

## TRENDS

### What Have You Done for Me Lately?

BY SIDNEY LEBLANC

Uncertain markets, an unsteady economy, recruiting challenges, escalating expenses and other critical issues find many broker dealers in a quandary about how to differentiate themselves from their competition ... Difficult, yes, but it's mandatory to do so because the differentiating factor is not simply the caliber of valued-added services and support with a personal and innovative twist at higher levels.

Firms also need to be very careful about cultural changes, and eliminating or scaling back on support, training, technology, and other advisory services in order to compete. If major changes are made, the risk, of course, is the potential of losing advisors because they are unhappy with the changes.

### Family is a Priority and They Mean It

The wise people at Independent Financial Group (IFG) don't just give lip-service about how advisors should balance their professional and personal lives. They make it easy for them to do so. Their culture is family-oriented and they easily blend "family" into their organization, which includes spouse and kids' invitations to their conferences.

According to IFG managing director, David A. Fischer, "We dedicate substantial efforts to building long-term relationships with advisors, their staff and their families. Those efforts start at the top of the company and run through every department. Senior management has set the precedent by taking the time to learn about our reps' individual businesses as well as their family lives. One of our OSJs very recently sent us a hand-written note that said, 'Family and friendship have been the Cornerstone of IFG ... I am so privileged to call you friends.'" "

Quality of life is a top priority at IFG and, as mentioned, is embedded in their culture. Said Fischer, "Most of our advisors bring their families to our National Conference and Top Producer Conference where they are actually part of the program." This includes all social functions, some of the business functions, and special family-oriented speaking presentations. "Because we so outwardly welcome families, rep attendance at our conferences has run 90% - 95%," he continued. This atmosphere also creates an opportunity for their staff and advisors to develop deeply rooted, long-term bonds.

At IFG's Top Producer Conference in Hawaii, they even encouraged their sponsor companies to bring their families and they were welcome at all of the IFG social events.

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