



SONOMA WEALTH
— ADVISORS —

The Power of Balance: Why Women in Leadership Are Essential to the Future of the RIA Industry

By Jackie Egidio, MBA | Chief Operating Officer, Sonoma Wealth Advisors

The registered investment advisory industry is growing at a remarkable pace. The number of SEC-registered advisory firms has reached an all-time high, and collectively these firms serve tens of millions of clients with trillions of dollars in assets under management. It is an industry built on trust, relationships, and the deeply personal work of helping people navigate their financial lives.

Yet for all its growth, the RIA space still has a meaningful leadership gap. Women make up roughly 18 percent of all financial advisors, and fewer than a quarter of Certified Financial Planners are women. At the executive level, those numbers decline even further. This is not just a diversity issue. It is a business issue, one with real consequences for firms that fail to adapt and real opportunities for those that lead.

I have spent the past five-plus years helping build Sonoma Wealth Advisors from the ground up as Chief Operating Officer. Before that, I spent more than two decades in strategy management, finance, and accounting across industries ranging from wine to financial services. From that vantage point, I have seen firsthand how much a balanced leadership team matters, not in theory, but in the daily decisions that determine whether a firm thrives or simply sustains itself.

The Current Landscape: Where Women Stand in the RIA Industry

Financial services has historically been one of the most male-dominated sectors in the economy. Progress is being made. The number of women earning the CFP designation grew nearly 14 percent between 2021 and 2024, outpacing men. Even so, we remain far from parity. Women hold less than a third of senior roles in S&P 500 companies, and the gap is even more pronounced in wealth management.

Within the RIA space, a handful of trailblazing women have founded and led firms to significant growth, but they remain the exception. Many firms have not made diverse leadership a priority in hiring, mentorship, or succession planning. The result is a leadership pipeline that often replicates itself. Predominantly male founders tend to mentor and promote individuals who look like them, and the cycle continues.

This is not about intent. Most leaders I know genuinely want the best for their teams and their clients. But without deliberate attention to who is at the leadership table, firms miss out on the perspectives and strengths that drive better outcomes.

A \$34 Trillion Reason to Pay Attention

This conversation goes beyond principle. The wealth landscape in the United States is undergoing a significant shift. By 2030, women are expected to control roughly \$34 trillion in investable assets, nearly double the amount from just a decade ago. This shift is driven by the Great Wealth Transfer, longer life expectancy among women, rising career earnings, and younger generations taking a more active role in their financial lives.

Research from McKinsey highlights a striking pattern. Roughly 70 percent of women change financial advisors within a year of a spouse's death. They are not simply maintaining the status quo. They are seeking advisory relationships that align with their values, communication preferences, and planning needs.

For RIA firms, this presents both risk and opportunity. Firms with women in visible leadership roles, those that demonstrate an understanding of female clients, and those that offer a holistic, goals-based planning approach will be better positioned to attract and retain this growing segment of wealth.

Where Women Leaders Add Distinct Value

Research consistently shows that women in leadership bring strengths that align closely with the advisory business. These are not assumptions. They are patterns supported by data, and they translate into measurable impact.

Client Relationships and Retention

Women leaders often prioritize deep listening, empathy-driven communication, and long-term relationship building. In an industry where retention drives enterprise value, this is a competitive advantage. A goals-based, life-centered approach resonates with what clients truly care about: security, legacy, family, and purpose. Clients who feel understood tend to stay longer and refer more.

Firm Culture and Talent Development

The RIA industry faces a growing challenge in attracting and developing next-generation talent. With approximately 37 percent of advisors expected to retire in the next decade, succession planning is critical. Women in leadership roles often emphasize mentorship, inclusive culture, and professional development. These are the qualities younger professionals, particularly women, seek when choosing where to build their careers.

Operational Discipline and Risk Management

Behavioral finance research suggests women leaders often take a measured, research-driven approach to risk. This is not about avoiding risk. It is about evaluating it thoughtfully. In practice, this leads to disciplined investment processes, strong compliance cultures, and steadier client outcomes during volatile markets. Women executives also tend to bring strong operational instincts, with a focus on process, efficiency, and scalable systems.

The Client Experience End-to-End

Women leaders are often highly attuned to the full client journey, from onboarding to ongoing communication to navigating life transitions such as divorce, loss, or retirement. This attention to detail strengthens relationships and drives organic growth through referrals. It is an area that can be overlooked without diverse leadership perspectives.

Complementary Strengths: How Men and Women Lead Differently

Conversations about leadership differences are most productive when framed around complementarity. This is not about better or worse. It is about balance.

Male leaders in financial services often bring decisiveness, speed, and a strong drive for growth. These qualities are essential in a fast-moving industry.

Women leaders often emphasize collaboration, thoughtful decision-making, and communication rooted in empathy and active listening. They tend to gather broader input and consider multiple perspectives before acting. Many also navigate higher expectations, balancing authority with approachability in ways that require both strength and nuance.

Neither approach is sufficient on its own. Firms driven solely by aggressive growth can lose operational discipline and relational depth. Firms focused only on relationships may struggle to scale without decisive strategy. The strongest organizations combine both perspectives.

A Case Study in Balanced Leadership: Sonoma Wealth Advisors

I see this balance play out every day at Sonoma Wealth Advisors. Our leadership team, Daren Blonski, Chris Sipes, and myself, brings together complementary skill sets and perspectives. I believe that balance is a key reason the firm has grown as quickly as it has.

Daren, our co-founder and Managing Principal, brings a visionary and growth-oriented mindset. His background in sociology and psychology, combined with his passion for leadership development, shapes the firm's strategic direction. He consistently challenges us to think bigger, invest in our people, and evolve. His work as an author and leadership facilitator reflects his commitment to growth, both within the firm and beyond it.

Chris, our co-founder and Chief Compliance and Investment Officer, brings deep industry experience and an analytical perspective. He is focused on disciplined portfolio management and proven strategies. His background working with business owners and high-net-worth individuals has built a strong foundation of trust. Chris ensures our investment processes remain rigorous and that our compliance standards are upheld at the highest level.

As COO, I focus on the operational foundation that supports everything we do. With over 20 years of experience in strategy, finance, and accounting, including leadership roles in the Sonoma wine industry, my perspective is grounded in building systems, supporting teams, and creating the infrastructure needed to scale without losing the personal touch. Since the firm's founding in October 2019, it has been incredibly rewarding to help build and support this team. My role is to ensure our advisors can focus on serving clients while the business operates with consistency and precision.

What makes this work is not just different titles. It is different perspectives. Daren's vision, Chris's investment discipline, and my operational focus create a leadership dynamic where growth is ambitious yet grounded, decisions are thoughtfully evaluated, and the client experience remains central. That balance is intentional. It reflects the kind of leadership structure I believe more RIA firms should pursue.

For more information about our firm, please visit: <https://www.sonomowealth.com>, or click [here](#) to book your complimentary Wealth Analysis.

The Path Forward

The case for women in RIA leadership is clear. Firms with diverse executive teams are better positioned to serve the ongoing transfer of wealth, connect with a broader client base, and build organizations that are resilient and adaptable.

Progress requires more than good intentions. It requires intentional mentorship, thoughtful succession planning, and cultures that recognize contributions across operations, client experience, and team development as strategic, not secondary.

To women earlier in their careers, your perspective is needed. The ability to listen, build trust, think holistically, and bring structure to complexity is not secondary to leadership. It is central to it. Seek out firms and leaders who recognize that, and continue building from there.

To firm leaders, take a close look at your leadership team. If perspectives are too similar, there is missed opportunity. The firms that will lead this industry in the next decade will be those that embrace balance, not as a concept, but as a strategy.

About the Author



Jackie Egidio, MBA is the Chief Operating Officer of Sonoma Wealth Advisors. She brings over 20 years of experience in strategy, finance, and operations, with a focus on building scalable systems and supporting high-performing teams.

At Sonoma Wealth Advisors, Jackie plays a central role in shaping the firm's operational strategy and ensuring a consistent, high-quality experience for both clients and advisors.

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