

If you're considering a career as a Financial Advisor, look no further than the Wealth Management Associate (WMA) Program at Smith Moore, one of the oldest investment firms established west of the Mississippi River. Through our WMA Program, you'll begin by working alongside one of our veteran Financial Advisors with the goal of building your knowledge of the industry, forming a partnership and team, and one day possibly taking over the practice from the senior advisor.



After joining Smith Moore as an intern in 2005, Financial Advisor Kevin Storm became part of a team that worked diligently on the team's client service model better serve the firm's clients. In 2005, Kevin realized he could help CEO Jim Deutsch add capacity and take his business to the next level, and thus the WMA Program was created.

In 2015, Kevin Kopff was engaging in many conversations with his father-in-law, Jon Bakalar, a Financial Advisor at Smith Moore who was looking toward retirement. Based on these conversations – and with a desire for positive change – Kopff left a successful career as an auditor to start all over from square one as a Wealth Management Associate at the firm's Overland Park, KS branch.



"The WMA Program is the perfect way to enter the business and work with its best people," said Kopff, now a Vice President and Financial Advisor at Smith Moore. "A large percentage of advisors will be leaving the industry in the next 5-10 years, and I've noticed many of them do not have a succession plan in place."

In his opinion, the decision was an easy one, and so Kopff joined the WMA Program in order to help Jon grow his revenues, expand the client base, and take over the practice once his father-in-law was ready to retire.

"Unfortunately, Jon didn't have a natural successor set up for his business," Kopff continued. "He had spent decades fortifying relationships with his clients, and if he was planning on riding off into the sunset of his career, he did not feel it was acceptable to leave his clients behind when he retired from Smith Moore."

According to both Kopff and Storm, Smith Moore's WMA Program provided them with:

- Invaluable mentorship
- Opportunities for career advancement
- A competitive compensation and benefits package
- Opportunities to earn fees and commissions once they were licensed
- Bonus and incentives programs
- 401(k) and profit-sharing plans



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“Over the course of five years, the WMA Program is designed to have the new employees become part of the team, sitting with clients, interacting, and learning about the business – not just sitting behind the computer,” Kopff said. “When you’re new, you receive valuable experience and credibility when meeting with an older client or couple because you are sitting beside a senior advisor. That senior advisor wants what is best for his/her clients, which includes preparing you for success.”

Not only are Wealth Management Associates expected to attend and participate in client meetings, but throughout the five years they are enlisted in the program, WMAs will also learn the ins and outs of client care and business management, which often includes the financial planning process, managing and resolving client service problems, identifying unmet client needs, and reviewing and updating client information for meetings.

Both Kopff and Storm, have said they have enjoyed the levels of confidence that have been placed in them, were invited into meetings and on conference calls with their senior advisors from the very beginning.

“I have stayed with the firm because I enjoy being able to grow my own role and run my own practice without constantly being delegated to,” Storm said. “Wealth Management Associates are not asked to meet some arbitrary, Wall Street standard. Smith Moore allows its WMAs to thrive in their own way, with guidance from their senior advisor. There is a family feeling here, and we do not ever get the impression that we are employee No. 300 at branch No. 75. We all know each other on first-name basis throughout each of our eight offices.”

In his branch, Kopff echoes Storm’s sentiments regarding the freedom he has been afforded. Though he was unaware of it when he joined the firm, another Overland Park branch advisor, Ted Long, had also been contemplating the idea of retirement. So, upon joining Smith Moore and completing the WMA Program, Kopff eventually took over two books of business.

“I love being my own boss. I am only 33 years old,” Kopff said, “ I am in charge of a financial advisory practice that previously belonged to two senior advisors. I have the autonomy to set my own schedule, work directly with my clients, and grow my abilities as I best see fit. If you are looking to take a few years to learn about this career path and this industry, then you should absolutely consider Smith Moore. It is a great place to work, and the work-life balance here is the best I have ever seen in my professional career.”

To learn more about joining our Wealth Management Associate Program and how you can forge your own path in this industry, please visit smithmoore.com/joinus or James Deutsch, President and CEO at jdeutsch@smithmoore.com .