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When dealing with couples, make sure both partners are equal participants

By Kat Shermack | April 12, 2016 10:50

For many married couples it is assumed that the husband takes care of the finances. This mentality is particularly common among baby boomers.

While some financial advisors and clients might be used to doing business this way, you should encourage both husbands and wives to fully understand their finances. Women live an average of five to 10 years longer than men, so bringing the wife on board should be a priority for every advisor.

Here are four tips to encourage your clients to see their finances as a team effort:

1. Build a relationship
While you might feel awkward bringing up the fact that women generally outlive men, it is important to do so in order for your clients to plan properly.

"Women need dialogue and trust, and they need to be validated and heard," says Christine White, an advisor with Money Coaches Canada.

Once that trust is established, it's OK to be upfront about life's realities. "You can be blunt if you already have the relationship with the woman." White says.

2. Help them visualize realistic goals
You might be used to discussing your clients' investments in terms of rates of return and asset allocation. But with women clients, that is not always the best approach.

"Women look at things more holistically," White says. She suggests asking your client what she wants her life to look like. Does she want to be able to have a comfortable retirement? Does she want to be able to help her children and grandchildren?

Get your clients to articulate their goals and together you can work on achieving them.

"Retirees are out at the gym and going out for lunch," White says. "They want nice things, so you have to paint that picture and help create that vision."

Slideshow: Do men and women clients really differ?(http://www.investmentexecutive.com/-/slideshow-do-men-and-women-clients-really-differ-)

3. Emphasize the woman's role
Couples might not be aware of it, but the wife is often the "chief financial officer" of the household. While a husband might see himself as the main decision maker, his wife is buying groceries for the family and clothes for the children while overseeing the family cash flow.

"Women maintain the household," White says. "If they don't have an interest in learning about stocks and bonds, that's fine. But the decisions should be joint."

4. Be patient
Today, it is becoming more common for both men and women to understand and participate in their financial plans.

"I think [attitudes are] changing," White says. "Women have more strength because they are out in the world more, and are asking more questions."

However, older clients may have difficulty in changing their ways. For some members of the boomer generation, it was normal for their mothers to not have a bank account at all, let alone play a significant role in financial planning. So, for some clients, becoming educated and involved will be a slow process. But, by establishing a connection with women clients, you can begin to earn their trust and help them become engaged.

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