

Career Move Leads to Life Changes

By Ann Marie Harvey

Switching Gears Mid-Career

It wasn't so long ago that producer Doug Denlinger spent more time on the road than at home. Although he had found great success as a senior vice president for a software company, that success led him all around the world managing 500 employees, with little time left for his family. Several years ago, he started thinking about that quality of life and what plans he needed to make for things to change. And change they did.

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—Doug Denlinger

As he was thinking through other job opportunities, one that came to mind was Doug's personal financial planner. "I thought she had an interesting job and I wanted to learn more about it," Doug says. "I liked the concept of making my own schedule and working in a small business environment and not in a corporate atmosphere anymore."

He also liked the idea of establishing relationships with people through creating financial plans. "By understanding a family, their goals and objectives, you can put a plan together to help them meet those goals, and that is intriguing to me," Doug says.

Doug put his plan in place by taking all his certification exams while still working for the software company. A year-and-a-half ago, he took the full plunge and joined Keystone Financial Associates in Mechanicsburg, Pa. "The parent company of Keystone is MMA, which once stood for Mennonite Mutual Aid, but is now a faith-based non-profit," he explains. "MMA works with churches and their members from the Anabaptist tradition, with representatives throughout the United States. After being assigned a group of churches, each local office works with the pastors and their congregations to help them with their financial planning."

MMA also appoints an advocate in each church to help manage the relationship between the organization and the church. "MMA offers member churches matching grants that allow them to multiply their local ministry," Doug explains. "MMA makes it worthwhile for their member churches to be active within the MMA system."

A Warm Market

Because of the already established relationships with the churches, Doug has a warm market to work with. "In most cases we have an immediate level of trust because of our reputation," he says. "Eighty percent of our business here locally is with congregations — and we have marketing rights with 130 churches in our area."

Doug's primary method of working with these congregations is by holding workshops that he tailors to the needs of the demographics of the church, such as Family Protection 101, where he focuses on insurance basics and budgeting. The church provides the meeting space for free and in return, Doug offers free debt counseling and family budgeting to church members who need the service. "It's part of the trade-off for the church to trust us and allow us access to its members," he says. "At any given time, I'm

working with three to five families in this capacity.”

Doug says that for every 35 people who attend a workshop, about half will schedule follow-up appointments, with 70 percent of those turning into some type of business, from investments to health insurance. “What people appreciate is focusing on what they want to accomplish, not that I have a product that I can mold to their needs,” Doug explains. “People look to us to give them advice. We have to flesh out what they want and how they want a policy to work for them. It’s always tempting to write exactly what they ask for, but you need to ask the right questions so that you can effectively recommend and convince them to move forward with the product that they really need, not the one they just read about on the Internet.”

Currently Doug holds one workshop a month, with plans to hold more per month by the end of the year. “We do a lot of work from leads that we get and we also get copies of church bulletins with birth and marriage announcements, so we send out mailers that way too,” he says. “Occasionally we hold an external workshop with a traditional mailing, or a church will send out a mailing as an outreach by holding relevant events at their facility.”

Since Protective is recommended as a preferred provider by MMA, Doug has been working with the company since he became a producer. “I can present Protective with confidence because of its financial stability and long history. It’s not that I haven’t checked out other products, but Protective’s Universal Life products are so much better than anyone else’s,” he explains. “And Protective’s term products are easily convertible to permanent products, so it’s a perfect fit with my philosophy. You sell temporary products for temporary needs and permanent products for permanent needs.”

Doug also appreciates Protective’s efficient Web site and the support he receives from Home Office staff, particularly from the Advanced Sales and Pending Apps teams. “I tend to get involved with some complicated issues and I know I can call Alexandria Parrish or other team members to get fast, strategic answers to my questions,” he says.

The Family Farm

One of Doug’s most interesting cases so far involved a \$300,000 survivorship policy with the option to write up to \$1.2 million. “Many family farms in Pennsylvania have been in the family for generations, and what cost a minimal amount of money years ago is now worth \$3 million,” Doug says. “One of my clients is a farmer and his brother who have a fifty-fifty partnership. Their children aren’t interested in farming and they are looking toward retirement, and they don’t need a lot of assets because they are used to living modestly.”

The culture of their small town is very conservative and neither of the partners wants to have their names in the local paper for selling their farm for an exorbitant amount of money. “I looked at their situation and we bought the life insurance because we were able to lock in the rates because of their good health,” Doug says. “Then we looked at a survivorship policy that would give half to a charitable remainder trust, enabling the farmers to leave a large portion to their church and other charities that they support.”

When the farmers do decide to sell the farm, Doug’s plan helps minimize the discomfort that a public sale of a valuable farm could create in their small community. It also gives them the opportunity to share the money and give significant dollars to charitable organizations. “The farmers are ecstatic about our solution,” Doug says. “It’s been a wonderful opportunity to work with these people and to create a trust that they can understand. Plus, they have the option of increasing their life insurance with the guaranteed insurability option.”

Sage Advice

In his short time as an agent, Doug has learned several important pieces of advice. First, get a good handle on your opening interview and how you introduce yourself. For example, Doug puts it this way: “I’m a financial coach. I help people identify where they want to go and help them get there by putting a financial plan together and walking with them every step of the way — including protecting families with insurance products and saving for the future with retirement and educational savings.”

Second, listen more than you talk. “If you find yourself talking more than listening, turn it around,” Doug suggests. “Asking questions is not just a means to an end, it’s a way to propose a solution. My experience is that my whole objective is to have an uneventful close. The only way to do that is to really understand what the client wants and to get the right product that meets their needs.”

Third, do the right thing for the client and take the long-term perspective. “Focus on customers, not individual transactions,” Doug says. “Treat everyone equally, regardless of net-worth.”

Finally, learn ELI and Tapestry. “Protective provides great tools to help with presentations, especially to show the differences between temporary and permanent products,” Doug says. “These programs have definitely made a difference in my business.”

A Bright Future

Doug’s territory is now about an hour either way between Mechanicsburg and Chambersburg, where Keystone has a second office. It’s a small cry from his former worldwide territory — and that’s just the way he likes it, although he admits it was initially one of the worst financial decisions he has ever made. “The trade-off is—now I have a better quality life with more time for my family,” he says. “I love that I’m helping people directly and not making profits for shareholders. It’s rewarding to take my senior clients who are very scared about the future, put a plan in place and do what they want for their children and grandchildren and still have enough money to live on. It’s been the best decision I could have made.”

Editor’s Note: Doug loves to share his story and enjoys hearing from other life insurance professionals. If you would like to learn more about him and his office, feel free to contact him.

Douglas K. Denlinger
MMA Counselor
Keystone Financial Associates
176 Cumberland Parkway, Suite 202
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
Phone: 717-796-1700 or 800-423-2838
E-mail: douglas.denlinger@mmapartners.org