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Wells Fargo Advisors**
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The Value of Trust

Rick Santella of Wells Fargo Advisors believes the key to successful financial planning is getting to know clients on a personal level, helping them understand their options, and creating a portfolio tailored to their goals.

Upon meeting a client for the first time, longtime financial advisor Rick Santella, CLTC®, could easily brag about his track record of success to inspire confidence, or show off his vast knowledge with a fancy presentation. Instead, he chooses a down-to-earth approach that puts people at ease, especially those who might be nervous about diving into the uncertain world of investing.

“I never want to talk over someone’s head,” he explains. “If they walk away from me not understanding what I said, then I didn’t do my job well. My goal is to talk to them in everyday language that everybody can understand without getting too technical on the terms, so they leave with a better comfort level. I have to earn their trust, and hopefully first impressions mean a lot and we can go from there.”

That philosophy has served Santella well over a career spanning more than three decades. A senior vice president at Wells Fargo Advisors in Philadelphia, he combines the backing of a large national brand with the client focus and personalized touch of a small firm.

Working with a wide range of clients—

from high-net-worth CEOs and small-business owners to blue-collar workers and everyone in between—Santella remains easily accessible long after the initial consultation and becomes invested in his customers’ success. Perhaps that’s why so many have evolved into close friends over the years.

“One of the things I’m most proud about, especially in very negative markets, is that I’m always on the phone,” he says. “I’m proactive instead of being reactive. I know in the past there have been some advisors that you never hear from in a bad market because they’re not comfortable talking. I’d rather you hear it from me, about what’s really going on, than from social media or the news.”

Tumultuous markets have been the norm in recent years. Santella has seen highs and lows throughout his career, and those experiences have taught him to never panic—and his clients tend to follow his lead. Weekly emails and periodic reviews help keep people informed during a downturn.

“Some of the clients who have been with me for a couple of decades, when I call them they say things like, ‘I knew you were going to reach out and touch base,’ or ‘I’m not

worried, Rick; I know you have me covered,’” he says. “That’s because in a lot of cases I put things in a portfolio that help minimize the pain based on their risk tolerance or comfort level. I haven’t had anybody really panic, but I do get more questions from the newer customers until they get a better feel for me going forward.”

Santella, who started his career at Wells Fargo before moving on for a stretch, eventually came back because of the wide-open platform of investment products he can provide his clients; he also appreciates the one-on-one interactions the company encourages. Because he gets to know clients so well, his guidance rarely, if ever, diverges from the intended path.

“It’s always best for me to find out their goals, and to give them the reality of what they can achieve versus what they have and what their expectations are,” he says. “There are a lot of people who think they’re going to get 20 percent a year, and it’s my job to give them realistic expectations going forward so there’s no false hope.

“Especially now with AI, a lot of people think they’re going to become millionaires overnight,” he continues. “AI might work for some people, but I still firmly believe that you need a warm voice there to guide you through things. Hopefully, I have more of an open philosophy than a computer because of my experience.”

Santella encourages young professionals to start saving through company retirement plans as soon as possible, and for parents to think about 529 plans for college savings. As clients get older and closer to the end of their careers, he savors the ability to give them the retirement they always dreamed of, whether that entails traveling, pursuing hobbies, spending time with grandchildren, or focusing on a legacy for their families.

“It makes me even more grateful that I’m able to make a difference in someone’s life and in achieving someone’s goals,” he says. “It makes it all worthwhile for me. I still love personalizing portfolios, putting things together, communicating with my customers, and finding out if there are any changes in their life. That to me is the prize, and it’s exactly what I would want if I were sitting on the other side of the table.” ■

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