

Best of Both Worlds

BY MATT COSENTINO | PHOTOS BY ALISON DUNLAP

ALICJA PLONSKA, A TRUSTED FINANCIAL PROFESSIONAL WITH **MORGAN STANLEY**, AS WELL AS A BUSY MOTHER OF THREE BOYS, HAS STRUCK THE PERFECT BALANCE BETWEEN HER PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIVES.

AS a young girl growing up in Poland, Alicja “Allie” Plonska envisioned America as having roads paved in gold and money-growing trees on every corner. Imagine her surprise when she first arrived in the United States at age 18 to attend Temple University and found out that the financial system was a tad more complex than she was led to believe.

Nevertheless, she soon discovered a passion for finance and capital markets. After receiving her bachelor’s and master’s degrees simultaneously—graduating with honors despite having to learn English while in school—Plonska began her career in the banking industry before moving to wealth management in 2008. She has since earned the distinction of being one of America’s Top Women Wealth Advisors Best-in-State (Forbes 2022), as well as a Certified Divorce Financial Analyst.

“This system is the best in the world and I have so much adoration and respect for it,” she says. “There may not be money-growing trees, but if you start with something, you can quickly build wealth. Since 2008, I’ve never had a day where I regretted coming to my office. I’m helping people, I’m getting referrals which is the biggest compliment to my hard work, and I love every minute of it.”

Plonska, a senior vice president at Morgan Stanley and the branch manager of the firm’s Yardley office, continues to see her own wide range of clients as a financial advisor. Also, as the mother of three boys, she actively encourages other women to pursue a career in finance that allows them to

balance their work and home lives.

Suburban Life spoke with Plonska to learn more about her background, her philosophy on wealth management, and her success in what traditionally has been a male-dominated industry.



Q&A

You wear two hats at the firm, as both a branch manager but also a financial advisor who handles wealth management for your own clients. Is that important to you to play both roles?

It's hugely important. I come from a group of people who believe you either evolve or you perish, so if I want to work for one of the best wealth management firms on the street, which I do, then I have to know the firm will evolve. The only way to ensure that happens is to sit at the table and have those conversations with corporate. If I'm involved in the decisions at the firm and everything in the future that will affect my clients, then I feel I can better serve my clients and help make sure the company retains its dominance in the marketplace.

I took over Bucks County because Morgan Stanley doesn't have a huge footprint here yet. My mission is to make it a company of choice for clients and advisors in this area. Bucks County residents will soon have access to the best Morgan Stanley has to offer because of my hard work and efforts to create a powerhouse here.

Is it important to get to know each client so you can customize a plan to his or her unique needs?

For sure. That should be the standard. I think we're getting away from the models, where we give you a questionnaire and fit you into one of six "risk" models. To me, that won't work long term. Each of my clients has a very different portfolio from the next one. We do a deep dive into understanding their goals and where they are going, and then we create a path to help them achieve those goals. It is 100 percent customized, and how money is invested for clients is dependent on their goals, their understanding of risk, how much risk they can take, and what their time horizons are. Tax planning is very important as well.

Do you get a lot of panicked phone calls when the economy is going through a difficult stretch like it is at the moment?

We have consistent contact with clients to stay ahead and prepare them for what's coming. Most of my clients are fully aware of where we are, what it means, and where we're going, and feel reassured that we are positioned properly for the future. We are proactive in delivering information and educating clients on the markets, the economy, what it means when inflation is high, and what it means when interest rates are going up.

Do you have a "typical" type of client?

A lot of my clients are mid-level to executive-level employees at Fortune 500 com-



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panies, and my second-biggest pool is business owners who have sold or transitioned their businesses. I have a lot of retirees as well, who I have been able to successfully lead to retirement.

Have you been able to balance your career with your life as a mom?

Yes. I'm a mother of three and hopefully someday one of them or all three will become partners of my team and take care of the next generation of my clients. Most working mothers have guilt about not being with our children all the time, and that guilt has driven me to be the room mother every year for my kids, to be involved in their sports, and to not miss any games. A beautiful aspect of my career is that I work 24/7, but if I need to take three hours to see my child's game, I will just rearrange my schedule. It's not easy, but I'm proud of how I've been able to balance both worlds.

Do you encourage other women to enter what has traditionally been a male-dominated industry?

I am shocked that we don't have more women in my field. The core of being able to help a client is to really understand them, listen to them, and educate them. Women have a propensity to listen better, and we're a little better at being patient and educating, so I would love for more women to be interested in this business. People go through emotional cycles when they work

with you, such as divorce, death in the family, or having babies, and we can help them understand what it means for them financially and what they have to do next. Also, when you are in this business you have the flexibility that not a lot of careers have. I definitely encourage women to consider wealth management as their career. I am actively reaching out to women at other firms to see if they want to join Morgan Stanley, because I feel it is the best firm on the street right now.

What is the biggest surprise you've seen in this business?

To me, the biggest surprise was COVID. I didn't expect what happened, which is that I had my highest number of referrals in those two years. I realized that COVID allowed people to really focus on performance and service. It was quite humbling to see how many referrals I got during COVID; it was because clients changed their standards for their advisor from who they golfed with to what statements show and getting the service they were paying for. ■

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