

[Inside: 2011 SMAX at a glance]

Senior Market

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over,

Jo Ann Favia and other top women producers
carve a path in a male-dominated industry.

guys



A Study in Diversity
Q&A with Jo Ann Favia

“If you are going to be comprehensive, every area has to be addressed: income solutions, investment strategies, long-term care.”



By Maria Wood

A work/life balance

Jo Ann Favia has been a financial advisor for 25 years and has never missed one of her children's school events. Here's how she does it.

Jo Ann E. Favia, CLU, ChFC, AIF®, started in the financial planning business 25 years ago—a time when there were so few women in the field that meeting venues switched the ladies lounges to men's rooms because there were so few women in attendance at industry conferences.

Fortunately, the business world has evolved since then, and so has Favia. She began her career at a small carrier, "Sitting down with individuals across the kitchen table, doing full insurance and investment planning," she recalls.

But in 2002, she went independent and is now president and owner of the Favia Group in Villa Park, Ill. Currently, she has \$82 million under management*, splitting her time between advising companies on their 401(k) plans and working with individual clients on personal wealth management and retirement planning. About 60 percent of her clients are seniors, a group she enjoys working with. "They are closer to retirement," she says. "They do have an interest in what's going on, and they still want to learn about it. They realize that because their investments are going to have to provide them their paycheck, they're taking it a bit more seriously."

Favia takes her profession very seriously as well. A 22-year member of the Million Dollar Round Table, she has garnered two Top of the Table and four Court of the Table qualifications. In addition, she currently

serves on the board of the Society of Financial Services Professionals (FSP).

Outside the office, Favia has raised two children as a single mom. (She founded the A-Parently One Foundation, an organization that aids children from single-parent households.) In fact, *Senior Market Advisor* caught up with her after she had just dropped her children, ages 19 and 18, off to college. Here's what she had to say.

SMA: *Are you seeing more women entering the financial services field?*

Jo Ann Favia: Absolutely. I'm very involved with MDRT and going to the meetings 25 years ago, they shut down all the girls' bathrooms and made them boys' bathrooms because it was literally 10 to one in regards to men versus women. Nowadays, there are definitely more women. However, with MDRT a lot of them are international, not necessarily American women in attendance at the meetings. But I do see a bit more women. I'm a board member of the Society of Financial Services Professionals (FSP) and at [its past] meetings, typically I was one of the few women and now we are seeing at least 10 to 20 at each of the meetings. It's a great profession for women. I've been a single mom for 17 years. I just sent both my kids off the college, and so it allowed me the freedom to be a mom first and also have my business. So it provided me a lot of flexibility and I'm trying to encourage my daughter to get into the business. >>

* As of August 2011



A Study in Diversity Q&A with Jo Ann Favia

SMA: *You say there are more women now than 25 years ago. But do you still consider it a male dominated field?*

Favia: I do. But I do think that's changing just because we're trying to get more women [into the profession]. Through FSP we've contacted more colleges to try to get more mentors and I'm actually the chair this year of the mentoring committee for the Million Dollar Round Table. So we are reaching out to, trying to put mentors together with mentees so we can bring more younger people into the business. I don't want to be biased, but I think women have a bit more attention to detail and it's kind of the mothering instinct. They want to take care of people. So I think it's just a perfect field for women to get into. But I do think it's still primarily dominated by men because finance typically is.

SMA: *What can organizations like MDRT do to get more women in the industry? And what can the industry as a whole do to bring more women into the field and help them succeed?*

Favia: It's a personal discovery. I do some individual recruiting that if I find a woman that I feel would be very good in this business, yes, I'm going to talk to her and I think many more people on an individual basis are doing that. I don't see the recruiting efforts that [companies] are doing. I think it's more of word of mouth, a personal meeting versus anything else.

At colleges, there are more degrees focused on financial planning and getting a CFP right out of college, so I would hope it stems from college or their educational years. It's a career where you can choose when you want to work, which is really nice. That's why I ended up getting into the 401(k) marketplace, because I needed a daytime activity. I wanted to work from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. when the kids were at school. I didn't want to work a night. I wanted to be home with the kids.

SMA: *Why is this field well suited for women?*

Favia: I think they are very intuitive and very sensitive to emotions. This is a very emotional business just with the market volatility. I think they take a different approach of more hand-holding. I know for me it's definitely not a transaction-based business, it's more a relationship-based business. I can sit and talk to [my clients] for literally an hour about kids, about life, about their vacations and boil down the business to 15 minutes. I think women bond a bit more and just have more of a motherly instinct. They want to help and they are willing to talk and not do business.

I think there are certain individuals that automatically turn to the more nurturing nature of a woman to handle some things. And I think it's a very emotional business—going into retirement and the uncer-

tainty of retirement. Also, I'm finding that women are living longer, so I have several widows that never handled the finances, the man always did. I think we are willing to spend a little bit more time with them so they understand it. I'm a firm believer in educating somebody. I don't want to handle somebody's money without them understanding why we're doing it and understanding the strategies and I think we tend to be a bit more patient in explaining things.

SMA: *Are there advantages for women to work in this field in terms of professional advancement and blending work and family? You mentioned the flexibility.*

Favia: Absolutely, the flexibility. Honestly, you create your own schedule. You work when you want to work and that's what's so wonderful about it. When my kids went to school, I went to school. That's when I got my designations. **So you can tailor-make your schedule around when you can and can't work.** I never missed a sporting event or a school event because of work. I truly believe that you can design your schedule and your work hours around your family. That's exactly what I did. Doctors have specific office hours and we can do the same thing.

SMA: *But being an advisor is not always a 9 to 5 job. How do you handle seeing a client after hours?*

Favia: Honestly, then, they just may not be my client. It's just as important for them to choose you as you need to choose your client. You make doctor appointments and doctors typically don't have evening hours. Well, you find one that does. It's the same thing. We're advisors, we're professionals



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and if I choose to work 8 o’clock to 3 o’clock, then that’s when my clients need to see me. There are some days that I’ll make [exceptions], if it’s a long-term client and it’s an emergency. But I think it’s something that you can absolutely design how you want to work and when you want to work.

SMA: *Do you do see more women buying and selling LTCI? Why?*

Favia: I do. A lot of the women I’m in business with, it’s definitely something that they talk about.

Once again, it’s because of the caregiving nature of a woman, and the odds of them outliving their spouses. Who’s going to be left to take care of them? My father has

Parkinson’s and he’s confined to a wheelchair. He’s had it for 28 years, so we are dealing with it firsthand. We have a full-time caregiver living [with him]. My stepmother knows she’ll eventually be on her own so we definitely have long term-care insurance on her. I talk to every client about it, but I think the women definitely are more open to purchasing it because I think the men believe the women are going to take care of them anyway. But long term, I think the women know that their kids are busy, they don’t want to be a burden on their kids, so they are definitely more open to looking at that.

SMA: *How can women become more active in other products like annuities and life insurance?*

Favia: I’m a full financial planner so we look at everything. If you are going to be comprehensive, every area has to be addressed: income solutions, investment strategies, long-term care. You don’t want to outlive your assets so you have to look at all of it. 📌

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