

Transcription details:

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Guest: Gerri Leder, President, LederMark Communications & Coaching

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 another episode of the Next Frontier. If you've been a listener of the podcast over the past year, you've heard us talk about how our world is being irreversibly changed by the pace and volume of technology. And all of this change really requires us to be flexible and learn to embrace it. And it's not easy. But if we're going to be successful, we have to learn to adapt; that can take many forms, whether that's learning something new, or taking a risk and transitioning to do something completely different. Relying on the same old approaches, the approaches that may have worked for us in the past – just isn't going to work anymore. It's about evolving the role of financial services to expand beyond just a client's balance sheet. We've been really good at helping clients plan for retirement and that they have enough money but what does retirement actually mean? Retirement is nothing more than a transition, right. In today's environment, we're likely to transition multiple times, not just at the "end of a career" – and we still want to feel purposeful and want to make a difference. I recently read a UBS survey that found that more than 50% of people experienced some kind of crisis 60-days post "retirement." In essence, they weren't emotionally prepared for what was to come next. Are people truly ready to transition?

BILL COPPEL Today's guest, Gerri Leder, has been a longtime colleague and friend and has done her fair share of transitions over the years. So I had an opportunity to catch up with her a couple of weeks ago to help us explore this question. But before I share our conversation, let me tell you a little bit about Gerri. Gerri is a leadership coach who helps leaders boost their capacity to learn and grow, increase their self-awareness, and create a life, lead an organization and build a career they truly want. In addition to her coaching practice, she is an accomplished writer and thought leader in marketing and practice management in the financial services industry. In 1999, she founded her own firm, LederMark Communications & Coaching. And is currently a Leadership Program Partner at Loyola University Maryland. And with that, let's jump into the conversation.

BILL COPPEL The industry is facing a fair amount of disruption and many of the traditional things we did as advisors are now being replicated through a variety of different digital applications, machine learning, artificial intelligence, algorithms, etc. And while I think we've done a wonderful job up till now from a traditional standpoint of helping people prepare for retirement by ensuring they have enough money, they may not be ready emotionally, spiritually, or for the purposes of having direction, prepared. So what I want to do is kind of pick your brain a bit as a coach and as a business owner, just like our financial advisors. They are running small businesses the way you are.

They're running practices. And they are facing many of the same challenges that you faced as they've kind of evolved their business. If you were to think about coaching an advisor or a team of advisors today, what's the first thing you would recommend they do in order for themselves to get their own house in order?

GERRI LEDER

Yeah, so I think that there's a bit of a discovery process around that because I think that many times, advisors, like all of us, are not fully in touch with what it is. They have maybe financial success. They have some obstacles perhaps in work. And oftentimes, they have certain people in their lives who are not doing what they, the advisors, would like them to do. And I think it's a process for all of us to figure out what the problem is and also to what extent-- what do we control and what do we not control? We often say in coaching, "We only coach the willing," right? We can't coach the other people in your life who are causing burdens and obstacles. And as a leader, there are certain things that you can do with others, but first, you sort of have to get your own house in order. So understanding what it is about yourself that could be better. Maybe we want to have more chemistry with our team members. Maybe we want to have better conversations with our client. Maybe it's time we got our emotions under control at work. Or love and accept ourselves more. Maybe these are some of the things that are at the root of a nagging sort of dissatisfaction or desire to look inward for some of the solutions that we often expect to look outward for, if that makes sense.

BILL COPPEL

Sure. So how would someone go about doing that? What would you recommend?

GERRI LEDER

Sure. So we have a discovery process. If we're coaching an individual client, we have a discovery process to try and uncover what some of those issues are and get to the heart of the matter, if you will. What a client would like to work on and what kind of outcome they'd like to see. Would they like to be a better leader? Would they like to identify a transition strategy for their practice? Would they like to build better team chemistry? So that's often the starting point. And we both coach individuals. We also do workshops around some of those topics. And then the third piece of that is leadership development. Sometimes people have had no formal training in leadership, and then they want to know better how to get people to be motivated and inspired and work with them better. And so the Leadership Development Program at Loyola University is the kind of thing that is sort of an active and proactive program to learn some behavioral skills that are required as a leader. So I'd say those are the three things, three areas.

GERRI LEDER

And then once they've had an opportunity to get closer to what they want, right, to go after what they want and to get some of the skills and/or clarity around what they want, then they have the opportunity to work on that. You and I have talked about a myriad of ways that people can discover that peacefulness that comes from doing exactly what you want to be doing, whether it's going through yoga and meditation, whether it's examining your spiritual life. I want to tell a quick story about Oprah, if you'll allow.

BILL COPPEL

Sure.

GERRI LEDER

If time allows. So there's a video on YouTube - you can get it - where Oprah is interviewed at the Stanford School of Business, the MBA student. And she's talking about how people like us, people in stressful careers, people who are launching business careers, need to have some sort of period of reflection, some ability to look at themselves, some quiet time. Let's call it spiritual time. And she told a story about how she was interviewing then for the CEO position of OWN media. And she, of course, only sees the finalist. And as each person would come in, she would ask the question, "So, tell me about your daily spiritual practices." And now, as an aside, you

all know as business owners you can't even ask somebody if they're married or if they have children, but if you're Oprah, you can ask, "Tell me about your daily spiritual practices." And what came back was amazing, she said. Some people said meditation. Some people said daily exercise, running through the woods where I run through my day and I figure out what's bothering me and I work out my problem. Some people talked about traditional Judeo-Christian prayer or Muslim prayer. She got an array of answers. And her point is this, that given the stresses and strain of running a business or being in the business world, you need some time for peaceful reflection and separation from the things that are creating that stress. These are some of the things that advisors can do to get closer to addressing the things that will create joy in their lives.

BILL COPPEL

In addition to the work you're doing as a coach and what you've done as a marketing professional, you do a lot of writing today. And I was reading one of your recent articles, and you brought up this exercise that you use called life wheel. I wanted to take a moment to kind of dive a little bit into that because I think that's one of the tools you're talking about in helping people begin to recognize what's really important in their life and then determining the amount of time and resources they actually apply to that particular activity. Talk a little bit about how the life wheel process that you've used and others have used, I believe, in helping folks really hone in on what matters.

GERRI LEDER

Yes. The life wheel - and I'm sure you financial advisors, particularly CFPs, have seen a version of the life wheel in your studies - is a tremendous tool, particularly at times of transition. We've used it a lot in transition workshops to help people get really clear about what they want and what's standing in the way. So imagine a pie divided by 10 areas of your life. Everything from paid work, nonpaid work, travel, family, spiritual life, exercise and health, and so forth. So imagine 10 areas of focus. Now we would ask people in this transition workshop to go around and on a scale of 1 to 10 talk about the importance of each of those 10 areas in their lives. If there's something that isn't important, I would expect maybe a 3 or a 4. And a couple of 10s, but not all 10s. So we'd ask them to go round once and add a level of importance to each area. Then we ask them to go back around and rate their satisfaction level in each area. And so they would go back around and 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, and so forth. And then we ask them to mind the gap, right, if you have something like family that's an absolute 9 or 10 and maybe they moved across the country. In one workshop I did, the gap was that they had a 5 as far as satisfaction because their family-- one son and family had moved across the country, and they only got to see them a couple of times a year. So that was the gap. And for others, the famous one, right, is exercise and health, right? I believe in health. I'm going to give myself a 10. But where am I? Well, actually there's a gap. I'm a 6 or 7.

GERRI LEDER

But in that particular case, Bill, I mentioned, the fellow who had that gap between his son, family living in California and the 10 that he assigned to family-- and at the same time, he was sort of going through that emotional crisis about just being retired, trying to figure out, who am I when I'm not a pharmaceutical executive? And after the life wheel exercise, he said that a light bulb went off. And he said, "I just got an idea." He also rated himself high in travel. He said, "I'm going to take my whole family to France next summer." And he was excited just in the talking about it. So the life wheel, while it sounds really simple, really does get people to align what they want with what they're currently doing and to focus on the gaps.

BILL COPPEL

I don't think that the clients that we serve in this industry are any different than the people that work in it, as it relates to these issues that you're talking about, Gerri. Let's kind of flip the conversation over to working directly with a client. And as I

mentioned earlier, while they may be prepared financially, probably, like the example you just gave with the pharmaceutical executive, they're not emotionally ready. And they certainly don't feel any differently about their value, in most cases, than they did when they were working. As a financial advisor, what are the things I should be thinking about in parallel with helping people prepare financially but also helping them prepare emotionally to transition to the next chapter of their life?

GERRI LEDER

Exactly. So Bill, in giving these transition workshops, almost always there's someone who says, "I had no idea. I wasn't prepared. I spent all my time focusing on the financial aspects of retirement. I didn't know it was going to be like this." And the reason is because a lot of us have a one-dimensional view of what retirement is going to look like, right? I'm going to take up golf or see my grandchildren or what have you. But it is a serious life transition. And there's a book *Transitions* by William Bridges. And it talks about how the thing that's so stressful about a shift like retirement is the not-knowingness, right? The space, the part that was unplanned. And we actually go through in the transition workshop several exercises where we get people to identify where they are on the stress level of the transition.

GERRI LEDER

Retirement's often been likened to Elisabeth Kubler Ross's stages of grief. And in fact, some people really do go through a sort of a grief process when they have to answer the question, who am I, right, when I'm not an employee of X? So I think there's an opportunity here for advisors to really embrace this as an area of conversation and discovery with clients. How would it be if in addition to, as we've talked about earlier, honing the practice so that you're doing the kind of advisory work you want to do, with the kind of people you want to do, and then being able to take that conversation further by really being a beacon during the process of transition? And how great it would be if when a client comes to you with the topic of, "Gee, I'm about to retire. I'm not really sure I have all my ducks in a row, and so forth, that as an advisor you would embrace that period of transition and get curious. And when I say get curious, I mean go down that road with a client. "Well, how are you feeling about it? Well, what scares you about it? What have you done to sort of plot out your activities," and so forth? Get curious in order that that client considers you a resource in the process of figuring out what I'm going to do for the rest of my life.

BILL COPPEL

Should an advisor wait until the client tells them they're prepared to retire or they're going to retire, or should this process start ahead of time, maybe four, five years? Or at any point the relationship begins, to begin to weave in this conversation that runs parallel with the financial conversation about what's important, their identity, and how they determine or how they identify or define purpose in their life? When do you start that?

GERRI LEDER

Yeah, that's a great question. And it's interesting because I referred earlier to George Kinder. The father of life planning. And he's also with CFP. And what he does is he asks those questions on the front end of the relationship. He asks three important life questions. And some of you have probably heard those questions. One of the most is, if you had all the money in the world, what would you change in your life? And then he asks various questions about the limited length of time. If you only had five years to live, what would you do differently? And so forth. And some of these questions are designed, not only to understand the life behind the portfolio he's about to start managing, but also to really get client-- to get to know clients beyond simply the financial relationship. That's one of the things I hear most in the transition workshops that we do. I'll hear something about, "I've had the same financial advisor for 20 years. And we've talked about retirement planning, but really, we haven't planned retirement at all. It's been all about the finances." Well, I'm going to give all advisors a break. It hasn't been the focus. There's plenty to do on the financial side of the house.

But now, as this advisor relationship is changing-- and Bill, your series is called this The Next Frontier. And it's all about change and what will be required of the advisor of the future. Here is where I think we have and advisors have a gigantic opportunity to go deeper, to ask better questions, and to start that planning around life purpose, what's important, the values of the client, and what kind of life the client wants to lead. Because chances are they're so consumed by the things you were talking about at the outset of the podcast, that they haven't had time to think about it much either.

BILL COPPEL

And to underscore a point you made, all of the traditional things we did on the financial side can actually be done as effectively, if not more effectively, by computers today. So this really leaves the door wide open for this kind of a conversation. And the other thing I want to point out is that these questions are not static questions. When you start this conversation, you'll ask these same questions again and again, slightly different. And each time you ask them, you'll be armed with new information from the previous time because these are really hard questions for people to answer at one shot. I don't know that people can really tell you what's important by simply asking them what's important or if you had all the money in the world, what would you do. Those are very difficult questions that I think the answers are built over time. What's your experience been around that?

GERRI LEDER

Yes, Bill. They are called lingering questions. Or at least I call them that. Because you want to ask the kind of questions where the first answer is not necessarily the best answer. And that's okay. You're stirring things up, right? Bill, you're great at asking lingering questions, the kind of questions that kind of stay with you the rest of the day. And Bill, you and I were in conversation as I've gone through this transition. And I still think about some of the questions that you asked me over the month that were just as relevant for a financial advisor's client as they were for me at the time. So the art of asking questions. And Bill, you had me in last summer to give a talk on asking provocative questions. But they're typically questions that are open-ended, that go deeper than meets the eye, and that get to the heart of what really matters to you. So I think the Kinder questions are a good start. You can probably google them and get them or send me a note and I can get them to you. But it's about, what would you like to have done? What would you like for your retirement to have been all about? When you look back on your work, what are the two or three things that were most joyful to you that you'd like to take into retirement and so forth?

BILL COPPEL

That's great, Gerri. Thank you. We appreciate that. My last question. As a takeaway for our listeners, give me the one thing-- what's that one starting point, what's that most salient message you want to leave our listeners with to get them started on this new road that-- well, I'm sure some have begun to dabble in it, but to really build it as a main core of the value that they provide for clients.

GERRI LEDER

Yeah, so I think the whole thing about leadership, Bill, to get back to the intersection between sort of leadership and transition, is leadership begins right here. And when we think about how we want to get past the things that are holding us back, it really starts with us. So I think if we sit down and ask ourselves some probing questions about what's standing in our way, what kind of practice do we want to have and why we can't move along the way of that practice today, and then strip out all the things that depend on other people, we really get to the things that we have more control over than we think. And I think we need to focus on those first. What can I do to make steps toward having the kind of practice I want, having deeper relationships with clients than I currently have? And to the extent that there are skill gaps, there are community colleges in all the 50 states. There are podcasts like this one, YouTube videos, and so forth. So I think understanding that you're not too old to learn, to fill in the skill gaps that might be necessary to have more meaningful conversations. And of

course, many people achieve that by having a coach or attending workshops or, as I mentioned earlier, leadership development courses through-- whether it's through Loyola University or a university close to home.

- BILL COPPEL
Go to your local community colleges. Take basic psychology, for example. Take a sociology class. Re-familiarize yourself with what's going on and what are causing stress in people's lives. I'm not asking you to become a psychologist. What we're saying is the more background and information you have, the better you'll be in appreciating and showing empathy. And then finally, take a coaching class. Learn how to coach. Learn what it is to be a coach. And there's a variety of ways to do that.
- GERRI LEDER
And I would also add that what I've found in the process of my own transition is that humility and vulnerability are not weaknesses in this stuff. It's the vulnerability and the humility allows you to show up with your clients in such a way that they feel comfortable opening up about some of these same things.
- BILL COPPEL
Well, you're absolutely right, because it's the antithesis of vulnerability and humility that this industry was built on, right? It was all about--
- GERRI LEDER
Yes, it was.
- BILL COPPEL
It was all about no fear--
- GERRI LEDER
Bravado.
- BILL COPPEL
Bravado. No pain, no gain. Keep driving. That's a theme that has not served the industry well.
- GERRI LEDER
That's right. And I think where I was going with that, too, is that you can have-- advisors can have small groups of clients in and talk about these things. Particularly if they don't necessarily have coaching skills but they have facilitation skills. And they can get clients to talk about how they're feeling and what was the hardest part about retirement. And then have a dialogue where other people are sharing their experiences, both those that have been through retirement and those who are approaching it. So what I found in the transition workshop that I did is yes, I had exercises, but the real good stuff was from these people sharing ideas among themselves.
- BILL COPPEL
Well, Gerri, thank you very, very much for sharing your own story and your insights on what I think is a very, very important topic. For our listeners, Gerri, if they'd like to learn more about what you're doing, how do they get in touch?
- GERRI LEDER
So my website is ledermark.com, L-E-D-E-R-M-A-R-K, dot com. And you can also find LederMark on LinkedIn and also Twitter.
- BILL COPPEL
Well, that's great. Thank you very much again, Gerri, for spending some time with us today.
- GERRI LEDER
Thank you, Bill.
- BILL COPPEL
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.
- Outro
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