

Harford Financial Group President Adam Freeland Earning Trust Key to the Advisor Relationship

BY LINDA L. ESTERSON



President Adam Freeland

Adam Freeland knows that trust is the core of all relationships. His military background and life experiences serve as the foundation of his leadership of Harford Financial Group (www.harfordfinancialgroup.com), provider of strategic financial planning and investment management services.

That's why he freely shares his background, which reveals quite a bit to garner respect. Freeland persevered through many challenges and obstacles during his lifetime, beginning with his parents' divorce when he was young, which left his extended family to help raise him and his sister. His aunt, a history teacher, took them to Civil War battlefields and provided the stability they needed. After high school, Freeland joined the Navy's rigorous nuclear engineering program and he served for six years of active duty, stationed in Orlando, Florida, Saratoga Springs, New York, and in the Mediterranean and Caribbean.

"It taught me how to think," he says, referring to the military focus on the

'big picture.' "We were always trained on what could go wrong and we were always trained on contingency planning. I bring that attitude into what we do. There are possibilities and probabilities. We never want our clients to be caught off-guard."

In the back of his mind, however, there was a fascination with the finance field.

"I always was interested in finance; I always loved numbers," he says. "I always loved investing."

After his military service, Freeland worked full time during the day and attended class in the evenings, earning a bachelor's degree in technology and management from the University of Maryland Global Campus and an M.B.A. in finance from the Johns Hopkins University Carey Business School. Freeland spent 13 years as a defense contractor, providing professional and technical training all over the country, as well as, teaching Dale Carnegie in the evenings. Dale Carnegie provides nationwide sales and leadership training.

Freeland had studied alongside classmates working for T.Rowe Price and other financial firms, but he was hesitant to start

his career from the bottom to build a book of business. Already a client of Harford Financial Group, it was following a confidential discussion with founders Matthew Rehak and Paul Smeton that his financial future became clearer.

In 2006, Rehak and Smeton asked Freeland to join the firm as part of their succession plan. Despite enduring a pay cut, Freeland took the plunge, and earned industry designations including the six-module CFP® (Certified Financial Planner™) certification. He worked with the company founders for eight years, building relationships and earning the trust of existing and new clients.

Freeland likens his commitment to professional growth to that of a physician who completes specialty training beyond medical school like an anesthesiologist or cardiologist. He has extended his education to include such designations as Wealth Management Certified Professional, Retirement Income Certified Professional, Chartered Retirement Plans Specialist, Accredited Investment Fiduciary® and CLTC -Certified in Long Term Care.

In 2014, Freeland purchased the firm



Harford Financial staff show community support at a gala for The John Carroll School.

with a strong commitment to serving Harford County, both as an employer and a key service provider. Today, the firm boasts a staff of 14, many of whom are Harford County residents. Six advisors predominantly serve the public sector of Harford County – teachers, firefighters, police officers and federal employees as well as business owners and executives, helping with business value growth and succession planning. In addition, Freeland continues Rehak's charge to provide opportunities to women in the male-dominated field. Two former interns have advanced their careers to become key members of the firm's leadership team. Diane Kurek serves as Harford Financial's business manager, running the finance, human resources and special projects divisions, and Melissa Mullan is a top advisor for the firm's broker-dealer and also serves as the firm's compliance officer.

When he assumed the reigns, Freeland vowed to maintain the firm's client-centric values. Today, the 40-year-old firm operates under a directed set of six values that encapsulate the way it conducts business: Relationships, Purpose, Service, Value, Teamwork and Professionalism.

Harford Financial focuses not only on its relationships with clients but also with employees and the community. The firm strives to maximize returns for clients, satisfaction for employees and philanthropic efforts to benefit the community. The firm is focused on building long-term, trusted, and valued relationships among all three of its partner groups.

Over the last two years, the firm has transitioned its practice to "Life Centered Financial Planning," which focuses on service to maximize returns that provide the tools needed to meet life's goals. This can be to provide money for spending time with family, pursuing hobbies and interests and other activities that are individually purpose driven. It's a "return on life" set up as a return on investment aligned with the client's financial and personal goals.

A subset of the firm's values are three core competencies: human resources, strategic planning and communication. Treating employees well translates to strong customer service. Strategic planning ensures growth for the company and its clients both in the short-term and over the long haul. And communication relates to articulating the complex world of finance and investing in a way that clients can understand.

"We not only have a professional, fiduciary



Harford Financial Group team

responsibility to our clients to just do what's right for them, legally and professionally, but we really do care about people and making sure what we are doing resonates with them," Freeland explains. "It's not just about focusing on the relationships or the technology. It's both, but it's also about being technologically proficient, having the skill set of a financial planner with communication and relationship skills. And it's about staying current with the trends and delivering through technology."

Freeland's love of history led him to read about historical leaders. Ulysses S. Grant's biography by Ron Chernow shared the keys to winning the Civil War: it wasn't about winning the tactical battles on the battlefield but instead about cutting off supplies, waterways and railways. This gave Freeland his "aha" moment.

"The key is to think strategically," he says, citing another book, *The Infinite Game*. "Instead of just playing for the short term, it's about how you think for the long term. We are positioning the firm to think long term to better serve the clients we have."

This mentality applies to the recent market impact of the coronavirus. Freeland maintains that long-term planning is essential.

"The money that people have in the stock market shouldn't be for them to use for another five years, if not longer," he says. "It's tough to understand when you see the

figures go down. But it's understanding that's not money you're going to use, even if you're retired, for a period of time."

Freeland acknowledges that some individuals follow the market and choose to invest through online brokers. But he stresses the value of enlisting the services of a trained financial advisor to a plumber or electrician with years of experience. Clients can go to Home Depot or Lowe's and buy supplies, but they don't have the time or experience to install new pipes or run electricity into an addition.

"Our best clients tend to be people that don't want to spend the time to do that themselves," he says. "A good financial planner provides that value because it's not just the investment returns, it's really helping to understand estate planning and cash flow management and debt management. It's helping to understand insurances and put it all together for the client."

Financial advisors are often part of a team of experts, including attorneys, CPAs and insurance specialists, to whom clients turn for guidance. But ultimately, it's the client who makes the decisions.

"We're like a good professional golf caddie. They're not just carrying the clubs around. They know the course. They provide insight and advice. At the end of the day, they give the advice, the golfer plays the shot and they're there to be with them along the way." **I95 Content Marketing**