Edelman & ASSOCIATES

ADVISOR DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

60–90 minutes | Case-based | Professional teams

Developing Advisor Judgment in Difficult Client Situations

Facilitated Case Discussions for Family Offices, Fiduciaries, and Wealth Advisors

Why this program

Experienced advisors sometimes encounter situations in which technically sound recommendations fail to produce movement. A beneficiary may experience trustee discretion as mistrust. A founder may acknowledge the need for succession yet continue to exercise control. A client may sign an estate plan without implementing it.

These situations call for judgment about what the people involved are trying to accomplish, protect, or avoid—and how an advisor's response may affect both the immediate decision and the working relationship.

An example of a case discussion

A successful business owner in a second marriage works with an attorney on an estate plan intended to protect the surviving spouse and children from a prior marriage. After several meetings, the client approves the recommendations and signs the documents.

Six months later, important assets have not been transferred into the trusts. The client says he has been busy. When the attorney follows up, he begins to express discomfort with aspects of the plan. The attorney is concerned about the risks of leaving implementation unfinished—and surprised, since these issues were discussed before signing.

What should the attorney do next? Explain the provisions again? Press for completion? Revisit the design? What would be useful to understand before choosing an approach?

What advisors experience

What participants practice

- Recognizing factors that may be affecting a client's willingness or ability to move forward
- Considering alternative explanations before drawing conclusions
- Clarifying competing interests, concerns, and desired outcomes
- Anticipating how different responses may be experienced
- Knowing when to adjust their approach or seek other expertise

How the session works

Participants read or hear a short hypothetical case and work through it in stages. The facilitator invites different interpretations, helps clarify what each party may be trying to accomplish or protect, and guides consideration of plausible responses and their implications.

Cases are tailored to the professional audience and selected to complement its legal, fiduciary, financial, and advisory expertise.

A practical question to take away

What is happening, what matters to each person, and how might my next response help—or hinder—sound decision-making?

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Why case discussions work for advisors

A hypothetical case gives experienced professionals a rehearsal space. Participants can examine a difficult situation, disagree, test explanations, and consider interventions without exposing confidential client matters or presenting one another with unresolved professional difficulties.

Because the circumstances resemble those they encounter in practice, the discussion is both engaging and transferable. Participants can hear how colleagues interpret the same facts and use those perspectives to improve their own judgment.

What participants take away

Advisors leave with a shared experience of navigating uncertainty: asking better questions, recognizing possible concerns beneath a presenting request, and assessing the likely consequences of different responses. The discussion strengthens their capacity to work constructively with clients while meeting their professional responsibilities.

Topics and formats

Possible case themes

- When a signed estate plan remains unimplemented
- Trustee–beneficiary misunderstandings about discretion and control
- Founder succession and leadership transitions
- When a client insists on a “simple” plan
- Beneficiary preparation and the timing of disclosure

Typical formats

- 60–90 minutes: focused, interactive case discussion
- Half day: deeper discussion and practice with alternative advisor responses
- Series: linked cases on recurring challenges facing a professional team

A useful option for advisory organizations

The program is a bounded, self-contained engagement that complements a firm’s existing expertise and client relationships. Attorneys, fiduciaries, wealth advisors, and family office professionals bring their own technical knowledge; I facilitate the exploration of context, competing concerns, available choices, and the effects of professional intervention.

Experience and case development

I have facilitated case discussions in the Private Directors Association Certificate Program in Private Company Governance since 2021 and work with families, family offices, boards, and advisor teams on governance, succession, and high-stakes decisions.

My articles with estate planning attorney Martin M. Shenkman, published in *Estate Planning*, *WealthManagement.com*, and Leimberg’s estate planning newsletter, examine client agency, beneficiary education, simplicity, and what helps sound plans work in practice. Those issues can inform audience-specific cases.

Discuss this program

Case discussions can be tailored to your organization’s professional responsibilities, audience, and current learning priorities. Contact me to explore a session for your team.

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