

Paula MacMillan
Educating People About Their Financial Future
by
Brian Campbell

While attending the University of Manitoba, Paula MacMillan planned to become a teacher. With that in mind, she achieved a double major Arts Degree in History and English. That plan was derailed when she got a summer job at Costco Wholesale. She began working in Costco's marketing department, and enjoyed it so much that all thoughts of becoming a teacher were swept aside.

Well, not entirely.

Over the next nine years, she rose through the ranks, up to Costco's Corporate Marketing for Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. This took her to the corporate office of Clarica Life Insurance Company to discuss Costco memberships. Clarica's recruiting manager then asked Paula to come in and meet with one of their advisors.

"I met with an advisor for what was supposed to be 20 minutes, but turned out to be about an hour, because I had a lot of questions," Paula says. "It was a big move to leave a secure job at a major company. I ended up thinking about it for a year, because it was terrifying."

"Then when I made the move, it was still terrifying," she adds with a laugh. "Changing to a business of your own from a company with a pension plan is huge. But now I've had my own business for 14 years and I wouldn't go back for anything. I love what I do."

As a Sun Life Financial advisor (Paula's corporation is Prairie Sky Financial Services); she enjoys helping people with their investments, insurance, financial planning, estate planning and more. She has three other members on her team: Ann Robinson, the Client Relationship Manager, Marie Collette, the Investment Administrator and Jie (pronounced Jay) Cao, Administrative Support. Paula says, "We work as a team to take care of our clients' needs."

Paula still considers herself a teacher, only now she educates people on how to best protect their financial future. She works very hard to protect the best interests of her clients, so it was natural for her to get involved in groups that advocate for clients. Two of these groups are Advocis (The financial advisors Association of Canada) and MDRT (Million Dollar Round Table.)

Advocis is an organization made up of financial advisors that helps to protect the best interests of their clients in relating with the government. “I’ve been an Advocis member since the first day I became a financial advisor,” Paula says. “They regularly put on educational seminars for advisors on topics such as taxes, estates, investments and more. I’ve been a speaker with Advocis on a number of topics, including helping to bridge the gap between Advocis and MDRT and their new advisor forum.”

MDRT is an association of financial advisors formed in 1927 to establish and develop best business practices and ethical ways of increasing client interest in financial products. You can’t apply to join MDRT, you have to be invited, and to be invited you have to achieve a certain level of production, ethics, education, etc. “I became a member of MDRT in 2006,” Paula says. “So this year is my 10th year, and after 10 years you become a life member.”

“MDRT promotes professionalism and a ‘whole person’ concept, where an advisor doesn’t just spend 24 /7 working their business; they take the time to embrace a healthy lifestyle, faith, family, community and then their business,” she adds. “Which is a good way for anyone to run their life.”

Paula was part of MDRT’s membership committee in Canada when they were trying to reconnect with Advocis and remind members who were also part of MDRT the importance of coming to their annual meeting. Paula says, “I talked about the annual MDRT meeting a lot to encourage people to come and get involved for the purpose of professional development and networking.”

She has also helped Sun Life Financial create a selection of videos, initially to help launch some new financial planning software to advisors, and additionally, to use for training purposes for new advisors. “It’s important to give back,” she says. “That’s why I have been on committees in the industry and with Sun Life and worked with advisors. MDRT has a mentorship program and for a year-and-a-half I mentored two advisors.”

Paula's end goal is always to help people. It is what gets her up in the morning and keeps her going all day. "Every day we are here, we are helping people," she says. "Whether it is explaining your group plan to you, walking you through a life insurance presentation, or helping you review the investment idea we presented, looking at how much you will need for retirement, or deciding whether your child should save now or save later; everything we do is to help people better their financial picture and protect their family. That's reason enough to keep doing it."

MDRT teaches that you can't live your life at work, and Paula follows that plan. Outside of work, she and her husband, Kirk, like to go out to their family cottage. She also loves to cook. "Kirk and I are certified barbeque judges," she says. "So we get to travel around, eat and judge."

As barbeque judges, Paula and Kirk have managed to travel everywhere from Kenora to Southern California. Of course, it was her work that got her to California in the first place "It happened that we were in Southern California for a conference," she says. "And the weekend prior to the conference, there was a sanctioned barbeque competition just down the beach, so Kirk went online and put our names in to be judges. They were excited to get certified judges from the middle of Canada, so we were like mini celebrities."

They also like spending time with their family and friends, either at their cottage or in their Linden Woods home, testing out their own barbeque skills when the weather allows. Paula loves living in Linden Woods. "It is very warm and friendly," she says. "We run into people all the time when we are out walking our dog. Everyone is very friendly. It is a lovely community."

They love walking in the parks in the summer and snowshoeing in the winter. It was also convenient for Paula when Sun Life moved their offices from downtown to Lorimer Blvd. in 2013. She says, "I thank them regularly."

As much as Paula loves her home life, her husband, her family, her neighbourhood and her barbeque judging, she also has a huge passion for her work. She considers her team her second family and her clients as extended family. She says, "Ann has always referred to our clients as our little family, because we are the protectors of everybody."

Because they think of their clients as family, the clients often respond in kind. Paula says, "One time when a client was downsized out of a corporate position

with an hour's notice, he sent us an e-mail two hours later saying, 'Guess what just happened. I have some questions.' He thought of us first. That's trust."

At the end of the day, Paula is still a teacher, educating people about their financial future. She says, "What I say to clients is that my job is to explain things to you, so you understand why I am suggesting this investment road, this insurance idea, this estate planning idea and move forward with it. Your job is to take that information, ask questions about things you don't understand, so you can make an informed decision. At every point of the process, you are in control. It is your money."

So after starting out with the intention of being a teacher, Paula is now a different type of teacher. She says, "I teach people every day about life insurance, health insurance and investments. It's funny how, where you think you want to go, and where you end up, are often linked but different."