

Changing the Conversation of the Financial Planning Profession

Asking what's best and what's next, the 'only way to move forward'

The Financial Planning Association (FPA) recently took a major step forward in shifting the culture of conversation within both the organization and the financial planning profession in general, say senior leaders.

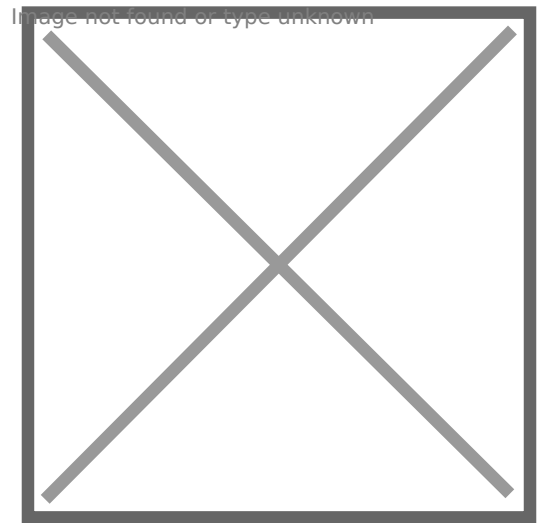
FPA 2011 president Marty Kurtz says it's been agreed the conversation needs to move to a line of thinking that zeroes in on "what we do well, and where should this go."

"I think that's the only way we're going to move forward, is if we build on our strengths," Kurtz tells *Axiom News*, noting both the FPA and financial planning profession are going through a "stressful time of transition" brought on in large part by shifts in consumer trends. This makes the new way of framing interactions that much more crucial at this time.

A leadership and advocacy body of 95 chapters representing more than 24,000 members across the U.S., FPA held an inaugural strengths summit in early August. The A4 Summit: Assess, Appreciate, Align, Act was facilitated by Innovation Partners International partners Cheri Torres, Ada Jo Mann and Christine Whitney Sanchez.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a tool presented as a radically innovative approach to the field of organization development and community change, was the approach used.

Speaking before the event, Kurtz says he saw AI as a choice solution for not only opening up "pleasant, powerful conversation," but also moving "us to decisive, wise action."



Summit participants in discussion.

Executive director and CEO Marv Tuttle notes the FPA and its members have huge aspirations, which “sometimes get in the way of being laser-like focused and clear about our mission and vision,” and he believed the strengths summit would help with becoming more focused.

Both leaders’ hopes were realized as the summit, though not without its share of challenges, resulted in agreement on about seven areas of strategic direction.

Tuttle describes it as launching “a new conversation for FPA that allows us to start taking steps towards strategic alignment.”

He notes that one exciting outcome was that about 90 per cent of participants left the gathering positive and optimistic about the process. He says this is especially notable given that some were quite resistant to the approach initially.

Sanchez agrees both the level of commitment by the end of the summit, and agreement on future direction are significant, especially given FPA and the profession’s current identity challenges.

“I think folks were blown away by the groan zone that you moved your way through to the very clear results that you got about what you’re to focus on and some ideas about how to get started, (as well as) owners for all the pieces.”

She attributes the success in part to past FPA practices, developed over a long period of time, which helped participants stay connected to each other even when

“things got really rough in terms of the energy and the tension.”

She adds she believes that first identifying the organization’s strengths and the “container” provided by AI and the AI facilitators were also key factors in helping people “hang in there through all of that natural discomfort as people shifted their passion from individual ideas to what would work for the whole system.”

Since AI was introduced as a whole-systems change methodology for FPA, Kurtz says his vision has been to see it go far beyond this one summit.

“I think we’re all hoping that this is something we integrate in, it becomes part of our standard working methods and we have many summits in the future, to keep us on that line of where we’re starting with this journey,” he says.

Next steps include exploring how to integrate the AI approach as well as the agreed-upon directions into other FPA gatherings, including more stakeholders, all the while doing it at the necessary speed, says Kurtz.

“I think we’re all feeling a need to get on this,” he says.

If you have feedback on this article please contact Michelle at 800-294-0051, ext. 27, or e-mail [michelle\(at\)axiomnews.ca](mailto:michelle(at)axiomnews.ca).