

The Road to Wealth Management Success: Ambition, Determination and Commitment

Anupam Guha, Head of Private Wealth Management at ICICI Securities, was born into a military family and that has instilled a sense of discipline in his work, and personal life. Hubbis caught up with him soon after he had returned from running a gruelling 87-kilometre ultra-marathon in South Africa named “Comrades” - one of the oldest and most famous ultra marathons in the world. He believes that some of the mental skills involved in his running also correlate to his career in private banking and the type of culture he believes should endure at the firm, namely setting ambitious goals, determination and an unwavering commitment to follow through.

GUHA IS EXCITED BY THE OPPORTUNITY THAT the wealth management industry offers in India, noting that, Private Wealth business in India is poised for healthy growth over the next few years as the Indian populace moves up the wealth pyramid. India continues to outpace global High Networth Individuals (HNIs) growth, mirroring the economic growth in the country. With the incremental allocation of wealth being higher in financial assets as compared to physical assets, the wealth management industry is emerging as a big beneficiary. With a stable political leadership, the outlook is encouraging, he feels. However, there exist near-term challenges in the equity market, as we are not seeing a broad-based recovery across sectors and there continues to be volatility due to global uncertainties. Also there is lack of liquidity and credit concerns in the debt market, he notes.

“One of my key priorities is to enhance the client proposition on an ongoing basis. Listening to clients gives us more opportunity to understand their needs and provide ideas & solutions to them, thus deepening the relationship and building trust over time. These client insights have helped in building the overall product proposition and bringing continuous innovation”, he says. “The other thrust area is to increase client coverage and add value through an effective communication & engagement strategy” he says.

Guha also believes that efficient use of technology will help significantly to boost and deliver the firm’s proposition and its brand, especially in tier II and III cities. Apart from the vintage relationship team which is a cornerstone

of I-Sec’s client engagement strategy, the firm also has a robust digital platform.

Flying the ICICI flag

Guha says when the firm engages with clients, it needs to con-

nect on a broader basis than just investments, communicating and working with them on their business and family wealth planning aspects as well.

“In addition to the successful Private Wealth practice, ICICI Se-

Key Priorities

First up is the drive to enhance the firm’s product suite and delivery. Continuous innovation has been one of the hallmarks in delivering client delight. For example, I-Sec has launched an advisory based direct mutual fund platform - Direct2U. The proposition is based on a process-based risk assessment, asset allocation strategies and active investment advisory, along with integrated portfolio reporting. “More and more HNIs are moving their investments to direct mutual funds. So at the click of a button, clients are able to invest into a direct plan, through the Direct2U interface on our online platform with active advisory,” Guha says.

Under Guha, the company has also recently entered into product manufacturing space with the launch of its proprietary PMS product - Active Index Portfolio, a passive investment strategy.

I-Sec has also launched its loyalty programme under “Prime” banner, where clients are offered multiple benefits, for example I-Sec has launched a unique product called e-ATM, which allows clients to receive money from sale of equity shares within 30 minutes, rather than the traditional two days through the usual settlement route. It is yet another first in the industry.

His second priority is to boost the tech/digital proposition. “How do we make our platform more intuitive and seamless for clients to navigate and take their own investment decisions rather than to be dependent on somebody else?” he ponders. “And how do we make it more efficient for everyone involved to deliver the best products, services and solutions in an optimal manner? That is a key priority for us.”

And his third priority is to continue to expand the firm’s focus on training and skills enhancement, to create an enduring sense of teamwork and culture of achievement.



ANUPAM GUHA
ICICI Securities

curities also has a leading investment banking business, and both the teams work closely to engage with corporates and SMEs on their overall business journeys,” he notes, “so when we meet wealthy clients, we can expand the discussion to areas, including capital raising, debt, M&A opportunities and so forth. On the family front, we bring in our family office team and connect on estate planning, intergenerational wealth transfer and on other key areas on which our family office clients need products, advice and services.”

As to investments, Guha says that the firm proactively engages clients with their views and insights on the markets and their ebbs and flows. “We need to assess their overall portfolios in the context of market realities and expectations, and do asset allocation proactively,” he explains.

Winning in a tougher market

Guha has some firm ideas on how the wealth management practice must manage its business in the current era of fee compression, driven by both regulation and competition.

Getting Personal

Guha, though belonging to a Bengali family, was born in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh, in an army cantonment close to Dharamshala, which he notes is where the Dalai Lama has spent most of his time in India. “My father was in the army,” he explains, “so we moved around the country every couple of years”. He has a Master’s in Economics from Pune University, and a PGDM from the Symbiosis Institute of Management Studies in Pune.

His first job on finishing his PGDM was in retail banking at ICICI Bank and then in institutional sales, before moving with ICICI to the Middle East for four years. He moved back to India to set up the private wealth business for ICICI Securities in 2009.

Married with two children of 15 and 12, Guha balances his spare time between family and his passion for endurance sports, most recently the 87-kilometre ultra-marathon, the Comrades Marathon, that he took part in, along with 180 other runners from India, an event that took place in South Africa. “It took me 10 hours and 49 minutes, and by the way it was an uphill run” he reports. Guha is a regular in the running circuit in India and participates in various marathons.

Guha explains that he is extremely passionate about and committed to his running. “I see it as a journey of self-discovery,” he explains. “The learning has been experiential”. He also uses his lessons from running and training to help in his working life.

“Better regulation leads to more investor confidence and growth in the market, as is evident by the broadening of investor participation in the financial markets. The regulatory environment in financial markets has been encouraging as lowering of fees and standardization of mutual fund categories are both good for investor experience,” he says. Real estate in India has been a muted performer of late, and there are clear signs of money moving from physical to financial assets.

Digital technologies will also help the firm reach these clients, Guha maintains. “Tech will play an increasingly important role in reducing costs, in making both the job of the relationship manager easier and more productive, and in propagating our B2C model, where we see more and more clients keen to interface with the digital platform and do business on their own, but assisted by us.”

Empowering the RMs

“The relationship team is a key component in the client engage-

ment strategy. Skilling the RM, and improving the service & advisory delivery to the client would ensure better productivity,” Guha says.

Investment in the training and mentoring of the relationship team is a high priority item for him. He further expands on the role of the RM, adding that one of the firm’s objectives through the digital platform is to ensure that the life of the banker is made simpler - that he or she is able to have more productive meetings, is able to deliver better ideas, insights and solutions to clients. Data analytics helps his team gather client insights including portfolio reviews, which in turn aid the relationship team in enhancing their client engagement.

Leveraging the IFA community

Guha also expands on the concept he had earlier referred to in relation to working in partnerships and alliances with other industry participants, some of whom will be struggling due to the overall fee compression and regulatory environment.

“The IFA community is struggling with lower margins,” he notes, “so we are reaching out, especially to IFAs in tier II and III cities, where there is a lack of expertise and scale. So, for example, in those cities it might be a chartered accountant who is also dabbling in wealth management, but they will have a limited product suite and only modest expertise, which won’t enable them to serve their clients optimally. So we want to build a partnership with the broad IFA community across the country, offering them a robust private wealth product suite, a superior execution and transaction platform and thereby building both our businesses in those tertiary and smaller markets.”

Well-positioned

Guha believes ICICI Securities is in a remarkably strong position for the future. “There are very few private wealth players of our size that have a major universal bank as their parent, while we retain the flexibility and the nimbleness of a boutique outfit as a separate entity. Our expertise in equity markets, strong research team, ability to manufac-

ture in-house products, as well as offer products curated through our open architecture, and a wide range of corporate finance and investment banking solutions, make our position in the market virtually unique.”

As to talent, Guha acknowledges the shortage of RM and advisory talent in the country, noting that the firm is emphasising its in-house training and development as a core appeal for those already at the firm, as well as others the firm will recruit. “We have a mentorship programme that not only helps our people develop, but it also emphasises the team culture we truly believe in,” he explains.

And all these initiatives are adding up to improving productivity numbers, with higher assets under advice per RM. “This means the RMs are becoming more effective and the clients more trusting of what we offer,” he concludes. “And that means we are doing what we aim to, namely winning in a market that is increasingly tough while being one that offers plenty of growth opportunities ahead for those who offer the best and deliver it in the best way.” ■

