

ADVISOR

A photograph of three men in business suits standing in front of a large window. The window looks out onto a cityscape with mountains in the background. The man on the left is wearing a dark suit and a green tie. The man in the middle is wearing a dark suit, a blue tie, and glasses. The man on the right is wearing a dark suit and a striped tie. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera.

MENTORING SUCCESS: DEVELOPING THE ADVISORS OF TOMORROW

Clay Gillespie, Financial Advisor and Managing Director at Rogers Group Financial with Dave MacIver, Vice President, Business Development, Dynamic Funds and Brett Simpson, Financial Advisor and Chairman at Rogers Group Financial

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Brett Simpson and Clay Gillespie

It was the word “articling” that caught Ethan Astaneh’s eye.

The young, recent graduate of the University of British Columbia was looking to join a financial planning firm and of the many job postings he was looking at, only one mentioned an advisor articling program.

“I was intrigued,” recalls Ethan, “and the more I learned about the articling program, the more attractive the opportunity became.”

That was in 2008 and the firm was Vancouver-based Rogers Group Financial, currently a 60-plus employee practice

made up of 17 independent advisor businesses, serving more than 8,000 clients. Of the total number of advisors (24) spread across the businesses, nine are articling graduates - including Ethan, who completed the program in 2011. In addition to being one of Canada’s largest, privately held planning firms with over \$1.5 billion in assets, Rogers Group Financial is also an IIROC dealer firm (through its subsidiary Rogers Group Investment Advisors Ltd.). It may also be the country’s one-and-only firm with a proven, highly standardized process for developing the advisors of tomorrow.

The roots of the articling program - based on the legal community’s mentoring process - stretch back to 1992. That’s when Rogers Group Financial - first established by Jim Rogers in 1973 -

decided to create a program to train up-and-coming advisors to help meet the needs of a rapidly expanding client base.

A path to excellence

“We needed additional advisory personnel to help with the operational capacity of established practices,” explains Brett Simpson who joined the group in 1991 as an established advisor and has mentored three graduates of the program. Brett continues to oversee his own advisory business, in addition to being the Chairman at Rogers Group Financial. According to Brett, the firm could do one of two things when it comes to training advisors in waiting: let them learn by trial and error or create a path to excellence.

“We opted for excellence,” says Brett, “and the choice was easy because we wanted quality, knowledgeable personnel who could deliver the results and experience Rogers Group Financial clients deserve.”

In addition to becoming a great way to train advisors, the program also paved the way for seamless, no-surprise succession planning.

“We have built our firm to survive from generation to generation and the articling program is an important component of that,” says Clay Gillespie, an original articling advisor who now manages his own practice, as well as being the Managing Director of the firm.

The journey begins

The program starts, as Ethan described, with a job posting. Normally, it’s for a supporting role in client services or as an administrative or marketing assistant, but the posting hints at the opportunity to apply for the advisor articling program once on the job and if there is a need.

The need would come from one of the individual advisor businesses at Rogers Group Financial. As mentioned, the firm is made up of 17 separate advisor businesses, each owning their revenue stream and the rights to their clients, with the ability to move if they desire. Rogers Group Financial Advisors Ltd. is an independent facility company in which every advisor business has an equity stake. Operational and overhead costs are shared proportionately by associated advisor businesses.

Raymond James Correspondent Services provides the custodial platform for nominee accounts, holding securities for safekeeping, while performing other services such as account administration, trading and transaction settlement.

Advisor businesses are responsible for hiring their own personnel. If a need for a new team member is identified by one of the businesses, the vetting process starts with them because each advisor business is different in terms of specialty, range of services and clientele.

“We don’t have an overall human resources function that hires people and then places them with individual advisory businesses. It’s better to start with the business owners to determine if the candidate is a good fit for their team and vision; someone who would naturally align with them,” says Brett.

Finding a good fit

If there is a good fit, the next step is to pre-screen and test, with a third-party consultant, to ensure the candidate meets firm-wide standards.

“I know it sounds formal,” says Brett, “but all of the advisors in each business represent our shared brand, and it’s important for us to protect and maintain our reputation for entrepreneurial independence, a commitment to excellence and the desire to do the right thing for the client.”

What does Rogers Group Financial look for in an articling candidate?

“We look for self-starters who are curious, who want to learn, who care about others and who have a relentless commitment to continuous improvement through

education,” says Brett. The way to identify these traits, according to Brett, is to measure for aptitude and attitude.

“It all comes down to aptitude and attitude. You can’t train people in these areas. They either have it or they don’t. If they have it, we can teach the rest,” says Brett.

To determine levels of aptitude and attitude, prospective articling candidates are asked to complete a range of psychological and personality tests as well as undergo emotional and intelligence quotient assessments.

Three-year program

If a suitable candidate meets the needs of the advisor business, is sponsored by its owner, and approved by the firm, then formal articling begins. In total, it’s a three-year program that must be completed while the articling advisor meets the expectations of their current role at Rogers Group Financial. When it

comes to the exact components of the program and sequence in which they unfold, it can vary due to each candidate’s unique circumstances.

The first leg of the journey focusses on starting or completing educational requirements. That could be the Certified Financial Planner (CFP®), Certified Investment Manager (CIM) or Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU) designation, and/or insurance and investment licensing – whatever education is deemed most appropriate for the sponsoring business.

While working towards completing the educational requirements, the articling candidate will be mentored by their sponsoring advisor. The two meet every month for a minimum of 12 hours annually to discuss all facets related to the running of a financial advisory business.

“This was invaluable experience,” says Ethan.

Jon Knutson agrees. He started at Rogers Group Financial in 2001 as an administrative assistant with Brett Simpson’s team. He became a marketing, then financial planning assistant, and applied to the articling program in 2010. Jon graduated from the program in 2013 and found his time sitting in on different advisors’ client meetings one of the most beneficial aspects of the training.



“Every advisor has their own style in terms of how they speak with clients, what they talk about, what their meeting agendas look like. You get to learn individual styles and that helps you to formulate your own,” says Jon.

Individual coaching

The mentor also acts as an important coach providing accountability for hours logged in other advisor’s client meetings and making note of educational progress.

John Hale, another graduate of the articling program agrees. John started at Rogers Group Financial as an administrative assistant in 2010, entered the program in the fall of 2013 and graduated in October 2016. He now works as a financial advisor alongside Clay Gillespie at his practice.

If the first year’s priorities are geared toward achieving educational designations and one-on-mentoring, the second year’s priority is focused on the ins and outs of business management.

“This is the part of the program where we learn what makes a business successful. So we take a range of practice management courses in areas such as marketing, communicating, time management and prospecting,” says Ethan.

The courses, which could be as short as an afternoon or as long as a couple of days, are offered by a mix of third-parties, subject-matter experts and industry specialists.

One course – Counsellor Selling – is how Dynamic Funds wholesaler Dave MacIver

was first introduced to Rogers Group Financial. It was in 1993 when he was asked to deliver the course to articling advisors, and five of them are now financial advisors at Rogers Group Financial, including Clay Gillespie.

“I knew the articling program was special the moment I heard about it,” says Dave who visits Rogers Group Financial two to three times every quarter. On these visits, Dave may knock on the doors of two, three or even four advisor businesses. Those visits usually take the form of due diligence and he has been accompanied by a number of Dynamic portfolio managers over the years including Oscar Belaiche, David Fingold and Chuk Wong.

“The due diligence is important because Rogers Group Financial doesn’t limit the product shelf and any advisor has the opportunity to add anything they want by completing their investment and operational due diligences and providing their proofs,” says Brett, who often relies on Dave and his team for his product expertise.

Associate meetings

Dave has also attended “Associate Meetings” which bring together all Rogers Group Financial advisor businesses at an offsite for three days to learn, share ideas and exchange best practices on everything from investments to financial planning and business management. The rationale behind “Associate Meetings” – to discover, learn and share – is a hallmark of Rogers Group Financial, which manifests itself in a number of ways – including the articling program.

“We ask our advisors who are associates of our firm to go out in the world every year and bring back ideas so the firm can be stronger as a whole. In fact, we have a corporate requirement that people attend global financial planning and national industry conferences. We apply the same thinking to the articling program requiring advisor trainees to go out and get outside course and meeting information, as well as attend conferences. We then ask them to bring their learnings back to the firm to share with others in order to make the firm stronger as a whole,” says Brett.

Ethan says that happens within the articling group on a quarterly basis.

“The group gets together every three months to review items like case studies, talk about their experiences at conferences and share the knowledge that’s new in nature and relates to our work,” says Ethan.

With two years of education and learning under their belts, articling advisors enter the final stage of the program, which is when the rubber hits the road. Articling advisors have to put together real-life financial plans, develop investment policy statements, build portfolios and make planning decisions based on actual clients, their financial circumstances and goals.

Presentation day

The articling advisors do not, however, present their work to clients. They present to the senior financial advisors of the firm in a dry run to demonstrate their knowledge, to showcase their delivery and to illustrate that they’re ready to become an advisor.

“It’s a presentation of an actual case that was done under the supervision of the sponsoring advisor, but the expectation is that you do the work bringing all of what you learned together. We have to explain the circumstances, recommendations and strategies we’ve developed. This brings the program full circle,” says Ethan.

At the end of the program, after all requirements are completed, the sponsoring advisor makes a submission to the Board of Directors recommending the articling advisor for a financial advisor role. The board, in turn, decides whether the advancement is appropriate based on the person, their expertise and the training they’ve completed.

“The board will then decide whether the articling advisor would be a benefit to our financial advisory contingent and the Rogers Group Financial brand,” says Brett.

If there’s strategic wisdom in “growing their own” advisors, there may even be more wisdom when it comes to succession.

Succession planning

“When there’s an opportunity for a natural succession, there’s no more perfect individual than one who already has a relationship with existing clients and knows the advisor’s business inside out,” says Brett.



THE GRADUATES

Since the articling program began in 1991, there have been many articling graduates. We asked some of them – along with one who just entered the program – to share their best memories and tell us what stood out.

Linson Chen

Financial Advisor
Class of 2016

“My sponsoring advisor completely supported me as I finished my CIM, my CLU and my FCSI. It was the kind of support I never imagined I’d get.”

Brian McGuire

Financial Advisor
Class of 2016

“There’s a lot of interconnectivity of teams working together on different cases. That’s really put me on a strong growth trajectory.”

Kelsey Penty

Articling Financial Advisor
Class 2019

“What really drew me to the program was the mentorship aspect and support system in place to help you with your career.”

Shaun Sun

Financial Advisor
Class of 2016

“If I have a question about something or if I want to know why we do something a certain way, I just have to ask and everyone has time for me, which is amazing.”

When it comes to the commercial aspects of succession, Rogers Group Financial has a comprehensive buy/sell agreement between business owners. A valuation formula is embedded within the agreement to ensure a reasonable metric to value practices.

“We have good transparency across all advisor practices so every associated owner knows what all the businesses are worth,” says Brett.

Although Brett says the articling program has been a success since day

one, it doesn’t mean it hasn’t evolved. In fact, the program has gone through several evolutions over the years. What’s interesting is that the people who do most of the evolving are the ones articling. Upon graduation, all articling advisors sit down to talk about the experience and how it may be improved or modified to make sure it remains current and relevant for those who come after them.

“As one of the older mentees, I have watched the program evolve and get better each year. It makes me feel good to give back

and make things better,” says financial advisor Cecilia Tsang who now heads up her own team at Rogers Group Financial.

But it isn’t just the next wave of articling advisors who’ll benefit. Brett makes it clear that everyone benefits thanks to continuous improvement of the articling program – clients, advisors and Rogers Group Financial.

“Excellent outcomes are a win-win for everybody,” says Brett.

That is called mentoring success.



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