



## A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

CLAUDIA SHILO OF BALLENTINE PARTNERS, LLC

**H**ad Claudia Shilo not met Roy Ballentine in September 2000, she wouldn't be a Fee-Only financial planner today. "I can say that with certainty," says Shilo, managing director and senior client advisor at Waltham, MA-based Ballentine Partners, LLC. "Roy introduced me to Fee-Only financial planning, and I knew instantly that the work was going to be a great fit for me."

A CPA, Shilo started at Coopers & Lybrand in Syracuse, where she handled audits of large SEC clients. She also owned and managed an individual accounting practice and served as CFO for two of Agway, Inc.'s largest divisions (retail and agriculture). "I loved auditing and all things involved with it, like financial statement analysis and tax planning," she explains. "I especially enjoyed digging into the numbers, discussing them with management, and helping corporations plan for the future."

Like many other professionals who are looking to achieve the right work-

life balance, Shilo found herself facing a major decision in 1999 when she moved to New Hampshire for family reasons. "I really didn't know what type of work I'd wind up doing after we settled into our new home in Wolfeboro," she recalls. "What happened next wasn't part of any grand plan, but I can see now the natural segue into financial planning."

Shilo was looking for new opportunities related in some way to her accounting background when she met Ballentine and learned about Fee-Only planning. "I picked up immediately on the positive synergies that existed between my own professional experience and the financial planning field," she says.

While at Ballentine Partners, Shilo earned her master's degree in financial planning and then joined NAPFA in 2006. "It was one of those goals that was very important to me," says Shilo. "You actually have to *do* something to join NAPFA, which is great. You have to have

job experience and take some proactive steps in order to become a member. I thought that was really important."

Subsequently, NAPFA provided her with a network outside of the Ballentine firm that has helped her build her expertise. "In a way, NAPFA has been a silent partner for many of us," she says.

Now, with the perspective of a principal at one of the largest NAPFA firms, Shilo says she would like to see NAPFA recruit more "member firms that have grown from grassroots practices to those that employ 50 or more people. We'd really like to be able to connect with more of these firms and share best practices and ideas with them."

### THE BALLENTINE APPROACH

How does a firm with 50 employees and \$2 billion AUM (and another \$4 billion under advisement) operate?

Ballentine Partners has used a multi-family office (MFO) approach with many of its clients since 1997. Its wealth

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### PASSION FOR HER CAREER

There's just something about a complex problem or request that gets Claudia Shilo enthused and ready to help. Her passion for numbers and challenging questions can be traced back to Shilo's early career as a CPA, where she enjoyed poring over numbers and data to come up with effective solutions for clients. "I obviously was drawn to the financial aspect of the work," she says, "but the fact that it also allows me to use my organizational and analytical skills makes my career especially enjoyable."

Applying the results at the individual client or family level gives Shilo a satisfaction that was missing from her corporate CPA position, where she worked mainly with large companies. "I genuinely like to help others be the best that they can be," she says. "In my own life and career, I've experienced the power of others believing in me, often more than I've believed in myself. That type of encouragement has led me to make choices that changed my life in ways I couldn't have ever imagined."

-Bridget McCrea

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advisory side works with client families whose average net worth is about \$80 million, serving them through teams that are led by eight senior advisors and nine senior investment professionals. Seeking to broaden its base somewhat from its current load of about 100 client families, Ballentine Partners recently set up a division that caters to clients with \$3 million to \$20 million in average net worth.

Senior wealth advisors typically manage 12 to 15 family relationships, with five or six associates assigned to each of those senior advisors. "That senior advisor works with any number of different associates and clients, and each team is different from the next," Shilo explains. "We do not have a silo structure where one group works under the same senior advisor on all engagements."

The associates include financial planning analysts, experienced financial planners, investment analysts, and senior investment professionals. "Our senior wealth advisors are the ones at the wheel," Shilo says. "We are responsible for identifying and addressing the families' complex, interrelated issues."

Teams are structured in a way that allows them to address every client's specific needs. For example, one advisor or associate may have deep experience in socially responsible investing, while another may possess extensive tax expertise. "This permits us to cross-pollinate ideas," says Shilo, "and lets planners see what other senior advisors are doing on one job and apply those ideas and concepts to other clients."

The setup can be chaotic at times, but Shilo says "it's chaos by design. If we don't communicate appropriately across team lines as to what our priorities are, things can get pretty confusing."

To overcome that hurdle, Shilo says frequent team updates and senior level meetings are highly encouraged. "This staffing model can be both a blessing and a curse," she explains, "but it's worked well for us."

For all of its clients, the firm typically invests in fixed-income (bond securities and bond funds) and equities that include domestic, international,

## BALLENTINE PARTNERS, AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:** Waltham, MA

**WEBSITE:** [www.ballentinepartners.com](http://www.ballentinepartners.com)

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1984

**NUMBER OF STAFF:** 50

**NUMBER OF CLIENTS:** 100-plus families

**AMOUNT OF MONEY MANAGED:** \$2 billion (the firm has \$6 billion under advisement)

**DESCRIPTION OF TYPICAL CLIENTS:** Individuals and families with \$3 million or more in investable assets.

**TYPICAL CLIENT NEEDS:** Wealth planning, tax assistance, auditing, and comprehensive financial planning.

**FAVORITE FINANCIAL PLANNING WEBSITE:** [www.kitces.com](http://www.kitces.com)

**FAVORITE NON-FINANCIAL PLANNING WEBSITE:** [www.weatherbug.com](http://www.weatherbug.com)

**PIECE OF ADVICE TO FELLOW NAPFA MEMBERS:** "Listen to your clients. Learn everything you possibly can about what's important to them, what makes them happy, and what keeps them up at night. Early on, I realized that financial planning isn't about us—it's about our clients. Just because we feel strongly that a certain strategy might make perfect sense for a client that doesn't mean that they feel the same way, or that they'll accept what we have to say about it. If we can help them create a path that makes sense for them and illuminate that path for them, then we're doing our job."

and emerging-market index funds. "We focus mainly on low-cost index funds," says Shilo, "but our clients may have actively managed mutual funds or stocks, depending on their individual situation and preferences."

Those investments form the baseline of a three-pronged endowment mode, which aims to provide broad diversification and a global perspective. Where appropriate, the firm uses alternative investments in hedge funds and hedge fund of funds, commodity funds, private equity investments, and real estate. "Our approach for each client is very specific and targeted to the individual client's circumstances, objectives, risk preferences, and behavior," says Shilo. "We study

every client carefully, and the ultimate investment decision for client assets rests with the client team's senior advisor."

As Ballentine Partners continues to grow its client base, it will need even more experienced team players to add to its stable of experienced professionals. After all, says Shilo, happy, energetic, competent, and engaged teams are the very lifeblood of the firm. "Finding the right people to fill those positions is our firm's most important, mission-critical goal," says Shilo. "It's also important to me, as a planner, that we find the right people and provide them with great opportunities to develop to their best potential. Ultimately, the success of our business will rest on our ability to meet those goals." 