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## RetirePreneur: Sheryl Garrett

By Jenna Gottlieb    Thu, Sep 17, 2015

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*Sheryl Garrett is the founder of Garrett Planning Network, a web-based professional network of about 300 independent financial planners who make financial advice accessible on an hourly, fee-only basis to anyone, with no minimum wealth requirement.*

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**What I do:** I have been in the financial services industry 28 years and my current initiative is Garrett Planning Network, an organization with about 300 financial planners around the country.

**Where I came from:** I was a *Money* magazine addict by the time I was 19. I would calculate how I could become a millionaire by 22. By 24, I was in the industry. I got a job as a Gal Friday with a fee-only financial planner. I also earned my CFP designation. I then moved to a fee-and-commission planning firm. But my initial experience in selling financial services from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. was a big turn-off. Eventually I needed to make a change. I met a businesswoman through my involvement with the Financial Planning Association in Kansas City. I joined her firm and we became 50/50 partners in 1995. I stayed until 1998.

<p><b>RetirePreneur:</b> Sheryl Garrett, CFP <b>Company:</b> Garrett Planning Network <b>Location:</b> Eureka Springs, Arkansas <b>Founded:</b> 2000 <b>Niche:</b> Advisor relations <a href="http://www.garrettplanningnetwork.com/">http://www.garrettplanningnetwork.com/</a></p>
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We had five employees including ourselves and worked for about 100 families. We offered one service: comprehensive financial planning and portfolio management. A lot of people who wanted to access our advice couldn't afford to delegate the management of their financial affairs to a professional. I hated turning away people whom I knew I could help, but who didn't fit our firm's niche. So I decided to start my own firm.

**How Garrett Planning Network works:** We're the professional home for about 300 like-minded advisors. Financial planners who believe in making competent, objective financial advice accessible to everyone may apply for membership. We share our time, talents and resources to leverage our businesses and services to clients. We also help advisors get new clients.

During our three-day live New Member training class, our monthly webinars, our recordings

library, and a whole host of marketing templates and examples, we instruct advisors regarding what works in marketing. My primary function is to raise public awareness of this option for financial advice.

Our Director of Financial Planning and Communications and I help to leverage every member's media coverage and blogs via our network's website, Facebook page, and other social media. Our members report that one of the top two sources for their new business is due to their membership in the Garrett Planning Network. We also have rules in place for how they must operate. Fee-only and a simple majority of all engagements must be made accessible without regard to any arbitrary minimums.

**On working with clients:** For the first eight years of my career, I was actually afraid of clients. I was not a good salesperson. I didn't have a lot of backbone when presenting a fee quote or pitching a service offering. But once I discovered the niche that fit me best, I fell in love with financial planning.

**What the retirement income industry can do better:** Stop focusing on solutions first. Until we fully understand the needs, circumstances, options, opportunities and challenges that face people as they save for, transition into, and live in retirement, we're missing opportunities to help people in ways that can be far more impactful on their quality of life than recommending a good investment portfolio. Social Security, Medicare, healthcare and living arrangements in retirement, and end-of-life issues, just to name a few, are critical and often overlooked.

**On testifying before Congress:** I've testified on financial literacy, Social Security reform, and conflict-of-interest issues in the industry. I could relate to Vanguard's John Bogle when he said, 'Making laws is like making sausage. You don't want to watch the process.'

**My view on the DOL fiduciary proposal:** Advisors need to put their clients' best interests first. Nearly every financial professional I've spoken with has witnessed the minor to devastating harm done by unscrupulous advisors. If you give financial advice, you must be held to the fiduciary standard.

**My claim to fame:** President Obama mentioned me during his speech at the AARP office in February. I got a call a week or so before from a speechwriter for the White House. She wanted comments for a speech. She said, 'Tell me your story.' So I shared some stories of victims of financial abuse, without thinking that the president would actually hear them. A week later, the White House called and asked if I could come for the president's speech at

AARP. I went to AARP, entering through a side door. After the president spoke, he said, 'Sheryl are you here?' We made eye contact. The audience turned and looked towards me. He told me to stand up! I did and waved to the audience. He mentioned my name eight times when speaking about advisory issues. It still feels like it didn't really happen.

**What I see ahead for retirement income:** I'm delighted to see the industry's focus on Social Security distribution planning, on healthcare in retirement, on reverse mortgages, on longevity risks and strategies to transfer that risk. As we focus on the holistic needs of our clients, we must also be compensated appropriately. Practitioners are electing to go independent and to charge for services that traditionally they could not be compensated for.

**On the evolution of the financial planning business:** A lot of advisors poo-poo a focus on middle-income clients. But people are more engaged today. There's a massive amount of news and books on personal finance. There are CNBC shows, shows with Suzie Orman, Dave Ramsay, and others. Middle-income clients will be a 'sweet spot' for many advisors.

**My retirement philosophy:** I'm a fan of Mitch Anthony's book, *The New Retirementality*. It's not natural for people to quit contributing when they have the freedom to stop working for a paycheck. We can 're-tread' versus 'retire'. What are we retiring to? That's a very important question. How about taking a sabbatical or 'practicing' retirement? Retirement is not an end-game, it's the beginning of a new chapter in life. I'm also a strong proponent of guaranteed income, or a paycheck for life, that covers basic living expenses. Going into retirement debt-free is also part of my retirement philosophy. It may not make the most sense mathematically or financially, but it provides an amazing feeling of security.

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