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Why Trust Accounts Produce Longer Advisor Relationships

One of the most important advantages of trust planning, yet one of the least discussed in mainstream financial conversations, is the impact trusts have on advisor continuity. Across his podcast interviews, Antony Joffe, Chairman of Sterling Trustees LLC, has highlighted a remarkable statistic: the average advisory account lasts about seven years, but the average trust account lasts roughly seventeen years. This difference has major implications for advisors who want to build stable, multigenerational practices.

The reason trust accounts last longer is simple. Traditional advisory relationships are tied to the lifespan and personal circumstances of the client. When a client dies, the advisory relationship often ends abruptly. Children or other heirs may already have their own advisors, may feel emotionally compelled to “start fresh,” or may not understand the value of long-term planning. As a result, advisors typically lose around 80 percent of assets when a client passes away.

Trusts, however, provide structure. They formalize continuity by embedding the advisor into the trust document as the designated Investment Advisor, leaving the existing advisor managing the investments even after the grantor dies. Instead of having to resell themselves to the next generation at a moment of grief or confusion, the advisor already has a legally defined role within the trust.

This creates a stable foundation for long-term planning. The advisor is not managing assets for one person; they are supporting a structure designed to outlive generations. Trusts allow the advisor to help families plan for education funding, business transitions, philanthropy, and long-term wealth distribution. This extended timeline supports deeper relationships and more thoughtful planning.

Trusts also protect advisors from institutional conflicts. Bank trust departments often attempt to shift investment management in-house, creating friction between advisors and trustees. Independent trust companies such as Sterling Trustees do not offer investment management and therefore do not compete with advisors. Their fixed-fee, administration-only model eliminates conflicts and ensures that advisors remain central to the financial strategy.

Trust structures also reduce emotional decision-making. When beneficiaries experience sudden wealth, they may make reactive financial decisions that disrupt long-term planning. Trusts provide distribution guidelines, oversight mechanisms, and guardrails that help beneficiaries make more responsible choices. Advisors benefit from this structure because families remain more stable and predictable.

For families, trust accounts encourage generational engagement. Instead of meeting an advisor only after a parent's death, beneficiaries begin forming relationships earlier through trust reviews, education sessions, and planning conversations. They build a relationship gradually, increasing trust, reducing surprises, and ensuring a smoother transition when the grantor passes away.

Another reason trust accounts last longer is accountability. Trustees are responsible for ensuring the trust operates according to its terms. Advisors must communicate with trustees, demonstrate consistency, and provide documentation that aligns with fiduciary standards. This encourages disciplined investment practices and more intentional planning.

Beneficiaries also value the clarity that trust structures offer. They have defined roles, clear expectations, and transparent reporting. Advisors can use this transparency to deepen relationships and reinforce the long-term benefits of responsible wealth management.


South Dakota trusts amplify these advantages through flexibility, privacy, and strong statutes that support multigenerational planning. Directed trust laws keep advisors in control of investments. Asset protection statutes preserve wealth through legal challenges. Flexibility in disclosure allows families to choose the right time to communicate with heirs. Together, these features create a trust environment that supports families and advisors for decades.

For advisors looking to build resilient practices, trust planning is more than a value-added service; it is a long-term business strategy. Trust accounts anchor the advisor to the family across generations, reduce attrition, and create opportunities for deeper planning. Advisors who embrace trust planning position themselves to lead families through life's transitions with stability and purpose.

Trusts transfer wealth and relationships. Advisors who understand and leverage this reality can build the kind of enduring practice that grows stronger with each generation.

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