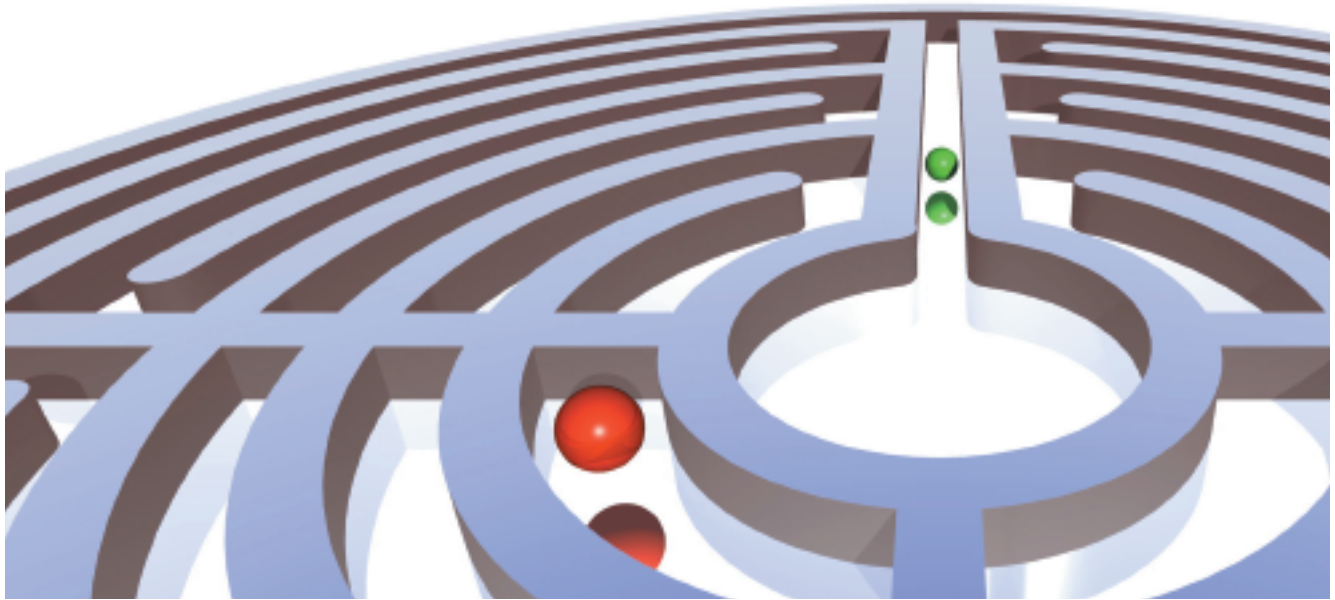


From the Beginning

The financial services industry can seem daunting to new advisors — but it doesn't have to be that way

by Meryln Kevin Fernandes



Many financial services professionals have a variety of stories that detail moments in their career when they may have second-guessed themselves or felt unsure of their ability to succeed in this business. Further, I would bet a majority of these stories are from when they were just starting out.

Of course, the hard times are almost always overshadowed by the successes. And as a relative newcomer to the business, I've had my share of both. There are some basic strategies, however, that have helped me consistently qualify for MDRT since my second year in the business.

For the rookie — or experienced producer — who may be struggling, here are some tips that might help you find success on a more regular basis.

Walk the walk

Always remember that to be a professional, you have to act like a professional.

Perseverance. Because the financial services industry is not a business wherein a producer is likely to see instant success, you first need to accept the fact that being rejected is rather com-

mon. When I first started, for example, I heard no 15 to 20 times before I closed my first case.

Every successful person will inevitably go through ups and downs in their business. Your biggest challenge is to work under pressure with patience and endurance, and to be determined to persevere through all of the trying times.

Time management. New advisors also need to effectively manage their time. You need to determine when you work best, whether it is during the morning or evening, or while relaxed or under pressure.

Once you know your working habits, plan your days accordingly and schedule and prioritize your work during the most productive part of your day. You should also be sure to take time away for rest. Typically, I take at least one day of the week off from work.

Preparation. An important part of my success is my impeccable preparation. I make sure I arrive at my client's office on time and am organized and ready for the meeting. I pay close attention to every detail, right down to the clothes I wear.

I was initially very reluctant to spend money



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on my own wardrobe, as I thought it was more important to use this income on my family. But then I realized that clients are less likely to believe what I say is important if I am not dressed in a prestigious, professional manner. As my mentor once told me, “Clothes don’t make the person, but they do make 90 percent of what you see of them.”

Be passionate. I always remind myself that being an advisor is about helping my clients reach their goals — not about me reaching my own goals. If producers only work for the money, they will always be underpaid.

I love what I do and I take joy in helping people secure their financial futures. I take my passion for my work to every meeting I have with a prospect or client — and it shows. My clients know that I love my job and that I am genuinely concerned about their insurance needs. People will see through you if you are not sincere, and they can tell the difference between an advisor who cares and one who is only concerned with his or her commission.

Know what you want

When you develop clarity about your future, you become more productive in your present. Think about what you want to accomplish and then give yourself deadlines. Write these deadlines on a calendar that you keep in front of you, dividing all of the tasks on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

I find it helpful to then visualize my goals. For example, I wanted to sell enough to qualify for the car my carrier was offering as an incentive. I had my children cut out pictures of the car, and I stuck them to the walls in my office. We’d also point the car out to one another when we saw it on the road while we were driving. Having this incentive helped me focus more on the business I needed to do to accomplish my goal.

You are the product

Your clients and prospects need to trust you or they will not buy your products: You are your company’s greatest asset. I find that being myself works best, as people can quickly recognize when someone is being insincere.

I also ask all of my prospects how they got involved in their respective businesses. I take the time to listen to them tell their story, and I ask questions so they know that I am interested in

what they are saying. I encourage them to share their greatest ambition, and I try to help them raise their own expectations. I’ve had many clients say to me: “I don’t know why I am talking so much today. I’ve shared things with you I haven’t talked about to some of my friends.”

I share things about myself with my clients, as well. I tell them about the success I’ve had, as well as the commitment I’ve made to the financial services industry. Your clients and prospects need to be confident that you are here to stay and are serious about what you do, and they also want to know they are dealing with someone who is successful and capable of achieving his or her goals.

Innovative prospecting

Finding solid prospects is perhaps one of the biggest obstacles for newcomers to the financial services industry. I make time to look through local newspapers and magazines, as well as any employment news I can find. When I see that someone has been promoted to chief executive officer or general manager, for example, I send them a letter introducing myself and congratulating them on the promotion.

I’ve also worked with local grade schools, sponsoring a “Dream Big” contest for their students. The children are asked to write down their wildest dreams, including a drawing, and the most innovative dream receives a prize.

The parents are then sent a copy of what their child submitted, and my office calls on each family to set up an appointment to discuss their child’s dream. Most parents are more than happy to meet with me and learn more about how I can help them make their child’s dream a reality.

I would also suggest that new advisors set aside specific days of the week for prospecting. Once you’ve set your schedule, don’t leave your office until you have the next week filled with appointments. I choose to do all of my prospecting on Thursday and Friday so I can start my weekend on a positive note.

Entering any new business can be overwhelming, particularly when you are solely responsible for your success or failure. If you love what you do, however, and have a few basic strategies to get you and keep you motivated, you are already well on your way to a successful career. **RTT**



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