

Transcription details:

Host: Bill Coppel, First Clearing Chief Client Growth Officer
Guest: Hope Reiner, Hope & I Founder

Transcription results:

Intro Welcome to The Next Frontier. Where we examine what the role of the financial advisor will be in a world that's being disrupted by artificial intelligence and algorithms. Our mission is to spark new conversations that create stronger connections and build greater client confidence. Join us as we look at our industry and others through a new lens and explore the opportunities emerging at the intersection of high-tech and high-touch. It's time for a new conversation. Are you ready?

BILL COPPEL Hi. This is Bill Coppel and welcome to The Next Frontier. The good news is the prospect of living longer is a reality. And technology is providing us with services to help us remain independent. But Alexa can't always be there when you need her. And we need to consider that our desire for independence can lead to an unintended consequence. Isolation. According to research conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons, social isolation and loneliness have emerged as a public health issue for older Americans. Studies have found that isolation and loneliness are worse for health than obesity. And that health risks of prolonged isolation are the equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. For older adults, in particular, chronic isolation has been shown to increase the risk of heart disease, infections, depression, premature cognitive decline, and early death. But it doesn't have to be this way. The question is, how can advisors enhance their understanding of the importance of companionship and human connection to help them deliver holistic life guidance? That's what our guest, Hope Reiner, is here to help us answer. But before we get into our conversation, let me tell you a little bit about our guest. Hope is the founder of the New York City based firm, Hope & I, that provides authentic friendship for older adults who are lonely, suffering from dementia, or otherwise isolated due to health conditions like sight or hearing impairment, general depression or social anxiety. She has more than 30 years of experience working in the fields of geriatrics and dementia as a certified practitioner. And has studied and researched with experts in these fields. Hope founded her company after many years of volunteer work with people who have become isolated and somewhat marginalized. In working with this population, she creates one-on-one relationships that are stimulating and engaging, involving her clients in purposeful activities that maintain and restore their sense of self and self-confidence. Hope's work with older adults and people with special needs is reinforced by scientific research about the essential need for loving connection, engagement and interaction in our lives. Hope, welcome to The Next Frontier.

HOPE REINER Thank you so much. I'm really thrilled to be talking to you.

BILL COPPEL Well, it's great to have you with us. In reading about your background, I learned that you really started your career, your initial career in the art world. And then you successfully built a very marvelous career in publishing. Share with our audience, how you've made this transition into your own company, Hope and I.

HOPE REINER I'm very happy to do that as well. It's sort of a long and winding path. But what happened was that I did try in many ways to see how I could help older adults. And historically, nobody was really doing anything. And what happened was that I educated myself in my publishing career. I did become a certified geriatric care

manager. I became a certified dementia practitioner. And even some of the care managers started hiring me to work with their clients one on one. But then one day came when the magazine I was working for closed down. That was the end of it. And for many people, it was a sad day. But for me, it was a joyous day. Because that was my impetus to start doing the work that I'd always wanted to do. And that was why I started Hope and I.

BILL COPPEL

So even in your publishing career with this passion, you went ahead and began to really study this and get those certifications. That's really interesting. Did any of that influence the work you did in publishing?

HOPE REINER

Well, the work I did in publishing was very, very helpful to this kind of work. Because I sold advertising and I was very successful at it. In fact, I was responsible for starting a lot of magazines and positioning them in the marketplace. So all through those 33 years, I really learned how to listen. And how to judge people, and look at people, and see who they were. And listening happened to be one of the greatest things that I could do. So that did give me many tools for my toolkit. And enabled me to be able to be better at what I was doing at Hope and I.

BILL COPPEL

Well, that's quite interesting. So let me get into the conversation here. Because I think this is a very, very important topic that I'm sure our listeners will benefit from. Oftentimes, we find that people aren't isolated, in the strict sense, because maybe there's a caregiver involved or there are aides that are coming to the house. And they get regularly visited by someone. I think it'd be helpful for our listeners to understand how what you do is different. And whether or not that aide coming in, or that health care caregiver coming by, really is achieving the objective that you're focused on.

HOPE REINER

Well, there are two objectives. The aide, the caregiver, the geriatric care manager, the music therapist, they do something. Everybody does something. But the work that I do is very unique. First of all, it's evidence and science based, which I can talk about, but also, it's genuine and authentic. So that the friendship that is created between myself and the client is as real as any friendship. In fact, it's heightened by my background and my research and my studying. So I'm very sensitive to how to deal with very vulnerable, fragile people. But the most important thing is to really be that very close friend. Because that very close friend can do so much more to relieve stress and depression. And that's something that takes a lot of research, a lot of experience, a lot of know-how. And it really isn't the same as just somebody coming in and sitting with you or taking you to the park. And actually, in my work, a lot of aides have learned a lot from me because they observe how I work with their clients. And they ask me questions. And they see how their client improves and flourishes in my presence. And that's a two-way street. Everybody gets something out of it.

BILL COPPEL

So what I hear you saying is that this notion of authentic friendship, this is science-based, based on your research in the work that you've done. This authentic friendship is a form of therapy that really is important in helping people, as you put it, avoid things like depression and loneliness. What are the aspects of depression and loneliness that, say, an elderly person will experience that has a detrimental impact on their life, and their health?

HOPE REINER

First of all, when I talk about this evidence-based side of this, what science has proven is that when you connect in an authentic way. Just like you would to your good friends, and most of us have friends, so it is authentic. But that can improve your cellular plasticity. Which is a kind of scientific term that many people might understand. But you can grow new brain cells. What happens when you don't have a friend is that you deteriorate. And when you have a good friend, you flourish. And everybody can really -- many people could relate to that. Because when you're with

somebody that you like being with, you see that you're happy. And you see that you look forward to being with that person. And you think about that person. And when you're with somebody who doesn't seem to pay attention to you and doesn't seem to care, you leave that feeling quite empty and unhappy, I would think.

BILL COPPEL

So the therapeutic value here, in the context of, say, helping battle diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia. Is the work you do aimed at slowing those processes down or, in other words, maximizing the potential that person still has?

HOPE REINER

Dementia is a category. In the category of dementia, there are many different types. There's Alzheimer's, there's Lewy body, there's frontotemporal dementia. So they're not all the same. And each of those different kinds of dementias have different sides to it. Different issues, different problems that manifest differently. But I help each person, I mean, it's not a cookie-cutter way of dealing with people. Everybody is different. So that's how I deal with everybody. Getting to know them, seeing who they are, really spending time with them. And you learn who somebody is. And then when you see somebody and you notice somebody and you acknowledge somebody, then they get better. They improve. They smile more. They laugh. They feel like they are somebody. They are somebody special. And to me, every one of my clients is somebody special. And I truly love them, as they love me. It's authentic.

BILL COPPEL

What about family members? As an example, oftentimes we'll find an elderly person living within a family setting. They could be a grandparent. And there could be multiple generations in the household. There's people around, obviously. They're not "isolated". Is it the same in terms of what you do? Or is it different?

HOPE REINER

Yeah. It's mostly different. I mean, if you come upon a family that is able to really connect with that person, the fact that there's a real social, personal connection, then that's fantastic. It's not that often. Because in our society we deal with something called ageism. And when people look at an old person or their elderly parent, there's a certain kind of distance that's created. A discomfort level, which is pretty much pervasive. I would love it if more people would see that that person, that family member, that parent, father, mother, needs just to be spoken to in a very caring, loving way. Now, I know people can get annoyed and irritated. That's normal, but also there's time to be loving, and there's time to provide that connection. But it's difficult. I don't understate the fact that living with somebody with those conditions can be very stressful. That's why when I come into the family, everything, people get happier. And people can go back to work. And aides can leave the room. And it's a much more pleasant environment.

BILL COPPEL

So what I'm hearing, which I think is very interesting and important for our listeners to hear, is that even if there are family members present in a stressful situation like what you describe it. Where, perhaps, the grandparent, grandmother, the grandfather has some cognitive challenges, or perhaps has a hearing disability of some kind, bringing in someone like you, perhaps, to play that role on a regular basis not only relieves and creates a benefit to the individual that you're befriending and working with. But it also begins to lower the stress and anxiety of the family.

HOPE REINER

Exactly. But just little simple things for the family. Just go in and hug your grandmother. Hug your mother. Just say, "I love you." "What can I bring you?" Doesn't have to be a three-hour conversation. Even in my work, I'm affectionate. Not overly but, I mean, I hug my clients. I hold their hand. The touching and the connection is very important to notice somebody. So I help, in a major way, but in small ways, family can help too.

BILL COPPEL I think our listeners would also benefit from learning about your process of how you work with clients. So let's say for a moment, I wanted to hire you. Could you step us through how you would approach this as a professional?

HOPE REINER Yes. In fact, I have a recent case that I'm working on. And I can talk about that because in really just two months, we've made such strides. The person that I'm talking about, she has something called frontotemporal dementia, which is a very difficult kind of dementia. It really transforms your personality. And also you just don't understand a lot. So with this woman, I did what I always do. I listened to her, I talked. She showed me pictures of her family. And over a very short period of time, sometimes even just the first visit, a connection is created. Because I happen to be a very warm person. And I smile a lot. And my eyes light up. And I notice the person. So that first initial visit most of the time, is really the beginning. And then each successive visit, and it doesn't have to be every day, it doesn't even have to be more than an hour a week. I mean, depends on what the family can do. The relationship builds and becomes stronger and better. Because you have a great time when you're together. Whether I do-- I mean, I do all sorts of things. Opera and ballet and concerts and lectures and walks. Depending on that person. It's not just home visits. And then so that person and I do something together that I know, and I organized, and I researched they love. Because you have to be very careful. You can't do things and screw up. It has to work perfectly. So we do that together, it's a great time. And then that person reflects on it and says, "Oh." Thinks about it. And those are moments they have, and there's a warm feeling that takes over. And then, they know they're going to see me again. And so that anticipation is good. So it builds over time. And it's really very wonderful to observe. To see people really flourish. You go in, and they're sort of like a plant that needs water. And then after a while, that plant is blooming. I like that.

BILL COPPEL I like that too. That sounds great. Let me just change gears for a moment. Because I, obviously, Hope, we're having this conversation here in the latter part of March. And we're experiencing a global pandemic. You're in New York City. And I'm in St. Louis. Both of our cities are literally shut down. How are you coping with the situation? And equally as important, how are your clients coping?

S3: 15:58 Yes. Well, I'd be happy to talk with you about how I'm coping now. And then I have, if you don't mind, some suggestions about when this is finally over, how everyday people can cope in a way that I did before.

BILL COPPEL We'd love to hear that. That'd be very valuable right now.

HOPE REINER A way of coping now is I can take walks. Solitary walks. I am in touch with people. I call people. People call me. I email people I read. I dance. We can do dancing over Zoom. I watch TV. I pay a great deal of attention to what's going on in the world. And I have a cat and I'm fairly content. I'm not a real worrier. And that's just my personality. I'm very worried about people. I'm very worried about the world. But it's not about me. And on the other hand, in normal times, what I do, because it's really interesting. And I live alone. My children are grown. I have grandchildren. When I'm out and about, I always have little conversations with people. I don't even know how I do it. But they're always lovely. People like to be acknowledged. And I don't make irritating conversation. I don't do things that are inappropriate. But just little acknowledgments along the way. And those short, brief conversations do a great deal to oneself. The joy level. I recommend that to people all the time.

BILL COPPEL Sure. And I would imagine that right now, it's really important, particularly for folks that, obviously, are at home, to hear from someone and to engage in a conversation. It's got to be uplifting for all of us.

HOPE REINER Right. It is important. And I think a lot of people wait-- and you are referring to after this is over, you mean?

BILL COPPEL Sure.

HOPE REINER Yeah. Yeah. I think people feel uncomfortable. They feel like they'll be rebuffed or they're inappropriate. But I have never seen that. And I interact with hundreds of people during the year. And they're always lovely. Whether they be elderly-- and elderly people, that's wonderful. Because so often you see them walking alone. And they look unhappy. And they look disconnected. And you just say, "Hello, how are you today? Hope you have a nice day." Or, "That's a nice hat you're wearing." It's really not relevant exactly what you say. It's just acknowledging another person.

BILL COPPEL In an essay you wrote for the book, Social Isolation of Older Adults: Strategies to Bolster Health and Well-Being, you outline the benefits of having just one very close friend. Tell us how you've seen the friendship you provide enhance people's health and well-being.

HOPE REINER People don't feel connected. They don't feel like they belong. So my connection with those people and the things that we do together increases their sense of belonging and purpose. Because we can do games. We can write poetry. We can do all sorts of things. And it boosts their happiness. And it reduces their stress. And it improves their self-confidence and their sense of self-worth. It encourages people to avoid unhealthy lifestyle habits which can become very ingrained when you live alone. And even to cope with previous traumas, or a serious illness, or death of a loved one. All of these things, genuine connections and authentic connections have enormous benefits.

BILL COPPEL Hope, let me ask this question. Given the aging of our society, of our culture, and all of the stresses that are being brought about by a variety of things, including this technical revolution that we're living through. My guess is the business you're in is a growth industry. More and more of our society would benefit from the work you do. Have you seen that happen?

HOPE REINER Well, the way I've seen it happen is that I've been working in the area of social isolation, and lack of connection and loneliness for so many years. And I find that more people contact me to talk about my expertise. I think there are more articles and editorials and special programming on the subject. But no, there's not nearly enough. Because people do-- I have noticed, people do what they've always done. And in a typical family, if they see a family member declining, they'll usually either hire an aide or place that person in assisted living. It's still a fairly new concept. But I hope more than anything else in the world, that people understand the need for the really personal connection. One-on-one genuine and, as I overuse the word, authentic friendship that people desperately need.

BILL COPPEL Given the need people have for companionship and human connection. What are a few things advisors should understand about this, that can help them enhance their skills as advice professionals?

HOPE REINER As I said early on, you really have to listen. Now, just if you show-- somebody once said, if you think about you have a big bowl on your lap and you just let that information - it was a healer who told me that once - you just take that information and be kind, be quiet. You don't have to make any comments. But just really listen and don't interrupt. And then ask questions. How do you get to know somebody unless you ask questions? And questions that you know will reach that person. Not your everyday questions that you would ask somebody just to be polite. I think it's

important to treat each person as a special person. Not just a number, or a business prospect.

BILL COPPEL So listening is key. And what about eye contact? You had mentioned earlier in our conversation that looking someone in the eye so that they can see that you are truly engaged.

HOPE REINER Yes, you have to look somebody in the eye. And you have to show that you're interested by your-- even just some minor body language. And again, if you look like you're dozing off, or you're not really paying attention, then you lose a lot of what that person is saying to you. So in all ways, paying attention, not just listening. By the way you look at that person and by what that person says, that enables you to ask questions that are relevant to what that person said. All of those things will make your business relationships better.

BILL COPPEL Well, I think that's very, very important for our listeners to understand and hear. Because what I find intriguing and why I'm so interested in the work that you do and asked you to join us today is because we often take for granted the little things in life that other people receive from us that mean so much. And in your case, in the example that you've created here with Hope and I, and the work that you do with older people, it shows how important those things are. Because you're able, in many cases, to help people regain their dignity and their life engagement, raise their happiness quotient at a point in time when they're probably not-- they're giving up, if you will.

HOPE REINER That's right. That's why it's so important that each person is important. They're all important. And if you let people feel that they're important, then everybody will benefit. Professionally, personally, emotionally.

BILL COPPEL Share with us, the types of folks you work with. I've often referred largely to older people, but that's not exclusively what you do.

HOPE REINER That's correct. There are many people that have certain issues in their lives, which make it very difficult to engage with other people. And as a result, they become socially isolated. People that have social anxiety issues, people have ADHD. People who have minor learning problems. And I've worked successfully with many of those people. And those people have gotten improved confidence in their ability to be in public places, to have an engagement with other people. And so that's another group of people that I love to work with.

BILL COPPEL Thank you very much for spending time with us today. To our listeners, thank you for joining us today. We hope you enjoyed our conversation today. Please take a moment to subscribe to our podcast. And if you like what you heard, please tell others about it. It helps people find us and ensures you never miss an episode. It's also a way to challenge you to think differently about your business and the role you play. And together, we can change the conversation. Thanks for listening. And until next time, be well.

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