

## Building a Legacy of Independence

SYM Financial Advisors celebrates 50 years by building for the future.

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In a business designed to help people plan for the future, Steve Yeager and the team at SYM Financial Advisors recently spent time reflecting on the past. This year, the company commemorated its 50<sup>th</sup> year in business. Amid a series of celebratory events with clients, business partners, and the community, SYM employees considered how far the company has come and where they want to see it go – the same legacy-building exercise they perform for their clients.

“This fifty-year mark has been a point of reflection for us to look back and be thankful for those who have come before

us,” says Yeager, AIF®, MBA, senior vice president. “At the same time, it also gave us the opportunity to go a little deeper and examine the legacy we are trying to create.”

That legacy, says Yeager, centers on independence. Originally a family-owned business, SYM began broadening its ownership base more than a decade ago when Yeager’s father, the original founder, retired and five employees purchased ownership stakes in the company. Since then, a third generation of employee-owners have become partners, with the expectation that even more will join in the future.

Having a broad ownership base with strong local ties is the foundation of SYM’s succession plan.

“We want to build a team that will create a legacy of independence,” explains Yeager. “Some estimates indicate that seventy-five percent of independent firms are still owned by their original founder. We’ve gotten past that phase, and now we’re building for the future.”

SYM’s advisors take their business personally, measuring every interaction against the company’s core values of service, integrity, teamwork, and results. The ultimate goal, says Yeager, is to provide financial confidence through proven strategies and personal leadership. In addition, because SYM operates on a fee-basis as a Registered Investment Advisor (RIA), the company does not receive commissions. That means SYM’s success is derived from clients’ success.

An important part of operating as a RIA is that SYM acts as a fiduciary to each and every client, putting the clients’ best interest before their own. “It’s a major focus for us to make sure that everyone we work with understands it’s our job to be a fiduciary – to act in their best interest at all times,” says Yeager.

In order to understand clients’ financial goals, the SYM team takes a high touch approach, striving to provide best-in-class service. Advisory teams are intentional and proactive in meeting with clients, using their expertise to add value as they build solid financial plans. As a result, in periods of transition or market fluctuation, SYM advisors can guide their clients calmly and effectively.

Teamwork between advisor and client is a common theme at SYM. To illustrate the role SYM takes as a financial advisor, Yeager recalled a situation he experienced as a Navy pilot. During one mission, Yeager experienced a bad case of vertigo that caused him to believe his plane was in a ninety-degree bank. He knew that was not possible because his aircraft was in the process of refueling and had to be relatively level to accommodate that. So, Yeager checked in with his “back-seater,” who looked at the instruments and confirmed that the plane was flying level. The co-pilot talked Yeager through the incident, repeating “your wings are level” until Yeager was able to overcome the vertigo.



“We look to be that copilot for our clients, to navigate through whatever turbulence, vertigo, or transition they may be experiencing,” explains Yeager. “We want to be a partner, not a vendor.” The partnership approach works for SYM; the company consistently hits its annual client retention target of ninety-six percent. “Our goal is to be the last advisor you hire,” says Yeager. “Most clients hire us and stay with us for decades.”

SYM’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary also gives the company an opportunity to thank clients for their loyalty. The company hosted a series of events that not only offered a look at where SYM has been and where it is going, but also offered clients a chance to do the same. SYM arranged for Susan Turnbull of East coast-based Personal Legacy Advisors to present on the topic of non-financial legacy planning. During the events, held in Midland MI, Fort Wayne, Carmel, and Winona Lake, IN, nearly 700 clients and business partners learned ways to become intentional about building their legacy through relationships, personal impact, and the passing on of values. The interactive presentation served as a natural complement to the financial legacy planning SYM offers its clients.



“We aim to take care of financial things for our clients so they can focus on the more important things in life,” says Yeager. “Most people really enjoyed going through this exercise and thinking about their heritage as far more than just finances.”

SYM’s dedicated team wants to leave clients comfortable enough to focus on their personal legacy, knowing their financial legacy is in good hands. Accordingly, the growing team at SYM has been carefully and intentionally assembled.

“It’s a really important part of our culture to build a team that works well together,” says Yeager. “We’ve been blessed with an abundance of high quality, service-oriented people.”

Yeager emphasizes that SYM advisors are passionate about their clients and their success.

“I hope people know how personally burdened we are to deliver value to our clients in a way that gives them confidence,” says Yeager. “This is more than a business for most everyone who works here.”

Because they take service to heart, SYM dedicates itself to remaining independent as the company moves forward. Clients need to be served in the way they are accustomed long after some employees retire, explains Yeager. SYM’s succession planning means that clients don’t have to worry about the company’s future status, which makes a significant impact on their stability and confidence.

“You want to be with a firm that is building itself to be able to take you all the way to the finish line,” says Yeager. “We’ve built our leadership and future leadership so we can maintain that and truly act in our clients’ best interests. That’s our legacy.”