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In This Issue:
The Case for Collaboration



The Case for Collaboration

A hot topic in the planning community and in management literature generally is working in collaborative teams. We find that in many circumstances collaboration is a very useful way to work with others. We also find that there are pitfalls that may come along the way.

The first step in collaboration with your advisor or advisors is to create the expectation that you-the Client--must stay in charge of your results. It is also important for you to fully participate as part of the team. Collaboration includes you.

Often we see collaboration gets confused with cooperation or worse, the advisor drives the process instead of the Client. Here's the difference, as we see it:

- Collaboration - We work together with our Clients and other team members to craft solutions for our Clients that have high value and bring in several different viewpoints. The final result is one where the sum is greater than the individual components.
- Cooperation - The Client cooperates with the advisors, and the advisors don't throw rocks at each other. Each of the advisors works in an individual silo and helps work on the Client's problem from their world view. The advisors don't spend a lot of time listening to the viewpoints of others on the team, sometimes not even the Client. Advisors may make assumptions about what the Client wants from short conversations with the Client or lead advisors on the engagement.
- Advisor driven process - Clearly, the advisor should not be driving, but we hear that Clients sometimes feel they are "talked into" actions they don't really understand. Although specific recommendations may turn out in the long run, we feel the Client should be comfortable with and understand actions taken on their behalf.

We've never met an advisor that doesn't say they are interested in collaborating with other advisors and with their Clients, but in reality, collaboration takes a lot of work.

This leads us to start thinking about the concept of community as it relates to collaboration. For true collaboration to happen there must be high trust between the members of the team and the Client. The Client must know the advisors understand their goals and are working in consort to further those goals. The

We believe that a successful wealth management relationship starts with clarity of purpose.

Before embarking on any plans or strategies with our Client, we first seek to develop a clear understanding of your personal and financial goals.

We then work with you to select and implement strategies that will help you move toward your goals.

advisors must understand the mission, vision, values and goals of the Client and trust that everyone on the team not only understands the goals, but has the competency, communication skills and willingness to put the Client's interests ahead of their individual interests.

Within a collaborative team, there can be conflicts of interest from time to time. The members of a collaborative team must not only understand this, but be able to articulate what their own conflicts of interest might be. Once conflicts are identified, the advisors and the Client can manage them.

Most importantly, you-the Client-must keep an eye on the outcomes you want. You will need to articulate your goals to your team, not once but on an ongoing basis, in order to ensure that everyone keeps the big picture in mind. Your Wealth Manager can be very helpful in keeping your other advisors focused on pulling together in the right direction.

True collaboration can be an expensive proposition, so it is important that it result in a constructive payoff, and the process needs to be managed. If the problem or opportunity is large, then a collaborative solution has the opportunity to bring you much better results than standard ways of receiving advice. The positive return could be psychic or economic, but it is always measured in the mind of you, the Client.

If you decide this is an appropriate way to work on a result for you then we encourage you to do so.

We at Stage 2 Planning Partners spend a great deal of time and effort understanding the collaborative process. We would be glad to provide a complimentary consultation with you explaining how collaboration can work and how we can help you assemble a collaborative team to assist you in meeting your goals.

Warmest Regards,

Stage 2 Planning Partners

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The Patrick Group | 20 Kimball Avenue | Suite 201 | South Burlington | VT | 05403