



EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

Industry Update: Should You Consider a Move When Markets Are Turbulent?

A conversation with Louis Diamond

Mindy Diamond:

Welcome to the latest episode of our podcast series for financial advisors. Today's episode is an industry update. Should you consider a move when markets are turbulent? It's a conversation with my partner, Louis Diamond. I'm Mindy Diamond, and this is Mindy Diamond on Independence.

Mindy Diamond:

This podcast is available on our website diamond-consultants.com as well as Apple Podcasts and other major podcast platforms. If you are not already a subscriber and want to be notified of new show releases, please subscribe right on your favorite podcast platform or on the episode page on our website. For Apple Podcasts users, I'd be grateful if you'd give the show or review. Your input helps us to make the series better and alerts other advisors like you, who may find the content to be relevant. And while you're at it, if you know others who are considering change or simply looking to learn more about the industry landscape, please feel free to share this episode or the series widely.

Mindy Diamond:

Over the last several months, advisors have been busy managing client expectations as the market has taken them unwittingly on a wild roller coaster ride. But as one advisor said on a previous episode in this series, "This is when advisors really showed their stripes and earned their pay." As of this recording, the markets have taken a bit of an upswing, yet tomorrow could be a totally different story. And it's this uncertainty that is an inconvenient truth of the wealth management business. That is, some days it's up and some days it's down.

Mindy Diamond:

Still, it's pretty common for advisors to share they are uncomfortable about considering a move when the markets are unsettled. But it begs the question, are you certain that the market is not an excuse for staying at a firm that doesn't allow you to serve clients best and grow your business? As the saying goes, timing is everything. And that's even more true in an unsettled market. So how does an advisor know if now is the right time to consider a change? I've asked Louis to join me in answering that question and many more. So there's tons to discuss and let's get to it.

Mindy Diamond:

Louis, thank you so much for joining me once again.

Louis Diamond:

Yeah. Always happy to be here.

Mindy Diamond:

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All right. Let's jump in. Let's kind of level set this and give our listener some perspective. I mean, it's no surprise to anyone listening that we are recording this episode toward the middle to end of July. And the markets have been choppy. They've rebounded a bit. But with interest rates going up and the like it's anybody's question or anybody's guess what it looks like tomorrow. So let's start with what we're hearing from advisors. Are many advisors postponing moves or due diligence because of this turbulent cycle?

Louis Diamond:

Great question. I would say the advisors that we're actively working with are still moving forward with both feet, for advisors that are motivated because either there's enough frustration and pain where they are and at the same time, they're finding that maybe the grass is greener and that there's other options that could allow them to serve clients better, they're still very confident that it's the right time because markets do go up and down.

Louis Diamond:

At the same time though, certainly we're hearing from another subset of advisors, perhaps those that either aren't that unhappy or aren't that motivated to make a change that maybe it's not the right time, because just crazy times, clients need them and it's hard to come up for air. So I would say it's a mixed bag, but it seems to be more about how motivated someone is rather than what the markets are looking like.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah, I think that's right. I think that someone who was lukewarm or not all that certain that there was enough pain to justify a move or enough enthusiasm about an option elsewhere is probably much more likely, and perhaps rightly so, to go back underground or put their head down, if you will and focus on serving clients and perhaps come up again for air or take a look again a year or so from now, and that's fine. I think as you said though, advisors that have determined that there is enough pain, enough things that they want to solve for and who have had long standing relationships with clients seem to be really unbothered by market conditions. Or said another way, everyone's bothered by market conditions and certainly hyper concerned or hyper focused on doing what's right for clients, but it doesn't daunt them or stop them from continuing the due diligence process. Because if their true north is doing what's best for clients, they are undeterred from looking for a solution that could be just that. So, let me back up a second. Are there other time periods that you can reference where we saw active advisor movement, even though the market was especially unpredictable?

Louis Diamond:



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Absolutely. Yeah, the two biggest periods of advisor movement that I think all of us can remember, certainly not saying now is equivalent as far as the magnitude of what's happening, but it was the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 when probably about half the industry changed firms. Largely because a lot of firms were going out of business and people had to move, but certainly everyone was unsettled at that time. And advisors moved in droves. Another, a very recent one would be during the pandemic in let's say April or May of 2020 even up until now, we've seen advisor movement really come somewhat close to what we saw in 2008 and 2009. So those are two extremely traumatic times for advisors and clients in all of society, but advisors that were motivated still found a way to move forward. And you can point to many other points in time, whether it was leading up to or after the election where Trump beat Hillary Clinton. There's a number of other moments in time where markets have been unsettled, but advisor movement has either remained unaffected or has actually increased as a result.

Mindy Diamond:

So it's worth, I guess, asking the follow-up question, and so were they good moves or bad moves? In other words, what was the upshot of advisors moving in droves in '08 or '09 or when COVID first began, these times of real uncertainty?

Louis Diamond:

Yeah, I mean, just looking back at the pandemic and hate to beat a dead horse because everyone's sick of talking about it, but we actually saw advisor moves be more successful as far as asset portability and even just advisors reporting that they were able to connect with clients more. Folks weren't traveling, advisors were able to demonstrate more value recently than if the markets were pretty calm. So I think just looking at the pandemic, we actually saw moves were more effective and advisors and clients reported more satisfaction after they made the change.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. And I would add, I mean, 2008 and 2009 was a crazy time for the world, the financial crisis and Merrill Lynch was on the verge of going under and a million other examples of what was going on at the time. And the markets were certainly turbulent. But we saw, I think the statistic was 28,000 advisors change firms in that 12 month period between '08 and '09 and what we found, and because now it's funny all the advisors that we moved in '08 and '09 are now free agents and many of them could move again. The vast majority of them tell us 9, 10, 11 years later that they're really happy that they moved, that they chose to move not because of turbulent markets, but in spite of them and or took the notion of turbulent markets into account and moved anyway.

Mindy Diamond:



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And what they said was that because it was turbulent markets they became even more focused on making sure that everything that they had access to, everything that they were able to do was best in class in terms of protecting their clients and serving them best. And if they didn't feel certain that their firm, whatever firm they were at the time was the very best in class that they had a responsibility to find another solution. And here we are 13 years since 2009, and we've talked to everyone we've moved and they'll tell you it was a great move.

Louis Diamond:

Agreed.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. Okay. So let me ask you another question. What types of questions should an advisor considering change ask themselves to assess whether now is the right time to consider change or in fact to put it off?

Louis Diamond:

That's the exact right way to go with this conversation. So I would say there's probably four or five different questions. We can each probably rattle off many more. So maybe I'll do the first one and then we can flip flop back and forth. I think the major question, the obvious one, is markets aside, do you feel well served at your firm? Or put another way if the markets weren't choppy, are you happy? Do you have what you need to serve your clients? Do you find satisfaction in your job? Is your firm a good partner? Is the day to day worthwhile? I think that's the first question. Because if an advisor says, yeah, you know what? I am pretty well served. Then who cares about the markets you're at the right place and you shouldn't be considering change to begin with. Why don't you take the second one.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. And let me just add one other thing before I do, what I would say is so that if you decide that markets aside, you don't believe you are 100% well served at your firm, then the second question becomes, do I have the bandwidth and capacity to do due diligence, meaning to go out and get educated on and explore other options. Then the third question is, so once I do that and I'm armed with information that firm A, B and C and opportunity D, E and F could, or is better than my current firm to whatever degree, then I need to rethink about market conditions. So then given market conditions, is this the right time to move or do I still like X, Y, and Z firm, a different firm, but is not necessarily the right time?

Mindy Diamond:



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So I think what we're saying is not to ignore market conditions, but to make sure that they don't paralyze you into staying if staying isn't the right thing to do.

Louis Diamond:

Yep.

Mindy Diamond:

Okay. So let me take the next one. So the next one is, does your firm give you the flexibility you need to run your business, especially in a challenging environment? So interesting because literally 10 minutes before we began recording this podcast I was on the phone with an advisor that was talking about how he works for Merrill Lynch and how Merrill is taking a stance of almost completely disallowing any sort of individualized communication on the part of advisors, and how frustrating that is. And that's one of many reasons the advisor is exploring other options. And one of the things we talked about, I said to him that was a big motivator in people moving and really assessing the amount of freedom and control and flexibility they had to market themselves, to mass market, to mass, communicate with clients and how they were going to communicate with clients.

Mindy Diamond:

So even COVID aside, generally speaking, again markets aside, do you feel that you have the freedom and control to run the business the way you want to? Tie in our opinion always goes to the runner. What I mean by that is if you do explore and you don't find an opportunity that's better enough or significantly better enough than where you are, then you stay put because the advantage goes to your current firm. But, the bottom line is that's a really important question. Do you have the freedom and control to run the business the way you want to?

Louis Diamond:

Yeah, no. I think that's right. And I would just add that I think the real emphasis of this is flexibility to communicate with clients, especially in a challenging environment. We saw this in the heights of the pandemic and we heard from folks on this podcast folks like Joe Eschleman and John Klaas and Terry Cook, who either had been independent during the pandemic or moved during it, talking about customized market commentary. That they're able to get out within a couple of hours, rather than a couple of days or a video where they can be in a client's living room without actually being there in person. So not every firm allows these types of rapid communication, but for many advisors it was a way to connect with clients. And a lot of folks look at that as a reason why they may or may not be at the best possible firm.

Mindy Diamond:

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So let me ask you a follow-up question to that. So for example, the markets are choppy and clients are worried, obviously, if an advisor is not bound by hypervigilant compliance and policies that say you are disallowed from communicating in all market commentary, what are some of the things that an advisor could do outside say the wirehouse world or the most limited environments in a market like this?

Louis Diamond:

One would be writing their own customized market commentary. So instead of just using the white labeled or kind of boiler plate stuff that a CIO puts out, it's having your own voice and your own methods of communication. Another would be rapid video analysis that can be posted on social media or sent out to an email distribution list. It could be doing a podcast. I would say those three in particular are just scalable ways to get a message out. And that's of course in addition to personal phone calls and Zoom meetings and in-person meetings.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. I agree with you totally. And one comment I'd make in response to that is I'm thinking about advisors that work in the traditional broker dealer world and the bigger the broker dealer the more stringent or tight the restrictions on this are. But that even if an advisor worked for firm in the broker dealer world that allowed them to rapid fire communicate, the advisor could craft the communication in rapid fire but it still would take days perhaps, or time, for the compliance department to approve it. And again, many guests on our podcast really talked about that, that even if they were allowed to say what they wanted to, it took so long for compliance to get back to them with approval that by the time they did, the message was stale.

Louis Diamond:

Exactly. Yep. I think the next big question to ask is, are clients best served by your current firm or are there limitations or things you wish you could do differently for them? So again, outside of the markets, this is just doing a gut check on whether you can really perform your duty as a financial advisor to the best of your ability and that clients' needs are being met by the services you are either allowed to carry out at your current firm or that you have the capabilities of your current firm.

Louis Diamond:

So I'll give you a couple of examples. We hear from many advisors who talk about wanting to be the one stop shop for clients. So offering tax preparation and estate planning services or more family office type services. So, not every client wants this, not every advisor even wants to be able to provide those things, but many advisors look at that and say, hey, if I can provide this in one unified way then maybe that is better for a client. So, that would be one example.



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Louis Diamond:

Another one I would say is on the investment side. Many, especially ultra-high net worth focused advisors, they look at the private markets as a real differentiator and also as a way to find alpha in challenging times. And if an advisor is either with a high-end boutique firm that specializes in alternative investments or is truly independent and can have unlimited access to direct private investments and the like then perhaps that is a better way to serve clients. Again, nothing's going to be perfect, there's tradeoffs no matter where you go. And for the extra flexibility an advisor gets, there may be some things they give up as far as support or just spending time working in the business instead of on it.

Mindy Diamond:

So, I get the benefits of independence, the notion of greater freedom and control to serve clients during choppy markets. But it begs the question that we're asked often by advisors and particularly in choppy markets. Am I better off being with a recognizable brand name bulge bracket firm like the Morgan Stanleys and UBSs and Merrill Lynches of the world during choppy markets than I am as an independent?

Louis Diamond:

Yeah, it's a great point. I think if you've surveyed 10 advisors, 5 would give you one answer, 5 would give you the other. It all comes down to what you know about your clients, your own comfort level, and also how you position your services and how front and center your firm is in your message to clients versus you and your team. So, I don't think there's a right or wrong answer. I think just every advisor has to know themselves. Obviously the wirehouses are still successful in recruiting, independents are. And like we say, there's no clear winner in the race for top talent.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. I would agree with that. And I think it comes down to what would you define as your best business life? What do you want to be when you grow up? Where do you see yourself? And there is no one right answer. I don't disagree. So I think the last point we'd add is that, how does your team feel about your current firm? Are they happy? Especially in a tight labor market, are you at risk of losing key personnel because they're dealing with extra bureaucracy or they're unhappy with certain things, certain mandates? Because what we hear a lot is that it's the support staff, the advisor support staff that does all of the blocking and tackling to make sure that clients are insulated from the bureaucracy or mandates that their firm imposes. And at some point, the happiness of the team needs to be considered.

Mindy Diamond:

And it's funny, I would even go one step further. A lot of times moves are motivated when the support staff begins to say, I know you may not be aware of X, Y, and Z, but here's what we are dealing with,



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here's what it takes in order to get things done from clients and protect them from the bureaucracy and it's getting unwieldy. And it comes down to how long do we believe our support staff can keep the finger in the dike before the dike explodes before we begin not to be able to protect our clients as it stopped working.

Louis Diamond:

Yep. I agree.

Mindy Diamond:

Okay. So then are there benefits to moving during choppy markets?

Louis Diamond:

Yeah, it's funny. So let's look at the glass half full here, because I think there actually are two or three points of why it actually might be in an advisor's interest to consider moving either when the market's down or when it's just unpredictable. The first one that comes to mind is that in bull markets, advisors are often reluctant to disrupt momentum. They talk about the pipeline being amazing, I'm growing 20% per year. And how can I stand disrupting that momentum? So it actually might be a time to think of your business as a business and to spend time to work in it instead of on it, and really dig deep and figure out if you're in the best place. Because now you have a break, let's say, or a reason why it might be a good time to reposition the business.

Louis Diamond:

Advisors also use turbulent markets as a way to really showcase their value to clients. When everything is easy peasy and an advisor has a fee-based business, it's easy for a client to forget about why they work with an advisor in the first place. When everyone can make money on day trading stocks, it's easy to say, hey, I don't need an advisor. I can just work with the robo or do it myself. But the best advisors really demonstrate their value and clients remember that their advisor is valuable, which ultimately might translate to better portability because you're just that much more important to a client.

Louis Diamond:

Another point would be that clients are typically less likely to switch advisors when times are challenging. So if you're changing firms and your accounts are redistributed, certainly there's going to be surprises of clients who stay or don't want to move, but they're also probably less likely to latch on to a new relationship if they don't have trust in that person. They know you, they like you, they trust you and you've been with them for a while.

Louis Diamond:

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And then finally, this one will be a little bit selfish or self-serving for an advisor, but it's true. The way recruitment deals are structured is that typically about half of the deal structure is paid up front, the other half is paid on the back end based upon hitting typically now their asset hurdles, meaning you have to bring over a certain percentage of assets and grow your assets by a pretty meaningful amount in order to hit the full deal. So when markets are down, it's actually easier for advisors to hit their back ends because they'll get the market bumped in the future and the market isn't overly inflated.

Louis Diamond:

So to me, those are some reasons to consider moving in choppy markets. But I think the first questions you got to ask yourselves are the ones we said before, which is, are you well served? Can you do what you need to? Et cetera. And then if you feel like you're in the zone where it's worth looking around to me, these are three or four points on why it might make sense to muster the courage to still push forward even if markets aren't ideal.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. I agree with everything you said. And I think it's important to note here that we tell advisors all the time that the first question is should I move? Will I move? Am I going to move? The second question is where will I go? And the third question and really the last question is the when.

Mindy Diamond:

So if an advisor's determined that there is enough frustration or enough motivation or enough drivers to consider a move, and they've determined that there is a firm or a model or multiple firms that in fact fit the bill that are worth considering. An advisor certainly has the ability to say, I want to move but I'm concerned that this week or this month is not the right time to do it. So, very often people may push off a move. Although I will tell you and I think you'd agree that we have not had anyone, not a single advisor, push off a move citing turbulent markets. Advisors push off the timing of a move all the time but it usually has more to do with is real estate ready, or they've got something personal going on or a piece of business coming in or something of the sort. But nobody's put off a move because of market conditions. I'd even venture to go as far as to say, it's just not even part of the conversation right now with the advisors we're talking to. Would you agree with that?

Louis Diamond:

Yeah, no, I think that's right. It's, I mean, not old news because it's obviously always happening but I agree it's not really a major factor. The other point is, I mean, doing due diligence in a thoughtful and strategic way takes time. You're not just going to snap your fingers and be ready to move next week. So many advisors might be reluctant to move in a situation like this initially, but if it takes them three, four, five, six months to conduct due diligence, who knows what everything's going to look like down their



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line. So it's never too early to get educated. Just because you're taking meetings or looking around doesn't mean you have to act on it now.

Louis Diamond:

And like you said, the last thing to concern yourself is the timing of a move. The timing can slip, it's your decision, and there's always ways to push off by a week, a month, a couple of months, as long as you're communicative with the platforms or the firms you're considering there's nothing wrong with that. So I think you conduct due diligence for the right reasons and then figure out the timing in the end.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. Well said. I agree. So are there advisors that shouldn't consider a move now or ever?

Louis Diamond:

Yeah. I mean, I think it's the inverse of who would consider a move right now. It's advisors that are happy, that have maybe looked around in the past and gotten educated and realized that maybe there isn't anything that's more than marginally better enough. That they're actually well served by their firm and they're confident that their clients are doing well where they are. Those advisors shouldn't consider a move now, whether the markets are up, down or sideways, it doesn't really matter because ultimately, they're happy.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. The bottom line is we're the first to admit and acknowledge that moving is disruptive. Due diligence is disruptive, it's very time consuming and labor intensive and it takes your eye and your focus off the ball and moving is a hassle, it's disruptive. And we always say that no one should consider it unless a move would be more than marginally better enough. So yeah, I think that's what we're saying that if someone feels well served enough, on par that is it perfect? Probably not. We acknowledge there's no perfection anywhere. But if there's enough frustration and you've managed to find either one or multiple opportunities that are better enough, then a move might be in order. So we're saying timing of a move is fluid, but is there a best time to move?

Louis Diamond:

I would say now I think the best time is going to be what makes the most sense for you? We get the question a lot. Is there a certain time of year that's best to move? Certainly, I would say there's popular times to move. A lot of advisors want to avoid moving, like right next to tax time. Some don't want to move between Thanksgiving and end of the year knowing that clients or themselves are on vacation. But I don't think there's really a best time of year to move and really there's always going to be excuses why now might not be the right time. Change is hard, change is uncomfortable and there's never going to be



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an ideal time. There's always a new prospect coming in or a new piece of business you want to close or the market, you can rattle off many different excuses. So there isn't going to be a best time.

Louis Diamond:

I think it's just being confident that you're moving for the right reasons, that you've been thoughtful and are seeking an option that's better enough than staying put. And then you can back into the timing. So, no, I don't think there's a best time. It's just the time that makes the most sense for you and your business and your clients. What would you say?

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah, no, I absolutely agree with that. I think that many advisors try to market time it and what I mean by that is find the time where they will be insured of losing zero clients, zero assets, the exact perfect time. And that is impossible if you're chasing that, you're never going to find it. In the 25 years I'm at this and the hundreds and hundreds of moves I've facilitated; I've never had an advisor that hasn't lost at least one piece of business in a move. It's just impossible to time it perfectly. And if your eye is on the prize, true north, which is I'm looking at big picture to be able to serve people better I'm okay with losing some clients or shrinking to grow if you will, or running the risk of losing something because I'm moving big picture to on par be able to do it better.

Louis Diamond:

Exactly.

Mindy Diamond:

All right. So one last question. Other than turbulent markets, what are some other popular reasons why an advisor might want to stay put?

Louis Diamond:

Yeah. So first thing I would say is any one of these reasons I'm about to mention, I think they're potentially valid reasons, but the big thing is to recognize whether you're using them as an excuse or red herring or whether you're just using it as a mechanism to put off something that's challenging. I'll give you a couple reasons and please feel free to add on. The first one, very, very popular is I'm under contract. I have three years, two years, seven years left on a forgivable loan, and I don't want to leave because I don't want to pay back a deal. Obviously very valid. No one wants to pay back money. But at the same time, if an advisor feels like they're not well served where they are, there are ways to either replace the money that is due. So going to another firm that you've identified as being more than better than staying put, that can provide capital to offset the money that you have to pay back to a firm.



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Louis Diamond:

So we always say, no one should feel stuck, whether you're under contract or not, you move for the right reasons. And if you're motivated enough and you find something that's exciting enough, oftentimes you can find ways to make your old firm whole and be comfortable that you're doing it for the right reasons.

Louis Diamond:

Next one I would say is part of a sunset deal or retirement deal or about to sign one. So this could be an advisor that's signed their firm retirement program. It could be a team that is inheriting a book of business and now is part of the three, five, seven, even eight year payback period on a note, or has been approached by an advisor in their office saying, hey, I'm going to retire in a year do you want to take over my business? This is a good one. I mean, obviously you have to get your contract reviewed. In some cases, it may not be possible to move while under a retirement deal, typically that would be for the retiring advisor. But I think this is where you say, hey, I'm either unhappy enough or I'm okay giving up a really good opportunity to take over a book. Or even if I have to pay back some money on a retirement deal, I know I'm doing it for the right reasons and I'm good with paying back my firm.

Louis Diamond:

So similar, I would say thinking to being under contract is being part of a retirement deal or having the opportunity to take over a book of business from a retiring advisor.

Louis Diamond:

Next one I would say, this one's common, my pipeline is massive. I have 15 high net worth clients that are right on the one-yard line or I have a \$50 million account that I've been on for three years and now all of a sudden there's a life event and they're ready to go. Again, very easy to rationalize why it's not the right time. You got to find the timing that makes sense for you. I think this falls in the category of if you're unhappy enough, conduct the due diligence, do the homework and can always back into the timing later. And if they're truly good prospects, they're going to come with you anyway, because your message of why you're moving and also your process and your expertise is still going to remain unchanged. So you kind of got to take a leap of faith there.

Mindy Diamond:

Yeah. What I would add to that is part of as you conduct due diligence if you've got 15 ultra-high net worth prospects in the wings, it's conducting due diligence with an eye toward those prospects. So yes, I believe my firm may be good enough or isn't good enough for serving my existing client base. But as I think about the needs and perspective needs of new clients will I still feel well served and how might another firm help me to do it better?



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Louis Diamond:

Yep, definitely. Here's another one. I've moved in the past. It was a disaster. It was so stressful, and I just don't have it in me again. I think that one's extremely fair. Every advisor knows themselves and they know what it takes to move a business. Typically, too advisors moved in the past when their business was smaller. But I think the point here is technology has made transitioning easier. Whether it's through DocuSign, electronic communication, your relationships are probably stronger. And I think this is one where don't let the fear get in the way. If you feel like you have to do this for clients and there's strong reasons why it makes sense to consider a change, then oftentimes it's worth it to take one step back, to take many steps forward or to be uncomfortable for a period of time, even knowing what it was like in the past. But again, you got to know yourself and know how motivated you are in the first place.

Louis Diamond:

And the last two, I won't spend much time on this, but someone looks around and realizes the grass isn't greener. That's amazing. You took the time to get educated. And if you haven't found something that's more than, better than making the change, then you stay. So very, very valid reason to stay as long as you're doing it from position of strength. And finally, like we said earlier, the firm is supportive of me and my clients get what they deserve. If that's the case, then no reason to even have a further conversation, you're in the right spot.

Mindy Diamond:

Yes, I couldn't agree more.

Mindy Diamond:

So of course, in any market environment, serving your clients to the best of your ability should always be the primary focus, but there are some compelling reasons why market factors need not necessarily preclude you from at least considering whether or not the ability to support them is best accomplished at your current firm. Because the reality is that there is never a perfect time to move and that there is no perfection in general, but when considered thoughtfully, there are often perfect reasons to do so.

Mindy Diamond:

So Louis, I want to wrap up and I can't thank you enough for joining me again. Appreciate your wisdom and insights.

Louis Diamond:

Thank you.

Mindy Diamond:

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Industry Update: Should You Consider a Move When Markets Are Turbulent?

A conversation with Louis Diamond

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Mindy Diamond:

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