



INSPIRE

Your perspective will save you in tough times

You're not wrong to feel under pressure but don't allow yourself to be overwhelmed, writes Nigel Bowen.

There was never a golden age of financial advising when the regulatory environment moved at a leisurely pace and politicians, journalists and the general public praised those who help people realise their financial goals.

But, as Financial Planning Association chief executive officer Dante De Gori notes, the current demands on financial advisers are particularly gruelling.

"If you're a life-insurance adviser you are having to determine how to adjust your business model to accommodate the regulatory changes around the capping of commissions," he says.

"You may be an experienced adviser but if you don't have a degree, you've got to figure out how to reach 'degree-equivalent status' while continuing to meet all your existing commitments. Plus, as is happening throughout the economy, technology is changing both the way financial advisers operate and the demographics they service."

Swimming rather than sinking

Financial advisers may have every right to feel besieged but they won't do themselves any favours by adopting a bunker mentality.

"There are advisers who feel in control of their destinies," notes Sue Viskovic, managing director of financial planning business coaching and advice firm Elixir Consulting. "They concentrate on finding a market segment they want to serve, developing a clear value proposition and generating fantastic advice for their clients. If they do need to, for example, upgrade their educational qualifications or change their fee structure, they calmly and methodically construct a strategy to do those things. Advisers like that don't feel paralysed by external pressures. Instead, they accept they need to stay on their toes and always be improving their service offer. They also keep an eye on emerging trends and how technological and regulatory changes are playing out."

"All financial advisers are facing much the same challenges. There's a proportion of advisers who see those challenges as problems and feel helpless. Then there's a proportion who see them as opportunities they can respond to in an entrepreneurial fashion," notes Paul Findlay, managing director of Professional Development Training (PDT).

Guiding points in a tough market

- Find a market segment you want to serve.
- Develop a clear value proposition.
- Create business strategies to adapt to changes.
- Keep an eye on emerging trends, market changes.
- Keep things in perspective.
- Concentrate on your options, not constraints.

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Sue Viskovic, Elixir

Cultivating the eye of the tiger

If you're not the every-soul-crushing-difficulty-is-a-cunningly-disguised-brilliant-opportunity type you can learn to be, argues Findlay.

"There are those whose default mindset is one of seeing troubles and feeling swamped. Then there are those whose default mindset is one of seeing favourable conditions and feeling upbeat," says Findlay. "But in both cases, the mindset is learned, which means a different one can be learned."

Findlay sees cancer charity Camp Quality as a good example of how shifting perspective can have dramatic real-world effects.

"If you're a Camp Quality staffer working with children with cancer, some of who don't make it, it's easy to lapse into doom and gloom. That can happen even if you intellectually recognise it is not an attitude that's doing you, or the sick children you're interacting with, any good."

A decade ago, Camp Quality developed a program to train staff to, firstly, keep things in perspective and, secondly, always concentrate on the options they have rather the conditions that are constraining them. That is, they're encouraged to always approach issues by asking 'What else can I try?' and 'Is there a different approach that might work?'

The number of sick days taken is a useful metric of how engaged and positive a workforce is. The average sick leave taken by Camp Quality staff more than halved, from 6.5 to 3.2 days a year, after they were taught how to maintain a resilient and optimistic mindset.

PDT has partnered with Camp Quality to take its program (called ORANGES, for Optimism, Resilience, Attitude, Now, Gratitude, Energy and Strengths) to the wider world. Findlay says dramatic results are not unusual.

“When organisations train their staff to have more empowered attitudes, metrics such as revenue, employee engagement and retention and sick leave all usually show a marked improvement,” he notes.

Adapt, don't die

De Gori points out financial advisers aren't the only ones having to deal with change. “All industries have their challenges,” he says. “In any field, you can't stick your head in the sand and expect to make it. Organisations such as the Financial Planning Association can provide support. But it's the financial planners willing to keep adapting and improving who will find themselves in the box seat.”

Viskovic encourages her financial advisor clients to consider the example of travel agents.

“Just as people can access investment tools online, they can book flights and accommodation online,” she says. “Nobody had to use a travel agent to arrange a holiday nowadays but there are still plenty of travel agencies around. Why? Because travel agents – at least the ones that survived – achieved clarity around what elements of their service people couldn't replicate with an online booking tool and updated their value proposition accordingly. They also embraced the same technology people could access directly, to deliver their services more efficiently.”

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