

**Ep #247: Leveraging Technology and Broker/Dealer
Experience - The Career of Cliff Downie**

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Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Maddy Roche

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Narrator: [00:00:01] Welcome to #XYPNRadio, where your host, Alan Moore, brings you into a community of fee-only financial planners who want to profitably and successfully serve Gen X and Gen Y clients. If you're ready to get the knowledge you need from leaders in your field, learn from forward thinking advisors, and take action on your own goals, #XYPNRadio is the show for you. Here's your host!

Maddy Roche: [00:00:21] Hello and welcome to this episode of #XYPNRadio! I'm Maddy Roche, your host. I'm excited to have XYPN member Cliffe Downie, owner of Downie Financial Group, a fee-only firm in Orange County, CA on the show today. Cliff has spent his career in this industry, spending significant time at Wells Fargo, some time at Merrill Lynch, within an independent broker dealer, and finally within the fee-only space as the owner of his own RIA. Cliff has a particularly interesting perspective on starting and running a firm that serves over 100 clients. He talks about how he leveraged his communication and sales training while at Wells Fargo to today, being able to have productive prospect meetings. He's leveraged his former client relationships as referral sources. And today, Cliff discusses why he segments his clients, how their service differs just slightly between the levels, and how he relies on text messages and technology to help move the process along. Cliff is also a Dave Ramsey SmartVestor, which he credits for some of his early growth. Cliff is focused on running a practice that lets him spend valuable time with his wife and two daughters. He doesn't ever want to grow too big, but assures us he won't ever leave this space. He says seeing relief come across his clients' faces is why he loves his job. If you're interested in how you can apply your broker dealer experience or leverage technology to run an efficient practice, this episode is for you.

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Alan Moore: [00:01:47] XY Planning Network's Annual Benchmarking Survey is out. Are you curious about the average number of clients XYPN members get in their first year or how successful niches really are? To answer these burning questions and more, we begin and enlisted a professional research firm to complete our Annual Benchmarking Study. Get your copy hot off the press and discover vital statistics such as the median advisor revenue by years in practice and sources of firm growth from our referrals to blogging, social media and more. Head over to xyplanningnetwork.com/study to purchase your copy today.

Maddy Roche: [00:02:18] You can find any of the resources we mentioned during this episode at xyplanningnetwork.com/247. Also, be sure to go to xyplanningnetwork.com/VIP to join our private group just for #XYPNRadio listeners. It's a community of advisors we've all been looking for that's there to provide support when we need it the most. Best of all, it's free! I encourage you to check it out - Again, that's xyplanningnetwork.com/VIP. Without further ado, here is my interview with Cliff Downie.

[00:02:45] ---

Maddy Roche: [00:02:48] Hey, Cliff. Welcome to #XYPNRadio!

Cliff Downie: [00:02:50] Thank you! Thank you, Maddy.

Maddy Roche: [00:02:52] Absolutely! I've really looked forward to interviewing you today because I think you have a particularly interesting

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story to share with our listeners. And as we prepped for this interview, it became really clear that you had kind of this all encompassing background of having been at a number of different places of business and employment before you ever decided to start your own RIA and I think that's particularly impressive, but also really important for our listeners - so why don't you tell us a bit about Downie Financial Group, Cliff!

Cliff Downie: [00:03:18] Downie Financial Group RIA got established like a year, year and a half ago or so, but I've been in business ever since 1999 - started at Wells Fargo there. Was there for many years, about 10 years or so. Learned a lot about the financial world. Funny story is when I was working at Wells Fargo, I was going to college and I was going to become a lawyer, I was studying to become a poly sci major there. And, you know, one of my buddies on water polo team told me "hey, get a job at Wells Fargo, become a teller, just, you know, part time summer job" and got that job and really started looking more into the financial world there. And I liked that. I liked a lot a lot about it. And so I decided to take a major, focus on the finances there, so was there for for 10 years. Teller Banker.

Maddy Roche: [00:04:02] Wow!

Cliff Downie: [00:04:02] Became a financial associate, financial advisor. Then I went over to Merrill Lynch for a couple of years. I was there for about a year and a half, two years or so, realized early on wasn't quite a right fit there, so I went over to the independent broker dealer with FSC Securities there in 2013 and I was there for a couple of years as well. There were a lot of changes going on. This was when the whole Department Of Labor rule, fiduciary rules come into a place of changes were happening and again, it was affecting my business, and so I wanted

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to see what else was out there and that's when I got introduced to XYPN and the whole independent RIA and that's when I made the jump and decided to open my own practice there. In 2000- I believe, it was 2017, beginning of 2018.

Maddy Roche: [00:04:48] Yeah, absolutely. Let's dig into some of that. You've spent a large portion of your professional career working at Wells Fargo. I am sure we've got some listeners today who-who are currently working there or have experience there. Talk to us about kind of what the training was, what did you what did you do over this ten years to really set yourself up for success?

Cliff Downie: [00:05:08] Yeah, I mean, the benefit of working at a major bank like that, and - I tell a lot of people who are looking to get into this field, but they don't have the experiences - the banking experience is great because they'll pay for your training, they'll give you a lot of the tools, a lot of the software, technology-wise and everything. But the benefit is, is that you'll be working at a local branch where you're going to meet 5, 5, 7, 10 people, maybe on-on average a day - anywhere from looking to just, hey, setting up a retirement account because their accountant told them to, hey, you know, I got a rollover. I got a lot of different scenarios. But the benefit is that you get out a lot of experience working on your presentation, working and talking with the prospect, seeing what issues they might have and how you can help and overcome that. And so it gives you a lot of experience in working on your.. like your speech, your presentation, how you handled things. And it's a big benefit from that perspective versus if you go on your own, you're out there by yourself and it is tough to meet people, but here at the local branch, you're going to be fed a lot of contacts, a lot of prospects. And so you can kind of hone your presentation from there.

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Maddy Roche: [00:06:17] Interesting. Now, did they give you training on how to have those conversations? Do you go through a sales training program?

Cliff Downie: [00:06:24] They do. They do. They do give you some sales training. The best experience I have or the best training I got is when I when I became an assistant to an advisor. Being able to just sit in on the meetings. And so typically you're an advisor, you're an assistant to an advisor, maybe even two advisors, and you're helping, you know, take care of the paperwork, taking care of the back office, things know, setting things up like that. But you can also sit on the meetings. And this is one thing I said, "I want to be in meetings. I want to just listen and see what works, what doesn't work and taking my notes." And that's really the best experience, the best training I got from being an assistant.

Maddy Roche: [00:07:02] Wonderful. And was being an independent RIA something that was even on your radar when you were kind of practicing your-your sales skills and your pitch and your communication?

Cliff Downie: [00:07:12] No, not really. One of the things about each spot that I have is I always thought I could - Wells Fargo, became an advisors like, "perfect. This is where I'm going to be at. This is my career. I'm going to be ready to be here for a long time." But then I just started learning more and more about the business, learning more about the different kind of players like the Wells Fargo, the Merrill Lynch and the independent BDs and stuff in... Each spot, I was just learning more, and I was like, "you know what? It might not be the right fit for me." And that's what really started the wheels in terms of looking at different options, seeing what else is out there.

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Maddy Roche: [00:07:45] Yeah. What prompted you to move to Merrill Lynch after kind of having a nice tenure at Wells Fargo?

Cliff Downie: [00:07:51] Really, what it was is... The first burning part was there's always changes, not even a little bit of regulations, but mostly from a corporate level that were affecting my my business. And I keep saying "my business" because I always felt like that these are my clients. And so there were things that were out of my control that were just changing how I get compensated. You know, what the process was and everything. And so is it frustrating for me as feel like a you know, I build up momentum. I was getting steam, my revenue was going up, and then there was a new management change. And then when a new manager has to come in, get this, all my opinions just they always have to make changes. Everything can be worked out great. Everything's working out fine. But new manager comes in to make changes. And then those changes, those affect my bottom line for myself. And so that's why I really start looking at what else is out there.... The move to Merrill Lynch was never really under the radar for me, but this was, I think in 2009-2010 that they were aggressively recruiting people. They wanted to get their head count up so I was like, "oh, I remember analysts. Let me go out there, over there and figure out what's going on." I went to Merrill Lynch - again, worked out well, but I think it realized early on really quickly that it wasn't quite the right fit. And then again, corporate changes were made, were happening. And so one of the major changes and we can dive into just, you know, how my household, my book of business looks like, but my average account size is about a \$150,000 in AUM. But at Merrill Lynch, there were one of the changes, they're going to make is any household under \$250,000, you weren't going to get compensated for. And this was a six, seven years ago.

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Maddy Roche: [00:09:29] Wow.

Cliff Downie: [00:09:29] So look, in my book I was like, well that that doesn't seem to make sense there. And so that's what prompted me to look into the independent BD and go from that and go there.

Maddy Roche: [00:09:39] What caused your book of business to be more at \$150,000 level and not kind of the ultra high net worth folks. Was that intentional?

Cliff Downie: [00:09:48] No. Working at Wells Fargo, you get to work at different branches in different areas. And I realize again early on we're - unintelligible - worked at a local branch, those nearby the beach community. There was, there were high net worth people down there. And I just, I just - I never related well - I never got along with them for whatever reason. And so I had meetings... I do have high net worth clients, but I built to work together and growing those assets. But but I just never had a good fit in terms of working with high ultra high net worth or high net worth prospects for whatever reason. But if I sat in front of someone in there, and they're 45, 55. They have a 401(k), you know \$150,000, \$200,000, \$250 - I could close that, no problem.

Maddy Roche: [00:10:36] Wow.

Cliff Downie: [00:10:37] But as... just is, just once it gets to the 500, 1,000,000+ is just, For some whatever reason it didn't work out well. And I realized in my book of business is not going to be made up, 50 clients, 50

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household - it's going to be larger. But the benefit of working at Wells Fargo, when I became a financial advisor, associate advisor. They give you a small book of business to help you get started. Most of it is-is not great assets, but you're going to have two, three, four and five hundred accounts. And so I learned early on in my career how to be efficient with my time to make sure that I'm touching each client's, making sure they're, they're - I'm helping them out. But if they have any issues, what I need to do, take it, move on and then move on to the next client from that perspective.

Maddy Roche: [00:11:21] Yeah. I want to dig into your efficiency, because it's a very, very clear that you've built a really efficient practice. I'm wondering what recourse did Merrill Lynch offer you in terms of being able to work with younger clients and quite frankly, not as wealthy of clients as they wanted you to? I mean, I think this is an industry issue that we've kind of run up against over and over again. And what was Merrill Lynch's take on this? I mean, how did your managers explain that you wouldn't be compensated for smaller books of business?

Cliff Downie: [00:11:47] Not to focus - don't help them. Pretty much it. You send them to the online department. Well, that was a bit.... Send them online - do it... You know, let them do it themselves. And my argument is, listen, I got these clients, they're saving a good percentage. Yeah, there might be 50 to 100 thousand, but eventually be at 250, 500 thousand. And you know, grow the assets from there. It's gonna take time. But unfortunately, managers of Merrill Lynch, they don't have time for that. And again, because managers are judge month to month, quarter to quarter, they've got to hit their numbers and everything and that's what they're focusing on. So they need those big accounts on day one. And again, for me, it wasn't me. I don't care about your goals. I don't care what you're doing. You know, you're trying to go climb the corporate ladder. I'm

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focusing on my clients. My clients are happy. They're taken care of. And so that's why they just didn't it wasn't working out well, especially when they made that change. And just that was their choice - was to send them online, send them online. And that's just I just felt I said, no, I'm not going to do that for.

Maddy Roche: [00:12:45] Yeah, interesting red flag to run up against. I haven't heard that from a lot of advisors that that was actually something that they had to avoid. What made you transition to the broker dealer and what was that transition like going from Merrill Lynch to an independent BD?

Cliff Downie: [00:12:59] Again, corporate changes again. That's what sorts of wheels turning in terms of what else is out there. And I remembered when I was taking classes for my CFP and when an instructor, the tax instructor worked an independent bd, and we connected, we kept in touch and everything. And so again, when Merrill was making the changes, I kind of reached out to him and just going to pick his brain, seeing what else is out there and see what an independent bd will look like. And so we had a meeting about a conversation and then everything looked, sounded great, sounded like what I wanted to do: open up my business, business be under my own name, you know, he'll take care of some of the back office stuff and everything. And so got everything set up and everything because again, the writing was on a wall with Merrill that I knew, you know, eventually it will be, we'll go on our go our separate ways. And so getting that all set up beforehand, had my office set up, had everything set up so when the date they'd come, it would be a smooth transition into the independent world from there.

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Maddy Roche: [00:13:59] At that point in time, had you maintained client relationships going as far back as Wells Fargo?

Cliff Downie: [00:14:05] Yeah, I had a lot of clients that have followed me through all the, all the steps and so it's worked out. So yes, I do have a lot of clients that have been working me through all the different institutions and companies I've worked with and everything.

Maddy Roche: [00:14:19] Ok. So you spent some time at that independent broker dealer. What was that like?

Cliff Downie: [00:14:24] Again, great, in the beginning. You know, building my practice had a lot of the freedom to run my practice how I wanted to run it, focus on the clients that I want to focus on. It was working out really great. And then, of course, corporate changes coming up. And so they started making some changes that were affecting my bottom line. One of those changes - I was doing a lot of direct mutual fund business and so was easy, right? That... From company websites. So was very easy to run my practice. And again, one of the changes they're making is, no, you can't do that anymore. You have to go to... Their custodian was just purging at the time, and I've just heard horror stories about just time and time to take care of little issues and things like that to communication and so again, that would open up the wheels. Started the wheels are turning. See what else is out there. And so a friend of mine, that's an independent RIA told me, "Hey. Take a look at this. Take a look at XYPN." Was hearing about it. So I reached out - what-was-it - in 2017 or so and decided to see, what else - You know, what you guys have to offer and everything. And really liked what I heard. And so I decided to open... jump ship and become an independent RIA, so...

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Maddy Roche: [00:15:34] Wow. I love this treasure hunt of of things that you've kind of gone through to find yourself the owner of your firm.

Cliff Downie: [00:15:43] I can't become any more independent now! There's no where else I can go!

Maddy Roche: [00:15:47] No corporate changes here!

Cliff Downie: [00:15:48] No, I don't think I can become any more, so I'm pretty confident that hopefully we'll be here for it for a longer time. So,.

Maddy Roche: [00:15:53] Yeah, so during this, given your kind of background: what was your development and understanding of the fiduciary oath that you've now taken as well as being fee-only? How has it evolved over the years?

Cliff Downie: [00:16:05] Yeah. It's something that, you know, deep down I always want to do what's best for my clients. But at each spot, learning more about the practice, what they do is like, you know, it doesn't seem to make sense. It doesn't fit well, especially early on. I was a, I was an intern in Smith Barney and it was it was the boiler room style situation. I was in the copy room, I had been given a phone book and you make one hundred dials per hour and you try to get people in the door and everything. And so it was an eye opener. And I learned early on that, you know, I'm not going to I'm not a day trading broker. I don't want to. That's what I enjoy. I don't want to do that. And so, you know, went to Wells Fargo doing what's best

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for my clients, work on them. But Wells Fargo, Merrill Lynch, I know they - I don't want to talk mean about them, but you know, they focus, they do have they have sales quotas. They do push products or, you know, they recommend products in this. "Hey, if you can really do it, focus on that this month, that would be great." And they just didn't make sense for me. And so I just it just I'm not going to I'm not going to sell a product for my clients if it doesn't make sense. And so when I became, you know, independent BD and finally became an RIA, it just... the fiduciary oath is just, it just made sense. And that's what it's what I always practiced, I mean, my whole business. This is just makes more sense for the client.

Maddy Roche: [00:17:28] Now, you started your business with a fair number of client households. That's correct?

Cliff Downie: [00:17:33] Yeah. Yeah. Luckily, I was able to transfer about- about 40-45 households over. And again, I grew up AUM route. That's where I, that's what I grew up at Wells Fargo, Merrill Lynch and everything. And so luckily I was able to transfer a number of households to give me a good, give me a base of income coming in, some revenue coming in that I wouldn't be... I mean, it was still difficult. It was still difficult. But I was, I got a good base coming over.

Maddy Roche: [00:18:00] Mhmm. I think we have a lot of different members that come into XYPN with a book of business. And then there are a lot of questions about whether they have any trails associated with any of those clients or any income that's being derived from any products sold in the past. Is that something you have to work through?

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Cliff Downie: [00:18:17] Luckily, no. And so a lot of my business is fee based or the AUM. And so at an independent bd, they did have some commissions and stuff like that. I did a little bit life insurance, term policy insurance and maybe an annuity trade once a year or something like that. But nothing - the majority of my business was the fees selected for managing the assets.

Maddy Roche: [00:18:40] Got it.

Cliff Downie: [00:18:41] So giving up commissions was not a big issue for me or my practice.

Maddy Roche: [00:18:46] Any recommendations for advisors who have a book of business that they want to bring into their own RIA? How did you facilitate those conversations with your clients and how did you explain why you were doing this and why you hadn't done that before?

Cliff Downie: [00:19:01] Yeah, luckily. I mean, the relationship I always had, it's with me and the client, were really strong. And so especially the independent BD, FSC, I mean, they didn't know who FSC was. You know, they they know they got paperwork from them every so often, but their relationship was with me. And so when I was talking about some changes, it really... For them, nothing, nothing really changed dramatically. Well, maybe their statements would look a little different. So that was maybe the biggest change. But how we worked together, the way, you know, we communicated. You know, the compensation component of it, that really there's no changes on that. And so why making the changes? A lot of the reasons from technology standpoint, from being, me being more efficient,

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me being more focused on the planning. That's what I told them, that that's how they're going to benefit from these changes. But in terms of like say what, what they see, not a lot of changes. So..

Maddy Roche: [00:20:00] I would think that Wells Fargo would have wanted you to not take those clients. Did you-did you get any pushback from that or what's the process when you've decided to leave Wells Fargo or a company similar? What's the process?

Cliff Downie: [00:20:13] I mean, the process is there. We were allowed to take some client information, name, phone number. That's pretty much it. And so I had the list of names of people I still wanted to continue to work with. And so when I made the change, I made the change from Wells Fargo, Merrill Lynch. It kind of cracks me up now. But it's really the morning you go in unannounced into your manager's office, you you hand them your resignation letter, they escort you out of the building. Then you start making phone calls. And that's when you start calling all your clients and everything, letting them know the change and everything in the afternoon and then start working on getting those account transfers and everything's established. Same thing. Wells Fargo and Merrill Lynch, Merrill Lynch to independent BD. And so that's when you make the make the mad dash. And so.

Maddy Roche: [00:21:01] Wow. Thanks for walking us through that.

Cliff Downie: [00:21:03] Yeah. It cracks me up, I'm still thinking about it and everything. And they just. Yeah, it's it's a funny process and everything, but this is what happened, what needs to happen.

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Maddy Roche: [00:21:12] Yeah. I've I've heard from several advisors that it's kind of a mad dash to make those phone calls. And it sounds like that's like legitimately what it is.

Cliff Downie: [00:21:20] It is. It is. Yeah. You get out building, you go to your office. You start calling. Those advisors on the other side are, you know, they're breaking up your book of.. your book. And I remember Merrill Lynch. This happened a couple of times where I was involved. They call it "the draft." And so they said, "hey, X, John Doe left. Here's a list. Pick one. Pick a couple clients and start making the calls."

Maddy Roche: [00:21:41] Wow. So it's a it's a race to reach them first.

Cliff Downie: [00:21:44] Yes. Yes.

Maddy Roche: [00:21:46] Interesting.. So let's shift gears a little bit and give you some credit for the firm you've built. You you are now servicing over 100 clients. Talk to us, through how that growth happened over the past two and a half years. Because that is, quite frankly, rapid growth. And you've done it as a solo advisor. Talk to us about the first year and the second year and what went into kind of building that base of clients that you now sustain.

Cliff Downie: [00:22:09] Yeah. So, luckily, like I said, I had a good base, 50 households or so, and I'd been growing about from 10 to 15 new households per year. And in the beginning, when I first became

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independent BD, I reached out to - I don't know what - a financial coach as well. The name was Dave Ramsey.

Maddy Roche: [00:22:29] Yes!

Cliff Downie: [00:22:30] Heard about him on the, on the radio and everything like that. Him and and Suze Orman and so I always liked his philosophy and everything. And so I became independent and I was now have the flexibility to become a a.. we're called SmartVestors. We endorse local providers for people who are looking help with the investment component of it. And so I got picked to be an endorsed local provider and that's really what helped in terms of growing, growing my business, growing my practice. And so meeting a lot of the followers, listeners of Dave Ramsey, helping them when it comes to the investment steps they're working on - what, that's where a lot of my growth has come for the first couple of years. Now, it's now that I have a good base of business here, a good book is a good size of a book here and everything, I still get referrals from Dave, I'm still a Dave Ramsey SmartVestor, but not more than the referrals I get from existing clients. This is where actually my growth. It's funny, Yelp is a platform that I use that I, that I get referrals from there as well. So that's that's really helped to grow my count, my book as well is-is those, you know, Dave Ramsey, the referrals and also the uh, I guess, social media, Yelp, that's grown my business from there.

Maddy Roche: [00:23:42] Mhmm. I'd love to learn a little bit more about Dave Ramsey and the role that that his program has played with you. Because I've heard from some advisors that they've had no luck. And then I've heard other advisors like you say that it's it's very much a large

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component of the business. What is that like to be a SmartVestor with him and an endorsed local advisor?

Cliff Downie: [00:24:04] Yeah. Before anyone rolls their eyes at the Dave Ramsey - Yes, I guarantee all my clients 12%, just like he says. No, I'm joking. I'm... Scott Gills is gonna be mad at me for saying that.

Maddy Roche: [00:24:14] Ooh yeah!

Cliff Downie: [00:24:16] But no, it's it's.. The program has changed. When I first signed on to the program so originally, when I first signed on, someone types in their information, I get their information, they get my contact information - it's just one-off. I reach out to them and we'll see if we can connect and set up a time to meet from there. And then the whole, the program was changed almost when the Department of Labor, the fiduciary rules coming down. Regulators didn't like that because they felt like Dave was forcing that one prospect to one advisor. And so they did change the program now, so when they type in their information, they get five names on there, five different local advisors in the area. They can-they can talk and meet with all five, they can talk to even no one, it's up to them. And so, and so this change happened maybe about a year and a half, two years ago. And so, and so, for new advisors coming into the program is a little difficult because they are competing against four other advisors in the area versus when I originally started, it was just me. And so now there's there's a little bit of competition within Dave Ramsey SmartVestors in order to get a hold of that client and see and you can build a relationship from there. And so I have helped and talked to a number of XYPN members who reach out to me because they're new to the program as well. And I just, I'm more than happy to share what works, what doesn't work, what I've experienced

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and things like that... and the workflows, the templates that I have in place, like I-what I use for technology so that I can try and get in front of these Dave Ramsey listeners as quickly as possible.

Maddy Roche: [00:25:42] And I don't know the answer to this: does Dave Ramsey's program point all consumers to fee-only advisors?

Cliff Downie: [00:25:51] No -

Maddy Roche: [00:25:51] Interesting!

Cliff Downie: [00:25:51] - so there are... Yeah. So there are some brokers in the program. And so they give, they do give them a wide range.

Maddy Roche: [00:26:00] Interesting.

Cliff Downie: [00:26:00] Of... Different type of advisers, brokers, in there, so, yeah, so no, not only they don't, they don't get pointed only to fee-only advisors.

Maddy Roche: [00:26:10] Do you think you being fee-only and being able to kind of work with the smaller accounts is something that is a differentiator for you among the other Dave Ramsey advisors?

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Cliff Downie: [00:26:19] I do think so because sometimes I see on there who are the other Dave Ramsey advisors on there. I can see they work for sometimes major firms as well. And so I know like - Oh! I know they have account minimums. And so -

Maddy Roche: [00:26:31] Interesting.

Cliff Downie: [00:26:31] like Merrill Lynch was 250, and that was six years ago. And so imagine it's even higher. And so... The program. And again, this is what I tell new people, the program works. But if you have a niche, a focus, if you say, "hey, I only work with physicians who make \$250,000 and have 500 thousand in assets." Great. The program's not gonna work for you.

Maddy Roche: [00:26:31] Interesting.

Cliff Downie: [00:26:54] Because I get about 30 contacts per month, so out of the 30, maybe one or two might fall into that little niche of theirs. And are you gonna be able to get a hold of that person before the other four or five people get to hold them? It's it's difficult. And so, and so with the program, you do get a range. I get some people that are, "hey, I'm just looking to start saving for retirement." And I get people that say, "hey, I got a \$1 million 401(k) rollover." And so you do have to have some kind of service-product model, whatever it is, to be able to help a wide range of people through the program. And so that's the most important part, so if you do have a niche, whatever that is, it's just, the program might not work because out of all those names, one or two, three maybe fall into that and it

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might be difficult to get hold of them and other advisors are also trying to contact them. So.

Maddy Roche: [00:27:46] Yeah. Have you defined a niche for yourself?

Cliff Downie: [00:27:49] It's really - yeah, I had thought, had thought about it. And, looking at my book, it is Dave Ramsey followers. Dave Ramsey listeners. So when I do meet with them and talk to them, the terminology that we talk about, the baby steps, we talk about budgeting. And so it is-it is a lot easier conversation. I do joke sometimes is - when I do meet someone that's not quite familiar with the Dave program, trying to change my mentality, my presentation - I start saying things about baby steps and this, and they're like, "what are you talking about?" I'm like, "oh, that's right. You don't know what - You don't know what I'm talking about, the program!" And so my book is made up Dave Ramsey followers. And so that's-that's really what I focus on and that's what, what it's grown into.

Maddy Roche: [00:28:30] Cool. So talk to us about your service model: Once, once someone becomes a client, what can they expect with you in terms of an ongoing relationship?

Cliff Downie: [00:28:38] Yeah. So I do, I do break up my book into A-B-C clients.

Maddy Roche: [00:28:43] Okay!

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Cliff Downie: [00:28:43] And so most - it's driven by revenue. And so based on where the fall in that range and everything, it's how often I will contact them or connect with them. And so, just to give you an example, a C level client is any client under five hundred dollars in year of revenue. I will be reaching out to them every 5 months either through a phone call, a email or meeting, if it's time for a scheduled meeting. I do tell them if there's any question, concerns, something keeping you up the night, call, email me, text me, shoot me and we'll have a discussion. But well, well, well you know, I'll be reaching out to you, checking in with you, talk a little about the accounts, performance wise, but really I tell them just to check and see how things are going. Se if you make any updates from that from that perspective. B-level clients is every - same thing, 4 months. And, an A-level client's every 3 months. And -

Maddy Roche: [00:29:29] Wow!

Cliff Downie: [00:29:29] - that's when I'm reaching out. And so that that's the service model in terms of reaching out and connecting with clients.

Maddy Roche: [00:29:36] Now, you're talking about servicing over 100 clients. And I remember when XYPN only had 30 members and they all fit onto one spreadsheet. As we grew, I had to scroll more and more and more and there became kind of a threshold of where, you just stop knowing everything about the clients.

Cliff Downie: [00:29:53] Right.

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Maddy Roche: [00:29:53] And I think there is there are some rules of thumb is in terms of number of relationships you can maintain. How do you stay organized?

Cliff Downie: [00:30:02] Leverage technology. So one of the great things about going independent RIA is, is just I.. There is all this technology that I never knew existed, 'cause even in the BDs, independent BD, we're just so limited on what we can do. Creating your own website? I mean, that's, I've never even thought about that! You know, Wells Fargo was "no, you're gonna get a picture and we're going to - we're going to type up what we're going to say." And so being able to create your own website and do what you want to do and say on there was amazing. So, yeah, I mean, I remember when I joined XYPN in May 2017, I think your conference back then was in Dallas.

Maddy Roche: [00:30:36] Mhmm!

Cliff Downie: [00:30:36] And so I went out there and there, was excited. I was all by myself, didn't know anybody, just - I think you and that was pretty much it - my contact. And so going through the technology conference almost felt like a kid in a toy store there.

Maddy Roche: [00:30:48] Haha!

Cliff Downie: [00:30:48] It was so exciting - all this technology! I was like, "Gah! I want this. I want that. I want all of it." And one of the technology vendors I saw on there was Asset Map. And so Asset Map was one thing

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that caught my eye and I - looking into more into it, it really - it really helped my business and being organized and knowing a lot about my client's financial situations.

Maddy Roche: [00:31:12] Hm!

Cliff Downie: [00:31:12] And so I've never been a do a full 30, 40 page financial plan kind of guy.

Maddy Roche: [00:31:19] Okay.

Cliff Downie: [00:31:19] And so my clients - and again, this this is my opinion against anybody. I know there's many advisors that do all that and do a great business. But, you know, I always like... My clients are not going to read this whole financial 30 page financial plan.

Maddy Roche: [00:31:32] Mhmm.

Cliff Downie: [00:31:32] And I'm going to spend the hours putting all this together. And so with Asset Map - I call it, you know, it's - it's a one page financial plan. It's the Cliff Notes of financial plan. And so with this one page, I'm able to know everything about my client's financial situation - from, everything from insurance, income, debts, real estates, you know, everything, all in this one page and be able to spot any kind of red flags that maybe, hey, maybe on our next conversation or our next meeting or so, let's have a discussion, see if we can make sure that everything's taken

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care and everything doing the right thing from that perspective. So with Asset Map, if I have a review call, a review meeting schedule, I can pull it up half an hour before the meeting call and know, say "OK, yup, I see my notes on WealthBox. We discuss this. We need to focus on this. OK. We got the agenda set up. We're ready to go." And -

Maddy Roche: [00:32:21] Wow.

Cliff Downie: [00:32:21] - I'm making sure that I'm organized from that perspective.

Maddy Roche: [00:32:25] Asset Map was one of the competitors at the FinTech competition or did you see them in the exhibit hall?

Cliff Downie: [00:32:31] I think - I think you're right. Yeah. And this is in the exhibit hall and I still clearly remember walking by and they did - they had a show on there and I was like, "that is amaz- " I had something. I was trying to put something together on Excel, I remember -

Maddy Roche: [00:32:43] Yeah.

Cliff Downie: [00:32:43] - trying to piece it all together because it wasn't... You know, I didn't find anything out there. And then when I saw that on Asset Map and at the vendor conference there, I was like, "this is exactly what I was looking for." So.

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Maddy Roche: [00:32:54] Interesting! Is that where you build a mind map almost of the client scenario?

Cliff Downie: [00:32:59] Similar. Similar idea.

Maddy Roche: [00:33:01] Okay.

Cliff Downie: [00:33:01] Yeah. So it's it's it's it's like I said it's a one page and everything financial related. It's on there. Add a couple notes here and there and everything, but it just helps me know a lot about my client's financial situation. And like you said, anything's that red flags or anything we need to discuss at the next meeting or conversation or so. And making sure we're - we're taking care of it from there.

Maddy Roche: [00:33:23] Interesting. You mentioned WealthBox as your CRM. I'm wondering in terms of the A, B and C clients and the different touchpoints that you have with each client, how does WealthBox or how do you use your CRM to keep you on track with those meetings? Or if not, how do you stay on track?

Cliff Downie: [00:33:39] So I do have a workflow established through WealthBox.

Maddy Roche: [00:33:42] Okay.

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Cliff Downie: [00:33:44] So that way - for example, I know in all my meetings, overviews, meeting calls, videos, whatever they are, they're all scheduled on the first of the month. So I know I've got to go on there and say, "OK, who do I need - Who do I need to call? Who do I need to schedule a meeting with? Who do I need to schedule a call with? Who am I going to create a review video for?"

Maddy Roche: [00:34:02] Hmm!

Cliff Downie: [00:34:03] And so then what I do is, through MyRepChat - which is the text service now I've begun just to use. I have my templates saved on there where.. for the review call.

Maddy Roche: [00:34:15] Wow!

Cliff Downie: [00:34:15] I send it out - it goes out. It has my link to Calendly. So then the client can just schedule the time that works best for that review call.

Maddy Roche: [00:34:23] You send that over text message?

Cliff Downie: [00:34:25] Yes. So I send it in text.

Maddy Roche: [00:34:27] Wow!!

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Cliff Downie: [00:34:27] No one e-mails anymore. No emails.

Maddy Roche: [00:34:27] I love that!

Cliff Downie: [00:34:32] The text. I get a quicker response. I get - yeah, it's just.. People respond a lot quicker versus the email.

Maddy Roche: [00:34:39] Wow!

Cliff Downie: [00:34:39] So I get a lot, a lot more things done via text than versus email. Sometimes, even I forget to check my email because I'm focusing on my text and everything, getting those - getting that accomplished. But, but I go - I send it through and it's a quick template. It's got it all set up. So I take care of my calls, my review meetings. Same thing on a different template. More of a "hey, just give me a couple days and times that work best" through MyRepChat, send that out to them. And then for my review videos I use Screencastify. And so, I just set myself a day I can knock out a handful of videos where I'm.. just showing me going over their accounts, going over their Asset Map and also just a couple homework items or questions that they might have and sending out through the video, through e-mail from that perspective. So - I haven't figured a way how to send a video through text. I don't - maybe...

Maddy Roche: [00:35:25] Haha!

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Cliff Downie: [00:35:25] Something there, but I still send the videos through emails for, for, for those clients.

Maddy Roche: [00:35:29] That is really impressive. And so you said the first of the month. So this is really something on your calendar that the first day of the month you are going through what clients you are going to have a relationship with this month.

Cliff Downie: [00:35:42] Right. Exactly.

Maddy Roche: [00:35:42] Wow!

Cliff Downie: [00:35:42] What clients - what clients need meetings; what client needs a call and what - scheduled call - and which clients I'm going to do the video for? And then just kind of break it, break it up from there.

Maddy Roche: [00:35:52] Mmm.

Cliff Downie: [00:35:52] And with WealthBox, I have my task items that tells me, I get - you know, it tells me which clients fall into - video, call, meeting. And then from there, I reschedule the next touch - either three or four or five months down the road and either - will it be a call or meeting or... phone call, meeting, video from that perspective.

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Maddy Roche: [00:36:14] And what makes a client need a video versus a meeting? Is that subjective or have you think about it? Talk us through that.

Cliff Downie: [00:36:21] Yeah, no. So how it works is - let's say, for example, I have a meeting with a client this month and we got it done, it was all taken care of. And it doesn't matter 'bout A,Bs or what - we had the meeting, we're done. The next touch will be a video. Okay? So that's the way I see it. It's really because I've already had a face to face conversation. So nothing urgent came out in the timeframe. So I'm gonna send him a video, say, "hey, here's how the account, blahblahblah." After, the next touch after that would be a phone call. So, that's what tells me that's about, you know, the next touch will be a phone call or have a conversation go over the accounts in a little more detail, something like that. After that, we'll be the video again, because I just talked to them the last time.

Maddy Roche: [00:36:58] Wow.

Cliff Downie: [00:36:58] And then the last one would be the meeting. So if you think about it, if I have a meeting with an A client, in three months, I'm going to have a video. In six months, I'm going to talk to them. In nine months, I have another video. And then a year, we should be meeting again.

Maddy Roche: [00:37:14] Wow!

Cliff Downie: [00:37:15] Same thing with a B - it's just different. It's just four months, is the difference and then with a C level client, it does take a

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little longer between the meetings. But again, I'm, you know, I'm not looking to build a book of C level clients and so - and so, being-being able to have a meeting with them, a conversation with them every year, year and a half or so, it works well. And that's-and that's what they're looking for.

Maddy Roche: [00:37:37] Wow. And do you lay this all out to them when you first onboard the client?

Cliff Downie: [00:37:42] Yup!

Maddy Roche: [00:37:42] - Just kind of talk them through what to expect?

Cliff Downie: [00:37:44] Yeah, I tell them what the process is and everything. How often I should be reaching out to them, how I'd be reaching out to them. But again, I always tell them, "listen. If there's something that comes up between now and then, let me know." My calendar's on my website, schedule a time, we'll have a conversation. Again, if-if something comes up, changes, and we-and we need to have a meeting to have a discussion. Then we'll have a meeting.

Maddy Roche: [00:38:03] Mmm.

Cliff Downie: [00:38:04] And then that will, that will change the timeframe from that perspective. But if there's something urgent, we need to have a discussion? Well, we'll set that up.

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Maddy Roche: [00:38:11] I hope our listeners are taking notes because I'm taking notes. I-I've, I've really been inspired and I've-I've learned a lot just through kind of your conversation about how you remain efficient and on schedule.

Cliff Downie: [00:38:23] Yeah.

Maddy Roche: [00:38:23] I'm wondering - does the Dave Ramsey program provide you any education on how to do this or is it really just a lead, a lead funnel for you?

Cliff Downie: [00:38:30] They did in the beginning. Some PDFs, some reports and say what works best. They run the numbers in terms of what the success rate if your... Right away. And so before, when I first started the program, I get a contact that they said, "if you reach out to them in the first five minutes, you're gonna get, you're going to get a hold of them." Because you, they're in front of their computer. They typed it in there - their information - they they they requested for help, so if you call them right there and - it's a joke. They're like, "Wow, I just typed in my information, you're calling me already." And so the percentage is a lot higher -

Maddy Roche: [00:39:03] Wow.

Cliff Downie: [00:39:03] - from that perspective. Same idea now with the 4 and 5. They do say, "Hey, if you do call right away, you're the first one to get a hold of them, there's a good chance that you'll have a meeting or have a conversation."

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Maddy Roche: [00:39:15] Mmm!

Cliff Downie: [00:39:15] I don't do that as much anymore because I feel like I'm - They're getting bombarded a little bit because, again, four or five different advisors are calling, emailing at the same time. So I do send them an email through GetResponse - is what I use - so when they type in the information, an e-mail gets automatically sent out to them. And - I joke in the email is that, "hey, I know you're getting bombarded by calls right now -"

Maddy Roche: [00:39:38] Ah!

Cliff Downie: [00:39:38] "I'll call you in two days just to - you know, once the dust settles, if you're gonna have a discussion with me." But on the email, there's my - my schedule's on there and I do, do text them in my intro Dave Ramsey a template as well. But it seems of a phone call user wait a couple days for the dust to settle, for them to calm down a little bit.

Maddy Roche: [00:39:56] Wow. It's so clear how much you've learned over these years and how to facilitate, not just prospect relationships, but client relationships! I'm wondering: did your calendar and how you reach out to clients and, you know, even just the decision to text them versus not - was there was this all trial and error or -

Cliff Downie: [00:40:16] Yeah!

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Maddy Roche: [00:40:16] - were you taught that somewhere?

Cliff Downie: [00:40:17] No, trial and error. Almost. I call it the machine. You know, I'm always tweaking with it and everything like that just to be more efficient. Again, the idea is to be more efficient, just be more and more efficient with my time and no. But also to, to let the clients know that they're getting touched, you know, they're that they're hearing for me. I think with the..., the book, the technology and everything like that these clients are getting touched, they know I'm here, but they can reach me at any time. But the machine is a process of if I do get a new client on board, I really know all the steps down the road: what's involved, our timeframe for everything, get everything done and everything, and so that that's that really helps.

Maddy Roche: [00:40:58] I'm interested in how you charge your clients and I'm - I'm interested because I suspect you'll probably have some nuggets of wisdom as well and how to kind of think about how you charge for your clients. Is it all AUM, any upfront? Talk, talk to us about that.

Cliff Downie: [00:41:13] Yeah. Majority of my income is AUM.

Maddy Roche: [00:41:16] Mhmm.

Cliff Downie: [00:41:16] Yeah, again, just growing up. Yeah. In terms of the Wells Fargo, the Merrill Lynch kind of timeframe. That's what it all, all it was. I really didn't get into fee-for-service until, until like say XYPN and

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started learning more about what you guys you know what to offer and in that model.

Maddy Roche: [00:41:35] Mhmm.

Cliff Downie: [00:41:35] And so I'm on a tiered rate.

Maddy Roche: [00:41:38] Okay.

Cliff Downie: [00:41:38] And so from, not to go through all the numbers, but if you want 0 to 25,000 is 2%, 25 to 50 is 1.75. And then it goes all the way down to 750 thousands is 1%.

Maddy Roche: [00:41:50] Got it.

Cliff Downie: [00:41:50] And I can tell - listeners: "oh my god, he's charging 2% on uh-

Maddy Roche: [00:41:56] Haha!

Cliff Downie: [00:41:56] - AUM! How can you get away with it?" Calm down. If it's someone has \$20,000, 2%, it's \$400 for the year. Okay? So let's just pump the brakes. There is not a huge amount there and everything like that. But also too, the way I present it is - where is this,

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where's this 40-20-\$20,000 client gonna get any help from a financial advisor? You know what I'm saying?

Maddy Roche: [00:42:15] Right.

Cliff Downie: [00:42:15] Here I almost have two decades of experience. They can go to Merrill Lynch, Wells Fargo. They're gonna give them online - "go to online, go take care of yourself." Is a financial planner gonna charge them 25 hundred, 3,000 for a financial plan? They might not need that. You know?

Maddy Roche: [00:42:31] Mhmm.

Cliff Downie: [00:42:31] And so I kind of fit right in the middle for those kind of clients and say, "hey - " and I, I'm upfront with them. I say, "listen, I am high on an account size this size. If you feel confident, you can do it on your own - Vanguard, Fidelity, there's a lot of online tools. There's a lot of institution out there. You can be up and running 10, 15 minutes. They have a good list of different mutual fund options, customer service. Is there waiting for your phone call? They're low cost and they're low cost because you do the work, you set up the account. You keep an eye on it and you know, do what you want to do." For my client? This is-this is the last thing they want to do. This is it. You know, they don't they don't want - They don't want to read a prospectus. They don't want to figure an allocation. They don't want to do any of that.

Maddy Roche: [00:43:13] Mhmm.

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Cliff Downie: [00:43:13] And so, then so they come to me because they realize that. And so they want help in terms of figuring out the investment allocation, incorporating a little bit about financial planning through with the Asset Map and everything and really just making sure they're on the right path.

Maddy Roche: [00:43:26] Wonderful. And so do any of your clients contact you throughout the months for-for kind of complex issues that maybe you didn't think about? Or do things come up pretty frequently for your clients?

Cliff Downie: [00:43:40] Yeah, especially now, right now is tax time.

Maddy Roche: [00:43:42] Mmm!

Cliff Downie: [00:43:42] That and getting a couple of questions on taxes. And that's what comes into now with Holistiplan - I'm using that. Again -

Maddy Roche: [00:43:50] Cool.

Cliff Downie: [00:43:50] - another vendor at the conference I ran into and I think they were at the FinTech as well.

Maddy Roche: [00:43:55] Mhmm!

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Cliff Downie: [00:43:55] And I think they won. I think they did win! And so using that now to help clients from a tax planning perspective: the accountants, state attorneys, insurance specialists. So I tell them, "hey, if I'm not the expert in that field, we'll bring you an expert that can help us, making sure that we, we're doing the things the right way with the right philosophy and mentality and getting those accomplished."

Maddy Roche: [00:44:15] Great -.

Cliff Downie: [00:44:15] Though. And so, yes, you run across those complex situations. I just bring in experts that can help us out with that.

Maddy Roche: [00:44:21] Mmm! I love that. I hear a lot of members kind of get tied up on this complexity issue and then -

Cliff Downie: [00:44:27] Right.

Maddy Roche: [00:44:27] - the flat fee is attractive in that regard that you kind of just ignore the complexity and it all balances out. It sounds like you charge quarterly in arrears, typical AUM style. Any upfront fee whatsoever to look at everything and then to make sure that they're a good client?

Cliff Downie: [00:44:43] Yeah. So I've done a couple project based I call them, where if a client comes up or a project comes up and say, "hey, I just want you to take a look at my 401(k) allocation, just give me your two

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cents." And so I'll charge them kind of a project base, couple hundred bucks, do-do that analysis and stuff like that. Budgeting help. I get that. And so I charge an hourly rate of \$150 so, what we do, in that situation, we'll have a conversation meeting every hour to see, every, every month to just see, "hey, how you're doing on your budget?" Things, you know, things like that you should look out work on from that perspective. So I'm still kind of learning that the you know, the fee-only service. You know, collecting those kind of fees because I'm still AUM, but I am incorporating more of that. So one of the things I did change is, again, on the AUM route, someone opens \$10,000 IRA, whatever reasons to 2% that's \$200, I'm like, "well, shoot, I'm working more than that!" And so now what I'm doing is for any households under \$25,000, we do the project based where I send them an invoice every six months for \$250 bucks. So I collect \$500 for the year. At the end of it, once a once a household reaches \$25,000, we'll go over to the AUM side of the equation, and really no big change fees say for the client, but it's more AUM driven versus sending them an invoice every six months.

Maddy Roche: [00:46:02] Yeah.

Cliff Downie: [00:46:03] So that's one of the changes. Again, I'm meeting these prospects, meeting these clients and everything like that. Again, they'll be they're gonna be good clients, they're gonna be a right fit. It's gonna take time for them to grow the assets. But it's a way for me to be compensated a little bit and still help them out from that perspective. And again, I'm not looking to build a big book of C level clients. I'm just here to help them out. To be honest, the C level clients have helped grow my business a lot as well because what happens is a lot. I see a young couple come in there. I'm helping them out and they're "you know what? My parents need help." And then that's what I get the introduction from. "Hey, I got a co-worker that needs help." Using them to leverage my social media,

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my my marketing, you know, so they get the email for me that shows my Facebook, my Google reviews. My Yelp. That has helped grow my business from that perspective. And so these small accounts are they really help in terms of growing my business from that perspective.

Maddy Roche: [00:46:52] Yeah. What part of your journey as an entrepreneur would you say has been the most challenging from you? You speak with such confidence and I'm wondering what what has been the most challenging for you?

Cliff Downie: [00:47:06] Compliance.

Maddy Roche: [00:47:07] Interesting.

Cliff Downie: [00:47:08] Most - just yeah, just compliance. And you know, I've run a clean book and I try to do the things best. But last year I realized I was falling behind. You know, all the Smart RIA that you guys have and everything - you just, I don't enjoy compliance, I don't like it. I don't know who enjoys it. Besides Scott. It's just that I don't like it. And again, at the conference, that's where the compliance coaching was offered on there. And so I really got to stop going to conference - I seem to buy something new every single time I go there.

Maddy Roche: [00:47:38] Well, I do remember a year, Cliff, that you walked away with like an i-Pad as an award, right? Didn't you win something? I think -

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Cliff Downie: [00:47:44] Oh yeah!

Maddy Roche: [00:47:44] - you won-you won some tech item!

Cliff Downie: [00:47:46] No, it was an Echo Dot.

Maddy Roche: [00:47:48] Oh, who doesn't need an Echo Dot?! Haha.

Cliff Downie: [00:47:49] Yeeah. I remember, that's right!

Maddy Roche: [00:47:53] So back to the Smart RIA and compliance. I hear it a lot from advisors who have spent a lot of time in the broker dealer world that compliance just is not something that they were ever trained to embrace.

Cliff Downie: [00:48:03] They weren't trained! Exactly.

Maddy Roche: [00:48:04] Right -

Cliff Downie: [00:48:04] They actually - they always took care of a lot of the stuff. You know, you probably just sit with them once a year just to go over a couple of things, a mock audit from that perspective, but yeah. You weren't trained, you weren't supposed to take care of it. That's why they took care and that's why they took 10-20% of your your commission for

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that. So that was a challenging part, just trying to, just trying to have the steps and process. Almost a machine for compliance as well. Now with the compliance coaching. But even before that, the open hours, that was always the -

Maddy Roche: [00:48:33] The office hours, yeah.

Cliff Downie: [00:48:34] You know, I was always on those. I am always on those calls and just listening in. You know, if I don't I mean, you know, we don't have a question. I'll just listen in to see what other people's questions about. And if something piques my interest, I'll listen, take notes and stuff like that. So that's helped out. But the one-on-one coaching now, it's really helped in terms of just finding tune, making sure I have all the steps right. All the folders in the right place everything. Everything's set up correctly.

Maddy Roche: [00:48:58] Oh, I'm so glad to hear that. The compliance coaching that Cliff's talking about is a newer benefit. We rolled it out about six or seven months ago with Scott Gill, who is originally our Director of Compliance. He's moved over to be a Compliance Consultant and worked to - working one-on-one with our members, in this coaching capacity. We've really seen advisors like Cliff and others jump on to it, just 1) for the sanity of knowing that there is a time and space every month to do it, but also to know that you've got an expert looking over some things, especially as you get into kind of these triple digit client numbers like Cliff is. Cliff, what do you think is the future for your firm? I am interested as as you've kind of progressed through your career as you look forward. Is there another channel you're going to jump to at some point or what are you gonna do?

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Cliff Downie: [00:49:44] Oh, there's no way I can leave you, Maddy, or Scott.

Maddy Roche: [00:49:46] Oh, thanks!

Cliff Downie: [00:49:47] That's impossible, so -

Maddy Roche: [00:49:47] We would hate it.

Cliff Downie: [00:49:51] Eventually, my my vision for my practice is I never-I never visioned growing, what is it? The enterprise practice? You know, being a manager or have other advisors or juniors under me. Really what I'm focusing on is the lifestyle practice where there's enough in revenue that I feel is comfortable for me and my family that we can enjoy what we would like to do. I can poke my head in here in my office. Take care of a couple things. A couple phone calls, couple videos. Okay. No fires and then I'm bouncing, enjoying the rest of the day. That takes me three hours. It takes me eight hours, whatever that is. But that's really what envision for my practice. Is, it's just get to a certain revenue number that I feel comfortable with, growing my assets, and then taking on a client here and there and and really enjoying time with our family. And that's been entrepreneur growing up. I have two little girls, 9 and 6. They're going on 19 and 16 here.... But-but being able to spend time with them and enjoying the activities from school outside of school and everything, the flexibility, that's, that's really what I enjoy. And that's what I envision for my practice, being able to sustain our family lifestyle and continue from there. So.

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Maddy Roche: [00:51:02] I can't help but keep thinking about this "keep it simple" attitude.

Cliff Downie: [00:51:08] That's what it is.

Maddy Roche: [00:51:08] I've heard it through this interview, this whole time, that you just haven't overcomplicated anything. And, you know, I.

Cliff Downie: [00:51:14] Yeah. But that's really what. "Just keep it simple, stupid." Just what? What is the simplest answer?

Maddy Roche: [00:51:20] Right.

Cliff Downie: [00:51:20] And that's for my clients. And again, they're - my clients, they're not ultra complex, you know. Husband and wife: they've got two kids. They've got a house. Mortgage. Have a 401(k). You know, have insurance here and there like that. And so it's it's just focusing them, making sure they're on the right path, making sure we are, you know, doing the right things. That's really my clientele. It just it just. I enjoy it. I relate well, because I try to keep it simple in my life as well. And so it just it just that's the kind of practice I want. And again, realizing I'm not going to have a book of 50 households. You know, it might be more - it probably will be more. But I feel I have the steps using that technology, the templates and everything that I can make sure that hopefully nothing falls through the cracks.

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Maddy Roche: [00:52:04] Yeah, great. Since you've been a practitioner in this space for such a long time and really through all the different channels, where do you think this industry is going and what can we do to impact it?

Cliff Downie: [00:52:15] What Kitces and Alan Moore, with the lawsuit and just going to, going for fee for, fee-only kind of route. The days of charging a commission transaction fee or anything, I think. I don't think clients want that. They-they want planning. They need help. They need planning aspect now. Again, do they need a 50 page financial plan? Probably not. But they also do they just need someone to help guide them and let them know, let them - educate them on their options and let them know. And so you think that's what the way the industry is going is more financial planning, however that looks and paying for a fee, knowing what their fee is? I think that's that's that's going be the big benefit. That's gonna be the change. And XYPN, again with both Alan and Kitces on on how they're helping push that and everything. I think we're going to the right direction. So.

Maddy Roche: [00:53:09] That's great to hear. I want to just ask: what what keeps you coming back every day? What-why do you do this work and why not any of the other professions that we've got out here? What what about this and what you do every day keeps bringing you back?

Cliff Downie: [00:53:24] I really enjoy I mean, helping clients get in a better financial foundation, working through the process, educating them and seeing them not stress out too much. I mean, sometimes in meetings I have I'm looking at the clients and process situation, and I say, "hey, you know what? You know, you're doing okay. I think there's a couple of areas we can approve on. This is how I can help." But when we really dive down the numbers to see where everything's at and then they're like, you're do

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fine. You know, they're okay - the enjoyment to say, "hey, you know, you can do what you want to do in retirement and enjoy what you want to do." And then there are some people I mean, there are alive in back of my mind. I'm like, "oh, my gosh, this is this is gonna be difficult." You know? If they come to me and they say, "I just retired last yesterday, I got 50k, rollover 401(k), what can I do?" And I'm like, "I can get your job back maybe and see what we can do from there." So - but I enjoy working with my clients and working on their plan and seeing, you know, quarter after quarter, year after year, we're improving and getting, and getting them on the right path. That's what I enjoy.

Maddy Roche: [00:54:30] Oh, Cliff. Well, this has been quite inspiring for me and I'm sure for our listeners. Thank you so much for the role that you've played through all the channels in servicing your clients authentically and loyally. And thank you for being a great XYPN member and friend. I so appreciate this interview.

Cliff Downie: [00:54:47] No! It's been great. I've been happy with XYPN since I joined, getting to, you know, helping in terms of growing my business. We've - working with you guys and everything like that. It's been enjoyment. And so I actually do look forward to all the conferences and everything. It's a great time. Might miss the Denver one. It's just 'cause my oldest one is turning 10... "Hey, how would you feel if Daddy just missed that birthday? You'll be okay!" And the tears - I'm kind of like, augh!

Maddy Roche: [00:55:16] Oh, you can't miss the big 10!!

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Cliff Downie: [00:55:18] I can't miss it. I know and I want to go to Denver. Sounds great and everything. And I don't know. We'll see what I can do. So maybe maybe I will bring her along as my sister or something like that and go in there.

Maddy Roche: [00:55:30] Yeah. Or maybe her birthday will change by then. Who knows?

Cliff Downie: [00:55:32] Exactly.

Maddy Roche: [00:55:33] Alright, Cliff, thank you so much. Listeners, have a wonderful and safe day!

[00:55:37] ---

Alan Moore: [00:55:39] XY Planning Network's Annual Benchmarking Survey is out. Are you curious about the average number of clients XYPN members get in their first year or how successful niches really are? To answer these burning questions and more, we begin and enlisted a professional research firm to complete our Annual Benchmarking Study. Get your copy hot off the press and discover vital statistics such as the median advisor revenue by years in practice and sources of firm growth from our referrals to blogging, social media and more. Head over to xyplanningnetwork.com/study to purchase your copy today.

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Maddy Roche: [00:56:10] Be sure to join our VIP community at xyplanningnetwork.com/VIP to hang out with other #XYPNRadio listeners, ask questions for future mailbag episodes with Alan and Kitces. And finally, to find a community of like minded financial advisors. Thank you so much for joining me today. We'll see you next time.

Narrator: [00:56:28] You're not alone and you're not crazy. It's scary starting building and growing your own financial planning firm. And that's why we put together a free private community just for you, the cutting edge financial planner. Go to xyplanningnetwork.com/VIP or text XYPN Radio to 33344 and join a network of thousands ready to change the lives of Gen X and Gen Y clients.