



Comfort Zone®

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Autonomy and Freedom To Focus on Clients

As a seasoned retirement advisor with over 30 years' experience, Russ Thornton has seen the evolution of client priorities and expectations when it comes to managing their financial lives. After spending over a decade at Merrill Lynch, he found his calling in 2006 when he started his practice as a fee-only advisor, primarily serving women in their goals of achieving retirement. He enjoyed having the autonomy and freedom to build a business that resonated with his personal mission and values but found running the business side of things – bookkeeping, compliance, etc. – daunting and time consuming. He connected with Wealthcare for their financial planning and portfolio management technology, and for a time retained his independent business. As he began seeing results and delivering an elevated experience to his clients without the burden of back-office management, he merged his Atlanta-based RIA into Wealthcare in 2009 and became an employee advisor.

Shortly after re-engaging with the company, Russ fully embraced Wealthcare's GDX360 process with the Comfort Zone® as an integral part of his client experience and credits the platform as being one of the main reasons he joined as an advisor.

Elevating the Client Experience While Driving Results

When asked how the Comfort Zone adds value to client relationships and his advisory practice, Russ shares that he thinks of the tool in two ways.

First, the Comfort Zone helps clients focus on the bigger picture by providing a high-level perspective around their financial lives in an engaging visual overview that makes sense to a wide variety of people. This gives them confidence that they are still on track to meeting their goals with their attention on what they can control: their own choices. Russ shares, "We're not trying to measure or manage your financial plan to a razor's edge level of accuracy and precision, because we don't know what is going to happen tomorrow, 10, or 20 years from now. There's a lot of value in establishing a range of possible outcomes, and trying to stay within that range, which would indicate that we have enough confidence to make some adjustments along the way and still know you're going to be OK."

Second, the Comfort Zone's ability to quickly and simply identify how a client is progressing towards their goals allows them to create a healthier balance in their financial lives. Having clarity around the impact of their decisions and the tradeoffs involved helps them determine how to be well-prepared for the future but also making the most of their lives today. More time to focus on dreams and aspirations rather than granular numbers has opened the door to conversations that clients may not have had otherwise and gives

clients a voice in the decision-making process. Russ shares how meaningful it is to see clients "...light up talking about what they have always dreamed of doing, but never thought they'd be able to afford." The Comfort Zone's reflection of what's truly important to clients comes from the advisor's ability to identify their values through interesting and valuable explorations around their priorities.

Instilling Confidence in Volatile Times

While advisors understand the importance of investing in technology to help streamline their business and provide an elevated client experience, part of the Comfort Zone's most significant value lies in its ability to help calm client anxieties over the uncertain and uncontrollable. "Having a number behind your statements that a client is OK is extremely powerful," says Russ. "It reinforces that there is a plan and strategy in place for what we are doing." According to Russ, that's what clients will happily pay for. The ability to help give clients confidence around their financial lives has led to other significant benefits for Russ's advisory practice including:

- A fully engaged client with high retention rates
- More referrals
- Higher net promoter scores
- Higher wallet share

Especially in times of market volatility, having Comfort Zone's advisor dashboard show all households which are at risk gives advisors organization and prioritizing when it comes time to calm panicked clients. Comfort Zone enables advisors to contact clients proactively and with a sense of order that addresses the clients most in need of your service – fulfilling fiduciary responsibilities while delivering unrivaled confidence with an immeasurable experience in building trust that lasts through lifetimes and across generations.

"I've been around long enough to where I've seen mostly everything that's out there in the industry," Russ says. "I have not seen anything better or more effective at elevating client relationships than the Comfort Zone and the Wealthcare process."