prospect, we really do not know what went against us and we will not waste our time speculating on that. To my surprise, I have found many years later in some cases that such prospects who did not choose us then have not gone to any other planner. They have been very busy messing up the things even more with themselves!

We are yet to get any great flow of prospects from our seminars but that is secondary. What is primary in our seminars is honing the clarity of our message and reaching out to people on a broader canvass. I feel if I awaken many people about the possibilities of financial planning process it will have virtuous effect and it need not necessarily benefit only my organisation directly and I am fine with it. After all completion of duties towards clients pays off. I think financial planning process is not a service that can be sold through mass marketing methods, email blasts etc. It is a slow process of winning over a prospect to see your point of view. This is what we want to achieve through our seminars where we can address on a broader canvass and share our accumulated knowledge and experience for the good of all.

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

We have a clearly defined scope of work and it is our biggest tool to grow our client list. Crossing out all the points mentioned in the scope of work is best service we give to our clients. The execution process is elaborate and it would take lot of time and space to explain it in full. Suffice is to say that we deliver what we promise and a little more than that. As regards servicing the clients, I would only say that my cell phone is never switched off and it is on 24/7 (barring downtimes related to software upgrade, battery change etc.). I am always accessible to my clients whether I am in town or out of it.

We do not ask for referrals overtly. It is always existing client's generosity through which we get our referrals. We offer no inducements or discounts for getting referrals. It is the simple case of being trusted, be trusting and providing satisfaction.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

Fun part of the profession is facing a telephone interview from prospective clients. I can almost always make out the sequence of questions that will be asked with much accuracy. How many years of experience I have? How many clients I handle? Can I give reference of my existing clients? Questions like these always amuse me. It is a script all of us are well aware of and well prepared for. Sometimes, we even know the web-source of such query list.

Hard part of financial planning profession is positioning yourself rightly to the right audience and this is internal to you. Post the planning work, making the people implement the plan and also making them ready for review is also a tough task. There is no fun quotient here but mostly cajoling patiently and following-up relentlessly. In fact instead of fun, many a times it is a feeling despair. So it is mostly passion and a sense of duty that is driving us than the fun factor. In any case, financial planning process itself is a dismal one similar to the subject of economics - too many wants and too few resources. Who would be happy to hear it day in and day out?

Analysing behavioural part is fun actually. Many a times, people get dumbstruck or feel stupid about themselves and then it is not fun anymore.

I have gone through all the phases of financial planning practice, from giving the plan for free to charging small harmless amounts to scope driven financial planning service with full freedom to the client to implement the plan on her own or with any other service provider. What I have seen that works with the prospect always is the clarity about things as financial planner you will do and what you will not. Also, exuding a particular level of confidence, felicity of communication and detached way of approach works well for us. Clients can feel your anxiety and exasperation better than you can. They would be unwilling to work with you if you are nervous or are not clear about the process and possible outcomes.

About the nitty-gritties, since we have still not started making money solely from financial planning practice, it would not be right on my part to speculate. However, what I can see in future is that there will be willingness to pay for advice albeit only with particular age group of people, who are really value seekers and realise that their time is more important elsewhere and they do not want to

reinvent the wheel. What I have found is that if we can replace their time with our efforts and do things better than what they could have done and they see this as worth the money and they will be willing to pay; otherwise not.

I am not too sure if 'fee only financial planning' model would work that well for some more time to come. Let us suppose, you wish to earn Rs.40 Lakhs a year as financial planning services income (this is the median salary a 15 year experienced IT Engineer would earn in Bangalore), you should have 80 clients who are willing to pay you 50K every year. Not a big deal because there may be at least a lakh of such people in Bangalore. Willingness to pay is another matter altogether because they have no prior experience in their life (barring visits to doctors or now a days to fashion yoga sessions) of incurring such expenses with only perceived notional benefits. Since financial planning service is not a lifesaving service (in the nearby timeframe of the client at least), people are unwilling to cut such a cheque. What we have found is that people are fine with 10K to 15K annual service fees and you can calculate yourself how many clients you need to service to earn Rs.40 lakhs annual gross or net income as the case may be.

It may be little different in different cities or even in Bangalore with different sections of people. I have seen many people paying even higher amounts to large banks for wealth management because amounts get debited automatically. Moreover, the connotation of financial planning and wealth management are different, the latter indicating certain status. So we are making most of our money at present through placing the products and receiving commission from the product manufacturers. Of course we do a full disclosure. My views may be entirely different when I have those 80 clients or when people are willing to pay fees to their financial planner in the same way they like to pay for fashion yoga or body sculpting gym sessions.

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

As of now technology is not playing a major role in our process. Since we customise each financial plan, we excel through MS Excel. We do have few tools for integrating the investment data and to publish the reports periodically but they are not very high on technology.

CRM tool may become important in the future. Even financial planning software could be a good idea if we see the need and demand for a standardised process. Presently it is not so.

A good website is actually an asset because now people want to find what they want themselves. So you should be available when and where they search for you. Social media is very important to show our presence but no serious business opportunity emerges from it. Because most the people in the important age group of 37 – 45 years are either not very active or have no presence in the social media. We use social media mostly for communicating and publishing our general inputs to the clients and create whatever buzz possible. With the younger generation (exceptions exist) our input is like putting water on the granite.

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

Since we do not use any such tool or software ourselves, I have no suggestions to offer. Generally I feel one should be good in using tools such as Excel and Email client. Internally, we have several trackers through which we monitor our performance and progress but such trackers cannot be generalised.

Technology in the context of financial plan creation may help the organisation if there is large amount of standard work. But it will also remove the personal touch. Since we are not anticipating such a huge volume for the present, we are ok with our current methods.

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

This profession is not for those who believe in “least effort-highest reward” equation. If you are not passionate about it, please keep away because your rewards are only available in a distant future provided the regulator keeps away from you and the customer keeps her trust intact. If you have time, add large quantity of patience to it. Please be sure that the profession you are getting in to is neither a mandatory nor lifesaving one. As a True-To-Principles Financial Planner, you are handicapped by the self-imposed restriction of not using irrational emotions to create business opportunities. You are neither expected to create nor pamper fear and greed in your prospect's mind. So it is like tying your hands yourself and getting in to a war.

A secondary reason why planners fail could be because of inability to master the communication angle. If you are not a good communicator, it will be difficult for you to thrive and prosper because some of the good financial planners who will be your competitors are very intelligent and extremely good communicators. Any prospect would easily recognise the gimmicks, borrowed or otherwise. Can you narrate the characteristics and analysis of an issue in a simple and straightforward way? If your answer is yes, continue to fine tune your communication. Else, learn and master the art and you will not be afraid. As a financial planner, your only weapon for the first few years with a client is your ability to communicate clearly and calmly. You may call this process as self-marketing, but I would stick with the words 'good communication'.

Q15 - How important it is for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

It is very important to have good experience before branching out on your own. It is unethical to experiment with someone's hard earned money. Not that experienced planners would not commit any mistakes but then they will be experienced mistakes! As I explained earlier, in the first 3-4 years of your relationship you will have nothing to show to the client in terms of performance. If someone has to pay you handsomely, they will pay only for your experience and knowledge. If you do not possess experience but still have the urge and zeal to come in to profession, be humble to admit your inexperience and work very cautiously with other's money and time and you may still win. After all, common sense is the most important and a least abundant resource.

CFP programme is only a starting point. As has happened world over, CFP as a professional certification will mature over a period in India and when that happens experience as a CFP would be invaluable. CFP certification or for that matter any such similar certifications alone are not sufficient and one should develop good communication and presentation (not PowerPoint but data analysis) skills. Of course importance of good communication pre-supposes existence of good execution skills. A business sensibility and focus to succeed would help you because no client or investor would like get advised from a pauper even though purely from experience point of view it is the pauper who will know best about not having money or wealth.

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

I read all kinds of books: fiction, self-help, how-to, cookery, travel, biography, psychology, economics, history, professional series; the whole bunch of them. I read FPA journal (online) regularly and other financial planning magazines and journals (mostly online) as well. I am also a believer in open-courseware methods and keep visiting Khan's Academy, MITx and Tedx regularly.

Few of the conferences I attended, I did not find them much interesting because most of them were sponsored types. I have no experience of attending any conferences or seminars outside India but some of my colleagues in Bangalore have found them useful especially from networking perspective. We CFPs in Bangalore are fortunate to have a vibrant and active forum and we meet once every month. We keep exchanging ideas, views and discuss professional subject and given and receive expert presentations.

A financial planner at some point in time would become the CFO of the client or her family so no area is a no-go area as far as knowledge acquisition or upgrading the skills is concerned. Rest is your personal choice. In the younger generation the ability to read and comprehend is diminishing. Most of the reading when happens, it happens through internet. Internet sometimes is a difficult place to find knowledge and wisdom. Information overload would kill your creativity and analytical capabilities. So you to find out what suits you better – books, web, audio, video or personal interaction.

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

It depends on the regulatory framework. Hitherto financial planning profession was not under any regulation in India hence any particular certification was not a necessity. When regulatory framework is established one has to follow the same. Otherwise, financial planning as subject of study can be learnt by anyone with some time and effort. Certifications such as CFP would provide the required professional philosophy and community support. No certification is complete in itself and it will be only a beginning. As a professional, that too in the area of personal finance, one has to be constantly on the learning curve.

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

I have had the fortune of designing an entire personal finance training course for a prominent self-help organisation down South and it is not an easy task. Going forward, I would like to fine-tune our

concept of Foundational and Transformational Financial Planning processes even better with our experience gained over a period of time. At some point in time, financial planning process has to be well integrated with wealth management process, practical aspects of ethics and transparency and risk management methodologies. Such a programme or process could create a powerful breed of financial planners and wealth managers.

India is largely a country of do-it-yourselfers. Therefore, in theory financial coaching should have a good demand. But then why do-it-yourselfers would pay for disciplining themselves when there is ocean of information flotsam available to them for free? If they get coached, they will not be known as do-it-yourselfers! It is tough life for them especially when the faculties diminish and they need a trusted person most. From logic point of view, believing in god is a better thing to do than being an atheist.

Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession? What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?

The future of financial planning profession is very good if the regulators are willing for self-regulation arrangement. Otherwise, like all the areas where the regulatory intervention has hurt more than it has healed, financial planning profession is doomed to fail through over and mindless regulation. Any area where the adoption of the process or method is not mandatory, mindless or over-regulation would kill such a profession.

We are focussing on long term wealth creation (not the kind of wealth management processes practiced by the so called wealth managers) within and outside financial planning process. We feel that is what would be durable and sustainable. Some of the areas to focus could be retirement planning (not just accumulation) and estate planning.

Q20 : I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'.....

Wisdom comes after a lot of experience of your knowledge being applied and the outcomes analysed. I am humble to accept the fact that I do not possess that much wisdom which can be shared with others with confidence. Both I and my team members are still on the learning curve and we have lot more to learn and do. I can only say that the success of a financial planner and in turn the plan she would create would rest much in sensing the driving emotions of a person and her family. A financial planner should be able to get in to the minds of her client and then device the

plan accordingly. A plan that does not meet the emotional needs of an individual or family is bound to fail or get discarded. Understanding the emotions is not the same as catering to them or pandering them. It is more about how to leverage them to the advantage of the client or devising a strategy to ring-fence the wealth from the bad effects of recurring emotions. Creating set of implementable actions is more important than preaching and moralising put together.

“Create a definite plan for carrying out your desire and begin at once, whether you are ready or not, to put this plan into action”

- Napoleon Hill



Nandish Desai & Manish Chauhan

Jagoinvestor.com , Pune/Ahmedabad

Family

Manish lives with his wife and younger brother in Pune, and Nandish lives with his wife and parents in Ahmedabad

About your business and team

We are into helping people live an awesome financial life. We do that through our blog jagoinvestor and with our financial planning and financial coaching services. We both handle and manage all our business operations and activities by ourselves. Right now we do not have any staff member apart from us. We operate from our home office.

Manish Chauhan has an experience of 5 yrs, writing about the money matters and interacting with thousands of Indian investors. His core focus over the years has been to bring change in the Indian mind set about money-related issues and how to live and be an informed investor.

Nandish Desai is a business & financial coach who is fanatically passionate about coaching people. For the past few years, he has been working with entrepreneurs, senior executives and highly committed individuals from all walks of life to help them reach their full financial potential. He is known for his thought provoking ideas and unconventional coaching style.

Personal Interest

Nandish likes Reading Books, Writing, and Blogging, Coaching people and exploring new places And Manish loves Blogging, reading books and cooking.

Into the Business of personal finance since

Since 2007

Q1. Let's start with a brief description of the opportunities you introduce people to, the services that you offer and the personal finance education and support you provide.

I and Manish start our day asking one Question to ourselves, *how can we serve investors by helping them live an awesome financial life?* With this question in mind Manish writes articles about personal finance on our blog www.jagoinvestor.com and I take care of the business part. We already have one bestselling book by Manish which has 100+ great reviews on flipkart and other websites. We will soon be having two more books which will help investors in mastering their financial life. We work with limited number of clients in a month through our services; Basic Financial Planning and Financial coaching which is a unique 8 Weeks program designed for investors. Apart from this we created India's first online wealth club in the year 2012 which is subscription based program for investor's community.

We also conduct workshops for individual investors and corporate clients on request. We have conducted workshops in Mumbai, Dehradun for IAS officers, Bangalore, Pune and Lavasa. Apart from this we run www.jagoadvisor.com which helps advisors in building their practice and in 2013 we will be getting into business coaching. So these are the things that rules our day, month and year. We are currently working on two other products that will serve investor in a big way.

Q2 - Let's go back to how you got started.....

I and Manish started our journey separately and then we got together. He was with yahoo and I was working as mutual fund advisor and financial planner in Ahmedabad. I got in touch with Manish through LinkedIn in 2009 start. We did a few calls, exchanged our thoughts and were both inspired by each other's thought process. We decided to do some readers meet in Pune and Mumbai. We continued to stay in touch through mail and phone and slowly started offering our services. At that time Manish was with yahoo doing his full time job. I would talk to people on call as I love selling; convincing people was not at all difficult for me. We had our first client, second, third and very soon we had a long client list ready.

After a lot of experimenting we designed our financial coaching program (By the way financial coaching word is trade marked by us). We kept serving clients and finally Manish decided to leave his Yahoo job in Jan 2011 and we formed our partnership firm. We trust each other 100% and we formed our company so that we can give our business a formal structure.

We also had one teammate (Kriti Parikh) with us during 2011-2012 who helped us in handling huge flow of clients at that time. In the first two years of our business we worked round the clock, we never saw the time in the clock or whether it is was Sunday or Monday. We were hungry to serve more and more people through our services.

Q3 - Fast forward and describe your business and your life as it is today...

We right now have around 250+ paid clients, on-line clients in 20+ countries, 25000 registered readers; one paid on-line program, 3 books on personal finance and a great life because our hobby is now our profession. We enjoy our work more than anything else.

We now give ample time to our family and avoid working on Sundays and holidays. We now spend a lot of time reading books that inspires us; we share our business learning's with advisors on our blog www.jagoadvisor.com and work with limited number of clients in a month.

We now choose our clients; we would only like to work with those who are inspiring to us and not with those who have money to pay. We spend most of our time in developing newer products and services for investors and we constantly engage with how we can add new dimensions to our business.

I call Manish our CWO (Chief Wow Officer) because his MCA skills helps us tremendously in adding the element of automation to our business. His dream is to prepare financial plan faster than Maggie noodles with the help of technology.

Q4 - What is it like for a person wanting to develop as a financial planner, in particular, working with individual investors? According to you how difficult or demanding it is?

If we can make it in this business I think anyone can make it in this business. This business requires almost no capital to start (I mean it does not call for huge investments). All you need is a laptop, internet and a mobile phone (Minimal things to start with). This profession is built around trust and expertise so these are the two things you need to establish out in the world. In our experience investors look for only two things 1. They need to see you as an expert 2. They are confident you can solve their problems around money. If you can establish these two things you can make anyone your client.

In my view a leading dress designer would always look for good fabric, a leading chef would always looking for unique ingredients, similarly if you want to be a leader in advisory business then look for how you can sharpen your conversation skills. Because advisory business is conversation business and you need to be willing to meet new people all the time.

You got to be willing to sell financial products and your services. A weak relationship with sales weighs you down in this profession. After completing your certification you will be like a new born baby in this profession. You then learn to stand, walk and slowly start to run. This profession can't make you an overnight star; you have to do a lot of work paid or un-paid, work that you like or don't like to become successful. Once you cross your initial stage of struggle people will start to approach you and your business will flourish.

Q5 - What are the three or four most significant turning points, discoveries or breakthroughs that occurred for you along the way?

For us Manish's first book was a big turning point for us. It took around 9 months for us to complete Manish's first book but it gave us a lot of confidence in our profession. The book added new dimension to Manish's life and also to our business. We now give Manish's book as joining gift to our clients and it helps us in selling our services.

One biggest turning point was when one of our Workshops did very badly. It just went flat. It took some time for us to get out of that shock but it taught very important lessons on how to read people's mind while leading workshops.

Lastly launching wealth club also brought a huge shift in our business, we learnt to develop one-to-many product for the first time. We learnt how we can reach to more and more people with less effort or by putting less number of hours.

Apart from these I would say no two days have been same in our business. Each day is filled with breakthroughs and breakdowns. We dedicate 2 hours each week on brainstorming; we brainstorm ideas on how we can develop our business. This one practice has helped us in a very big way.

Q6 - Is it reasonable to say that it is easier for someone to become a financial planner today to achieve significant success than it was for you, when you started out? I'm going to assume you'll say 'yes', so - why?

You become a financial planner when you declare yourself as a financial planner. An expert is manufactured not in some factory or workshop but is always created in one's mind. When we started or got into business we never looked at what other established financial planners were doing. We created and followed our own path. We never looked at what others are charging, I don't remember I ever visited any other planner's website then our blog [jagoinvestor](#).

Now more and more people are aware about entity called "financial planner" but still the challenges remain the same. You require high level of commitment to establish yourself in this profession. You will face a lot of resistance initially, you will face rejections but that is part of the overall package deal and you can't escape from it. You have to write this down on your wall "There are no readymade clients, they are always created". If you are willing to create clients every single day then this profession welcomes you with wide open arms.

Q7 - What are some of the biggest benefits of being into personal finance profession?

This profession has given us everything in life. We operate from our residence and our business model is on-line so we feel blessed that we don't have to travel every day from one place to another. While Blogging Manish always has some wonderful experiences while replying comments. So many people have taught him so many things and he is constantly helping people whom he does not even know and he is clear he is not going to get any revenue from most of them. His hands sometimes go numb by replying people but still he continue to contribute because that gives him immense satisfaction. His body of work will be his legacy for generations to come.

While coaching people I also have had several great experiences. I have cried with some of our clients on calls, I have got tough with a few clients; there is so much to learn. I can say my life is not the same after each call I do with people. This is the beauty of this profession you learn from people and you are still paid.

Lastly the best part of this profession is that people are never going to stop investing or earning money so our profession is here to stay for ages to come. We can make any person our client because every individual is dealing with some issue around money.

People out in the world go to job so that they can become your client. I see a prospect in every new born baby because that new born is going to grow, will join a job, start to earn money and will be confused what to do with his money. By this I am just talking about the best side of this business where you get an opportunity to make a difference and you are paid and you constantly receive blessings from different people all the time.

Q8 - We both know – people are sceptical about our profession. There are agents, advisors, financial planners and financial coaches out in the market. Investor’s doubt as some of them already had some bitter experience in the past. How do you handle such situation and open up people to have conversation with you? How do you prepare before talking to your potential client?

We have never faced this situation so far. We stay away from all such disempowering conversations. We simply focus on serving people and how we can add value to people who contact us. We are 100% into pull model where we educate people on our blog, we let people experience us fully and as and when they are ready we work with them. We do not spam people with marketing mails; we do not do any kind of follow-ups.

The way you can’t force people to join gym similarly you can’t force people to become your financial planning client. We are into relationship business and so before talking to any potential client we do filtering to check whether the person is 100% ready or not. We do a small exercise with our potential clients, we check since how long the person is associated with our blog, and we also take person’s high level data which helps us in choosing our clients.

In my view a brain surgeon is never sceptical about his patients, he never has to deal with people’s concerns and drama, they never offer discounts and they charge high for their services. I think every planner has to operate like a brain surgeon who is ready to help only those who are ready to help themselves. I mean working with the committed investors or helping people generate commitment to work with you.

Q9 - Do you follow some kind of sales system that helps you in converting clients? Can you give a little background about your sales process that you follow from start (prospecting) to end (client closing)?

As I shared earlier our business model is 100 % pull model and not a push model. Honestly, we do not follow any sales system. Our primary point of contact with potential clients or investors is our

blog and now our books. On blog Manish engages people with the conversation of living a good financial life. Out of a few thousand readers a few choose to move ahead with our paid services or products.

More than sales process we have chosen the path of educating investors and let people experience our knowledge and work before anything else. We believe it is not about closing a sale but it is about opening a new relationship.

From the very beginning we have chosen to do good and deep work with our clients and continued collecting video and written testimonials from our clients. Most of the people read past client's experiences on our services page and choose to become our client. My advice to new planners is to only focus on doing good work and share your good work with more and more people; it is one of the best ways to get new clients.

Q10 - What are some of the strong ways you have discovered over a period of time to grow your client list? also how do you service your clients? and How do you get referrals?

The only way one can grow his/her client list is by doing good work. Because only good work will help you get referrals. Never focus on getting more clients instead focus 100% on the person who is in front of you. The more you focus on the person standing in front of you the better you are able to serve that person. We have a few clients who choose to work with us on year on year basis. The rule is simple instead of thinking of getting more clients get tuned with the process of serving one person at a time. According to me as a financial planner or financial coach the fastest way to prosper is to keep learning how can you make your clients prosper. Your fee is a measurement how confident you are about producing results in people's financial life.

Q11 - What according to you is the hard part of financial planning profession? and How do you make HARD part fun? If someone is struggling asking for fees or is convincing people what would you like to suggest? Can you please share the nitty gritty of exactly how a person makes money in this profession?

According to me when you love what you do all the hard part becomes fun part. Every business has challenges wrapped with it. You get paid in life only for hard things and not for those easy ones. Regarding fees one has to practice speaking their fees. I did a lot of practice in the initial days of my practice. I would stand in front of mirror and would practice speaking my fees. A new planner has to practice speaking his/her fees till he/she is 100% comfortable with fee conversation. If you are

comfortable with your fees then your potential clients will also get comfortable with your fees. In the initial period do not focus on fees but focus on mastering the game of enrolling clients. You can get anything in life when you are able to ask for it.

You can make money in this business by serving people online or offline. We have somehow mastered the online model and we see that we are low on our overheads because of online model. If you want to make money in this business then keep strict accounts. You can also succeed with offline model if you focus and build your niche.

To make money in this business you have to sell financial products and your services. You got to constantly invite people to try out your offerings. Make a commitment to sell something each day and you will make a lot of money in this business.

Q 12 - What role does technology play in the overall success of a financial planner or advisor? Is it important to focus on having a strong online presence or not? What about social media? Do you get clients using social media?

Our biggest strength is use of technology and all the credit goes to Manish. He is an MCA by profession and he takes care of the technology part of our business. He is extremely good with excel and bringing the element of automation to our business which makes the overall processes smooth. We are able to handle so many tasks only because of Manish's technological inputs. I think it is extremely important for financial planners to use technology to grow in their business. If you are not technically sound hire these skills from market place.

It is important to have online presence because that is how people from different parts of India or world will come to know about your work. Use technology to showcase your work, talent and knowledge.

A lot of planners think they can get clients by using social media. I do not fully agree that social media helps in getting clients. More than high-tech choose to be Hi-touch with people. We are into relationship business and for that we need to have strong conversation's that creates an impact.

In our case Manish is Hi-tech and with experience I have learnt to be Hi-touch. I think that is a deadly combination that helps us in using the best of technology and best of enrolment conversations. Create a balance when it comes to social media or any other medium that you are using for generating clients.

Q13 - What kind of personal finance software's or tools you would recommend to new planners and advisors? They help you in making the overall business process smooth

There are several personal finance software's and tools available in the market that can be useful to new financial planners and advisors. According to us you should make use of them because that helps you in managing more clients in less time. Pick the one that suits you and your business model.

When you get entangled with manual work like preparing plans manually you spend more time on creating plan then with client. We have created our own excel based tool for creating financial plans, with the help of it we are able to serve more clients with speed.

14 - As you probably know, there are a ton of misconceptions in our field, and the vast majority of new financial planners enter the profession but find it difficult to establish their practice. What do you think the #1 reason is for why most financial planners are not able to grow their practice? And what do you think the #1 key to success is?

A lot of people quit their high paying job by declaring personal finance is "My passion". Before taking any step put your earning structures in place, see that you do not disturb your stream of income.

According to me the number one reason why most financial planners fail is when they start getting influenced by established financial planners. You have seen their success but you have no idea about their struggle days.

Most financial planners choose the path of pleasing people rather than serving. You don't have to be nice to people (I don't mean you have to be rude to them) but be the first person who is going to tell truth to them about the way they are in their financial life. It is about calling cake as cake and shit as shit.

Q15 - How important it is for a new planner to gain experience before he starts his own business? Is CFP program sufficient for someone to start his own practice?

You need to gain some experience to learn the dynamics of this business. You can learn them on your own or you can take someone's help. I would suggest find someone who is already doing what you are doing and put a request to that person to be your mentor. You will succeed faster in this

profession with the help of your mentor. Your mentor will help you see more opportunities and possibilities that you are not able to see on your own.

CFP is a good program to be a part of. Many people need financial help and more and more professionals are required to cater the needs. Most colleges in my view are only helping students in building their resumes. Also most students are interested in building their resumes. It is high time the focus shifts from building resume to really building a skill and career.

Q16 - What kind of books or journals you read for your personal development? What kind of books, programs and conferences you would recommend for those who are new into the profession of financial planning? Do they need to read beyond personal finance to become successful?

You have to be a student of life and continue reading all that interests you. If you are new into this profession read different financial papers. I once did one workshop where I was taught how to read business papers. It was interesting to learn the skill of reading financial newspaper.

Do not restrict yourself to only reading about personal finance. Read all kinds of books and participate in different kinds of training and development programs. There is always something to learn from each book that you pick. One of the book close to my heart and on which we have based our business is a book called Go-giver by bob burg. We have literally made a commitment to design our business from this book.

I start my day reading some inspiring piece that I have collected over a period of time and also end my day in a similar way. Do not get addicted to buying a lot of books, it is better reading one book in depth rather than scanning 100 books a day. I would recommend programs offered by mission control, landmark education and vipassana programs. It is important to develop a clear mind in any profession because when you have a clear mind good decisions will happen on its own.

Q17 - How important is "CERTIFICATION" to become a successful financial planner or advisor? Do you think the programs available in the market are complete in itself?

We are not certified so we may not be the right people to comment on this. We would like to encourage more and more people to become CFP's because it is an institution that certifies you and makes you a professional. This profession is evolving and it will take it's time to evolve. If you are

thinking of going for certification than go ahead. But don't do any program just for getting a certificate; participate fully in the program to develop yourself as a professional financial planner.

Q18 - If given a chance then what kind of program you would like to design for creating powerful breed of financial planners or financial coaches out in the world?

We would like to create a one year planners school where people come, stay for one year and learn every dynamics of this business. It will be a place where entrepreneurs are produced. We would like to have program for planners which is practical, which teaches sales and technology part of this business.

We would like to have team of experienced planners who would train students on different aspects of financial planning profession. We would like to establish our planning school in some quite place like Lavasa. This is our dream; with some good funding we can give our dream shape.

Q19 - How do you envisage the future of financial planning profession? What kind of business opportunities you would want new planners should focus on?

The financial planning profession is changing and it is changing for the best. More and more people will show interest in planning their finances. Those who will focus on helping people take action will win in this business. Those who will take the route of mentoring will win.

The focus will shift from number and calculations to really bringing a change in the overall attitude of investors. Life planning is one thing which will help to elevate this profession. The concept of life planning is holistic as it focuses on each and every area of investor's life and not just money.

Also personal finance education has a lot of potential in it. I urge every financial planner to start working in this area as many business opportunities will come your way if you are into it. Women investor awareness is one more area where huge potential resides. Be the first one to explore these opportunities and produce a lot of wealth.

Q20: I'm sure you have some final 'words of wisdom'

I would like to suggest all new financial planners or those who have some experience to slow down. By slowing down I mean focusing on one person at a time. Focus on true service and creating deeper impact on people that you meet. Constantly find out ways how you can add more value to investor's life. Wake-up every day with one question in your mind who can I serve today?

Life is NOT a dress rehearsal -- it's a live show! You owe it to yourself to put on your best Possible performance. Period

“If I had eight hours to
chop down a tree, I’d
spend six sharpening
my axe”

- Abraham Lincoln

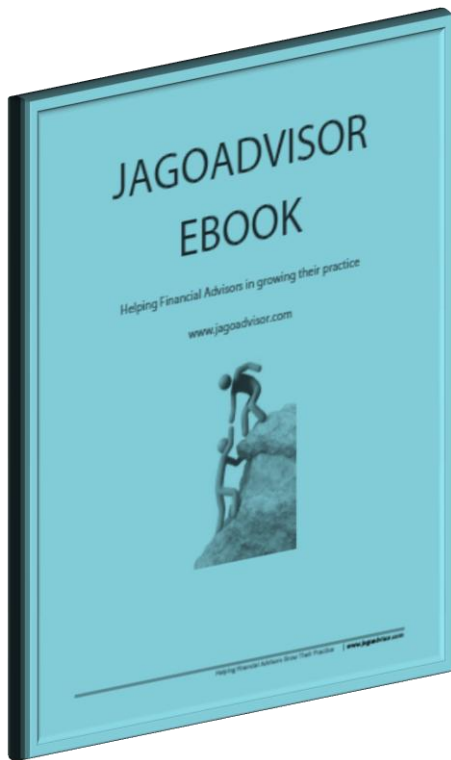
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What other Planners/Advisors are Saying

I liked the example of Fish, how true it is, our core business activity is to meet as many prospective client as possible and share with them the work we do. I heard SRK in one of his interviews where he quoted " If I don't go out and do my work (acting) even for a single day, I feel I have not brushed my teeth for that day".

I always keep saying to myself and other's whom I interact, don't worry about the output, if your inputs are right your output has to be right. Many of them are really worried about what would be the output without giving a thought of what has really gone in the process. The journey so far has surely, not been a cakewalk, trying to gain some more ground, will elaborate latter on this.

- **Rajiv Mulik**

Greetings from Malaysia. I am so glad to read this article and knowing that someone has the same passion as mine. I am very passionate to help the unit trust, insurance , bank advisors, etc. to transition their practice to become a trusted advisors. I got myself certified as ICF credential coach and have been since coaching these financial planners.

Currently there are only a few CFP with certified coach and practice Financial Coaching in Malaysia. My company also developed a coaching model called 4D engagement model to coach the clients. Look forward to seeing you and learn more from you

- **Wee Hen, PlanPlus**

I really liked the myth #1, I completely agree that teaching your client nowhere affects your business or you lose client. It is very much true clients are with us because they want to hear from us and need value addition as well. Myth#3, rightly said. Never charge low, rather charge a right fee.

My charges are between 20k-40k pa (and it justifies my work as well the services I deliver to clients) Myth#7, who said ppl are not ready to pay fee, it's just you and I that keeping product selling approach in mind, thus get hesitated asking for fee. I run Fee-Only model, I proudly ask fee.

- **Soubhagya Kumar Patra**

Nandish, Very good points mentioned in this article. In fact these are the 'arteries and veins' of financial planning process. What actually many advisers do in the name of financial planning is the structural part (not to talk of the standardized solutions in the market), and devalue the word and the service.

I feel that financial planning as a service, as it took birth in the financial world and also as it is taught as CFP subject, is quite a living thing. Now it is up to we planners how we actually serve clients.Thanks for reinforcing the values of financial advisory!

- **Sukhvinder Sidhu**

I really enjoyed reading this post. Because I could relate so much to your core expertise – unfolding money scripts in clients lives!! This is precisely what life planning does and from there on nudges clients gently to identify their personal and financial goals in harmony with their values and priorities, provide with a one pager action plan and facilitate them to implement it. Of course financial planning as a process is used to meet these goals.

When this is done, we have seen that people have 'bought' into the financial plan and they get serious about implementing the recommendations to achieve their goals. We become the 'choice architects' for clients. That is precisely our job as a financial planner. Read more on the word 'choice architect' in the book – 'Nudge' by Richard Thaler. You will enjoy it. This book is awesome.

- **Partha Iyenger**

Other Financial Advisor's Communities and Forum

Networkfp

Sadique Neelgund is the Founder of Network FP which is an online publication and conducts professional training programs & conferences for financial planners in India. Mainly you can find most of the CFP's and other kind of financial advisors here.

CafeMutual

Cafemutual is a meeting point for all mutual fund professionals. So whether you are a self-employed independent financial advisor (IFA) or a hot-shot private banker with a big bank or a CEO of an AMC or a back office girl, they have something for you.

IFAGalaxy

IFA GALAXY is a group of Independent Financial Advisors having online membership across India. The Objective and Motto of IFA Galaxy is "Knowledge Sharing". It has been conducting regular Knowledge Summits at various cities addressed by renowned Speakers covering variety of topics.

WealthForumEzine

Wealth Forum E-zine - the voice of India's wealth management industry - is India's FIRST EXCLUSIVE magazine for the wealth management industry.

FAAIDA

Financial Advisors Association of India (FAAIDA) is a body for independent financial advisors (and those in related roles) in the Indian financial market. Being an association run by advisors means FAAIDA can constantly assess what is happening in the financial advising industry.

AskCircle

AskCircle is another group of people who represent financial advisors and they keep doing lot of programs for advisors with the mission of helping them enhance their capabilities.

FIFA

FIFA is the foundation of Independent Financial Advisors which is the group of financial advisors which represents the advisor community.

SOFP

Society of Financial Planners ("SOFP") is established to promote professionalism in financial planning. It recognizes and registers Certified Financial Planners who are in the field of financial planning.