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How a Top Advisor Is Communicating in a Crisis

Catherine Valega cut her teeth on Wall Street and overseas before focusing her work on women and impact investing.

By Ginger Szala | April 07, 2020



Catherine Valega, Green Bee Advisory

Catherine Valega is a fluent both in numbers and in multiple languages. If she hadn't started her career on the Lehman Brothers bond trading floor, she might have been a full-time linguist.

Valega heads up Green Bee Advisory, an LPL Financial affiliate near Boston that she opened last year; her focus is on advising women and small businesses with a tilt toward impact investing.

Her path to becoming an advisor began after she graduated from the University of Pennsylvania and took a job with Lehman. She then got a master's degree in international relations at Johns Hopkins University, during which time she met her husband.

They ended up moving to Geneva, Switzerland, and she went to work for Credit Suisse using her French. When they returned to the United States, Valega went to work for Pioneer Investments (now Amundi Pioneer) in global investment communications. Today, she resides in Waltham, Massachusetts, where she's quarantined with her Swiss husband and four teenage daughters.

"I focus on different touchpoints as a way to communicate and prospect right now," Valega told ThinkAdvisor.

She also works with other advisors to show them how to market and monetize their knowledge: "I'm an eternal optimist. As horrible [as the pandemic] is, there's a lot of good things that will come out of it."

What are your clients asking you today?

I'm fortunate in that most [individuals in] my book of business are not current retirees. That really helps, because if [clients] have at least three to five years [before retirement], there aren't so many fires to put out. I have clients who are entrepreneurs and — sort of — corporate world people.

If they're lucky enough to have a 401(k), my advice is a diversified fund, and if they are not having cash flow issues and are still employed, they should max out their 401(k). This is the best buying opportunity. Because I'm a "solopreneur," I don't have a 401(k), but I wish I did, because it really is the best tool.

How are you working with clients from your home?

I [typically] have a shared workspace, [but] they're really bringing everybody virtual. [For example,] I've got a Finance 101 type of seminar coming up through Zoom. I'm going to talk about some of the latest programs that have come out of the CARES Act. And then [there are] Zoom calls.

It hasn't really been much of a change, because I run around a lot anyway. But if I was in the area and [my clients] were in the area, we would [meet] face to face, which is always preferable. But, you know, most of my clients are pretty tech savvy, so it really doesn't matter.

What are your top challenges in working from home?

I have four teenage daughters. And my husband's also working from home. He's an engineer, a techie, so we're very lucky because we're pretty well set up [technology wise].

That said, not all of our rooms are hard-wired for internet so ... we're always shuffling things around, trying to find the service. [Or someone may come in] and I'm like "don't bother me. I'm on a real client call or real meeting."

It's the same challenges as everybody else. But I feel very privileged that we live in a home ... so I'm not going to complain.

It took a little bit of adjusting the first couple of weeks. ...[I finally said] we're all going on a schedule, going to bed normal time, getting up early. I go for my run in the morning, and then I come home and work really till about 5 or so.

If we're lucky enough, we'll have lunch together, which is kind of a treat because we really weren't able to do that before.

My daughter [also designed] a spreadsheet with all of our names on it and with three lines for three activities [with a] check box next to each. [It runs] Monday to Friday.

There's something very refreshing about physically checking the box [and seeing] what you actually did. It can be school related. It can be making the bed. But I want [them] to write three activities a day that [they're] anticipating doing. That will make them feel better.

What would you advise wannabe advisors?

Sales is a huge piece of the pie. I became a CFP before being a financial advisor. I don't recommend that per se, because I do think there is something to be said about joining an organization and cutting your teeth and learning about the sales culture and process.

So, I'd say do one of those programs that hire young advisors. They are going to work you hard. They're going to teach you some of those sales skills that you need. And then you can go independent. I didn't do [that] and I wish I had.

If you can start in a role that will give you some sales background so you learn how to finish the conversation and how to follow up with clients, how to do client service, that's really more than half the battle.

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