

As seen in **Morningstar Advisor**

The Ties That Bind

by C. Marie Swift / 01-15-09

While some advisors and allied service professionals might have pulled back on their marketing and public relations efforts in fall, many of the industry's best and brightest have strategically ramped up their efforts.

"Tough times are the best time to see and be seen," said Brett Ellen, president of American Financial Network, a financial-planning and wealth-management firm in Calabasas, Calif. A tenured professional with more than 20 years in the business, Ellen has weathered previous market downturns and come out smiling.

"When you think of it, it's really quite amazing that Brett has been a top advisor with every organization he's been affiliated with over the past 20 years," AFN managing director Denise Villanueva said.

"Based on advisory assets under management, Brett has been a top five advisor since he joined our firm in 2004," said Janine Wertheim, chief marketing officer for Securities America, Inc, one of the nation's largest independent broker/dealers. "He is an incredibly talented advisor and overall generous and wonderful person. We are very pleased to work with high-caliber advisors like Brett."

Blogging for Kids

A busy executive with strong community ties, Ellen has a passion for educating not just corporate executives--his core clientele--but children as well.

"My kids and the dozens of others I've coached over the years via youth sports programs in the community got me inspired," Ellen said. "Now I find myself teaching fifth-graders about stocks, bonds, saving for long-term goals; blogging about personal finance for children; and recording educational video clips in an effort to help kids improve their financial IQ."

Ellen's newly established blog, <http://www.kidsfinancecoach.com>, and winning way with children have not gone unnoticed.

"Parents and educators in the community are beginning to comment in a very positive way," Villanueva said. "We also expect to attract the media's attention through a series of podcasts, news releases and media alerts."

With nearly \$450 million under management, Ellen's success in the boardroom is clear. Now, with a new focus on educating children, he said that he hopes to make a difference in the classroom and online.

Community Ties

Daniel G. Gensler, president of The Gensler Group in San Diego, said that the way to survive and thrive in a down market is finding a way to create good news when everyone else is fretting about current events or frozen by the continual stress of bad news.

"We've been spending a lot more time with our clients, talking about their investments, of course, but also just talking about life and what's good," said Karen Baszak, senior vice president and

branch operations manager at Gensler's firm. "We're all pretty tired but it really feels good to hear a client say at the end of a conversation that you've helped them gain perspective and renewed their spirits."

With all the focus on helping clients mitigate their fears about the economy, Baszak admits that hosting a holiday party was the last thing on their mind . until their PR consulting team reminded them that now is exactly the right time to be bringing people together for cookies and tea before strolling down to see the Christmas parade of lighted boats on Coronado Island. "The more I think about it, the more I know it's the right thing to do. We all need a sense of fellowship and community right now," Baszak said. "Things may be tough, but we're all in this together and have so much to be thankful for."

The Gensler Group has also decided to write and produce an open letter to the community.

"We'll touch on market and economic issues and invite people to drop by our offices during 'open hours' times every Friday morning. We plan to have a team of experts available, including tax, insurance, investment and mortgage professionals, to make short presentations and answer any questions people have," Baszak said. A flyer went in the local newspaper, and a digital version went out via e-mail to the firm's "house mailing list" of clients, prospects, strategic partners and centers of influence.

One of LPL's top advisors, Gensler, with approximately \$350 million under management, is no stranger to community service. To fulfill his own service-oriented networking objectives, he got involved with projects like Limb Camp (building prostheses for indigent patients in Mexico). He served as club president for the Rotary Club of Coronado and helped "Sister Ethel," as she is affectionately known across the globe, with her charitable projects to benefit needy people in Missionvale, South Africa.

"Getting involved in community service can produce business dividends," Gensler said. "But if you go into that kind of work with your sales hat on, it won't work. You have to be true to yourself, and only then can you bond with others, earn their respect and build credibility; however, those personal attributes do translate into trust."

Over time, Gensler's experience has been that the connections he has made through social and charitable networking have led contacts to trust him with their money.

"Social networking works, but only if your heart is authentically in the right place," he said.

Gensler warned that building business through social networking activities takes time and patience. His exposure to Rotary started when he was invited to join the local Rotary Club 10 years ago. His business office wasn't even established on Coronado Island at that time, so he joined partly to get involved with the local community. Over time it has become a profitable source of new business, but, again, he warned that if you are going into volunteer work expecting business, you might be disappointed.

Gensler now has prospects knocking on his door. For example, a few weeks ago, a fellow Rotarian, whom Dan had been sitting next to for years, never chasing, approached him with \$2 million to \$3 million in investable assets; the client has \$4 million or so in net worth and could come into more money as time goes on.

Another fellow Rotarian joins Gensler on trips to Mexico to build prostheses. He, became a client three years ago, with \$1 million in assets under management.

A prominent dentist in Coronado recently returned from South Africa after visiting Sister Ethel and her mission. While she is a perfect prospect, Dan won't pursue her as a client; instead, he'll build the relationship through their shared vision of helping Sister Ethel realize her goals.

Another Coronado Rotarian, a self-employed sole proprietor originally from Israel became friends with a fellow Rotarian who is Palestinian. The Israeli invited the Palestinian to his home for dinner. That dinner conversation resulted in collaboration on a project to send 1,000 wheelchairs to Israel, half to Israelis and half to Palestinians. They named their project "Pathways to Peace." One of them is now a Gensler Group client, receiving both financial planning and asset management services.

Gensler recently asked his publicist and public relations coach Kip Wotkyns, a staff member at the firm I am president of, Impact Communications, to help Sister Ethel write a book about her work. As we like to say in the PR world, "stuff leads to stuff."

"I can only imagine the good that will come from writing this book with Sister Ethel," Wotkyns said. "And the fact that Dan is willing to pay his own PR firm to help her chronicle her work is amazing. It won't surprise any of us here at Impact if Dan's business relationships strengthen and grow as a result of his generosity."

The People's Mayor

Bill Spalding, founder of Bill Spalding Financial Services in Sandy Springs, Ga., knows from experience that building trust pays off in the long run.

Building trusting relationships and demonstrating leadership has long been Spalding's forte.

"I call him 'The People's Mayor' because he is such a personable individual and he knows everyone in Sandy Springs," said Grace Choung, a local business owner and member of the Sandy Springs Business Association. "When you talk with Bill, you know that he is sincere and thoughtful in what he says."

An adamant patron of local businesses, Spalding believes strongly in keeping a good chunk of your money in the community in which you live. Even when creating client appreciation events, he always finds a way for a local business or charity to benefit.

Spalding also likes to create experiences for his clients that make a lasting, local memory. Some of those events have been held at historical landmarks, botanical gardens, cooking schools, art museums and religious retreat centers. When sponsoring a community event he typically plans and hosts an event-within-an-event (such as the annual Sandy Springs Garden Tour) to connect people and create awareness within the community about the organizations that work locally to improve people's quality of life.

As a former president of the area business association, Spalding has been an avid supporter of various offshoot organizations developed to enrich his community. Breathing new life into fundraising efforts, he has found ways to bring agencies, professionals, advocates, and volunteers together to support local causes while ensuring that all involved benefit from the experience.

"I want a full circle in which everybody benefits from their participation. If the project has a sense of goodness, a spirit of community and offers a win-win opportunity for everyone involved, then I jump in with both feet," Spalding said.

According to Jan Collins, president of the Sandy Springs Arts Council, Spalding's philanthropic involvement extends beyond writing a check to a worthy charity. With his unique ability to bring people together, Spalding works tirelessly on behalf of area businesses to encourage and educate people about ways to keep their money in their community.

"By example, Bill has started a ripple of support within our town. Not only will he continue to be involved, but he has introduced and shown others the benefits of being an involved citizen as well," Collins said.

While many businessmen and businesswomen are happy to sit on a board and share their opinions for an hour once a month, Spalding rejects that notion of involvement.

"I see what needs to be done, roll up my sleeves and get to work," he said.

Most recently, he became a charter member of the Arts Council of Sandy Springs. The group recently held a national search for public art, displayed the winners and will donate the winning sculpture to the city for permanent public display.

Understanding that the work he does, whether for a client or a local organization, can have an impact for years to come, Spalding said that he believes he has a stewardship to safeguard and protect the interests of those he serves to the best of his abilities. In doing so, Spalding has maintained a first-rate reputation for honesty, integrity and action.

"Spalding is encouraging, optimistic and generous with everyone he encounters," Chung said. "He exemplifies what an involved citizen should be. He is in touch with the needs of the community, is a powerhouse of ideas, has outstanding interpersonal skills, and has the enthusiasm and intelligence to be a leader."

Purpose-Driven Social Networking

High praise, indeed, from community leaders in Spalding's home town. But how does it translate to support his business? Motivational speaker and business coach Sarano Kelley, author of "The Game: Win Your Life in 90 Days," said "It sounds like Spalding has reversed the deal flow through purpose-driven social networking."

A longtime industry observer and coach to assorted celebrities and billion dollar advisors, Kelley has not only been researching and cataloging business results related to purpose-driven social networking but practicing this philosophy himself. In 2009, Kelley plans to publish a white paper and deliver speeches on the subject.

"When you're more interested in helping other people win than you are in benefiting yourself, and you build up this great reputation based on pure intention and integrity, you can't help but reverse the flow," Kelley said. "Instead of looking for business opportunities--and sometimes finding yourself mired in the wrong relationships--business opportunities find you."

That certainly seems to be the case for Bill Spalding. Based on assets under management, Bill was recognized three consecutive years as one of the top five advisors with Securities America Advisors, Inc. He has twice served as a member of Securities America's Quality Council. He has also served on the Advisory Council of Lockwood Financial. He enjoys public speaking and was a featured speaker on the Queen Elizabeth II Cruise Line and the Mississippi Queen.

While Spalding might be too humble to toot his own horn, he's not at all shy about promoting others. As a result, everyone loves Bill--and opportunities just follow.