BY ANDREA LEHNER

BUILDING TRUST, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Listening is the Underprinning of Success

Walter Watson Jr., president and founder of Atlantic Wealth Group, has been in the financial industry since 1997, long enough to see both the rise of discount brokerage houses and, more recently, the advent of online tools and robo-advisors. And he's also seen the fall of trust in banks. Through it all, he's maintained a philosophy that listening is the key to earning trust while education and action is the key to keeping it.

Watson, who went independent in 2009, (now with almost 20 years' experience under his belt), said establishing trust was paramount for that transition during a time when banks were in decline. "I was able to show clients that it's really not about the institution," he said. "It's about the client relationship with the advisor and the client's understanding of the market and how advisors can help clients understand the world."

His client-focused and holistic philosophy recently inspired Watson to return to school to complete his CFP and to provide cutting edge technology to his clients. "At first I was—just like every other advisor—unclear on how effective the robo-advisors would be at delivering what they promised," Watson explained. Today, he offers clients a variety of online resources and tools to help investors determine their risk score and manage their accounts online.

"The robo-approach is great," Watson added. "I think it will create more educated investors. The generations after me—I'm over 50—are more online savvy and use it a heck of a lot more than my generation does, or did, or will. Giving them online access to use tools is great."

Education is one of the cornerstones of Watson's practice. By listening, educating, and systematic communications, Watson strives to understand and respond to each client's unique situation.

"Our planning takes into account best and worst case scenarios and long term care needs," Watson said, explaining that he only recommends products that fit the long-term wealth building and wealth retention strategies he creates for each client.

One of today's greatest challenges, he added, is making sure clients have enough wealth to last throughout their retirement and to pass to future generations. As a certified estate planner, he considers seeing clients being able to live well as his greatest success.

"I think of estate planning as more of a personal thing," he said. "What are the clients' wishes for themselves, their families, and their charities? How do they want to leave a legacy? It's more personal."

In seeking to achieve these goals, Watson sticks to concepts like conservative allocation, principal protection, low fees, and managing client expectations. "We don't let fear cloud their judgment," he added.

"For us it's about pursuing a return using a traditional asset allocation, lowering beta, and using alternatives," Watson said.

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