

# Are You in the *Right* Place?

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A framework for advisors who want to move once - or not at all.

If you're an advisor, you've probably been called by a recruiter - maybe more than once (and that's just today). The pitch usually sounds something like this: better payout, better technology, better firm.

The problem I've seen is that "better" isn't a framework - it's a sales word. I've watched too many advisors make practice-defining decisions based on a sales pitch, or worse, based on a specific frustration that likely has a fix. That's how advisors end up at their third firm wondering what went wrong.

That's why I built the 6C Framework. My goal wasn't just to help advisors move; it was to help them think clearly about whether moving makes sense at all - and if it does, exactly where and why.

Around 40% of the advisors who work through this assessment with me confirm they're actually already in the right place. That confirmation has massive value. Knowing where you belong changes how you show up every day - for your clients, your team, and yourself.

This guide is a working document, not a white paper. It's organized around the six dimensions of your practice life that determine whether you thrive at a platform or just survive it. I invite you to work through it honestly and challenge your assumptions. The goal is clarity about what you have, what you're missing, and what would need to be true for a different platform to serve you better than the one you're on today.

This guide won't tell you whether to move. That's not its job. Its job is to make sure that if you do move - or if you stay - you're doing it with your eyes open and your priorities straight. That's what the 6C Framework is built for.

Use this guide. Take our assessment at [continuumsearchgroup.com/alignment](https://continuumsearchgroup.com/alignment). Then let's talk.



**Rick Kerstiens**

Founder, Continuum Search Group

THE STATE OF ADVISOR SATISFACTION TODAY

**41%**  
 OF INDEPENDENT ADVISORS MAY NOT STAY WITHIN 2 YEARS  
*J.D. Power, 2024*

**52%**  
 OF INDEPENDENT ADVISORS HAVE WORKED AT 3 OR MORE FIRMS  
*J.D. Power, 2024*

**35K+**  
 ADVISORS CHANGED FIRMS IN 2024 ALONE  
*ISS Market Intelligence, 2025*

# Six dimensions that actually determine where you belong

**Most advisors evaluate platform moves on two things: payout and technology. Those matter. But advisors who've moved on those two dimensions alone often discover they traded one set of problems for another.**

The 6C Framework was built from thousands of advisor conversations across every channel. The six dimensions below represent the full picture of what makes a platform genuinely right for a practice - not just acceptable, but right for the next 10, 15, or 20 years.

Take the five-minute anonymous assessment at [continuumsearchgroup.com/alignment](https://continuumsearchgroup.com/alignment) to score your platform across all six dimensions and get a personalized report instantly.

## 1. CULTURE

How a firm treats advisors when there's nothing at stake tells you everything. Leadership transparency, decision-making autonomy, and the gap between how the firm presents itself and how advisors describe it privately are the real signals. You can feel culture inside 60 days. You can't repair a mismatch once you're settled in.

## 2. COMMUNITY

The best platform is often the one with the strongest network of advisors who look like you - in terms of practice model, client profile, and growth stage. Peer community drives learning, referrals, and retention. Conferences, study groups, and informal networks aren't perks. They're a business asset that compounds over time.

## 3. COMPATIBILITY

Does the firm serve clients like yours well? Does the compliance posture match how you practice? Does the product shelf include what your clients actually need? Compatibility failures surface six months in - when it's too late to easily reverse and too early to have made the move worth it.

## 4. CAPABILITY

Technology, back-office, operations, and products. The relevant question isn't whether a firm's tech looks impressive in a demo - it's whether it functions reliably in your specific daily workflow. Back-office integration is the most common source of regret after a transition, cited by more than 40% of advisors who move.

## 5. COMPENSATION

Total economics, not headline payout. Your net-to-me number after technology fees, desk fees, compliance costs, E&O, and any required assessments is what actually matters. A lower headline payout with no hidden costs can outperform a higher one by 8-12 points net over five years.

## 6. CAPITAL

The dimension most advisors under-evaluate until they're 55. How does this platform help you build enterprise value? What succession options exist? Is equity participation available? The firm you choose today will either support your eventual exit or complicate it. Capital alignment starts on day one.

# The two dimensions advisors routinely underweight

## Culture

The reason culture is hard to evaluate is that every firm says the right things about it. "Advisor-first." "Entrepreneurial." "Collaborative." These words appear in every BD and RIA's positioning and mean almost nothing without verification from people actually living inside it.

What actually reveals culture: talk to advisors who recently left the firm, not only the referral list. Ask the firm how they handled the last significant operational failure - how fast they communicated it, whether anyone was accountable. Ask what happens when an advisor's business judgment conflicts with a compliance decision.

**WATCH FOR THIS**

Firms that deflect specific questions about past failures or frame all leadership decisions as obviously correct. Transparency about imperfection is a culture signal. Its absence is a bigger one.

J.D. Power's 2024 Advisor Satisfaction Study found only 46% of independent advisors strongly agreed their firm was moving in the right direction - down from 54% the prior year. Culture and leadership were the strongest predictors of actual advisor attrition, more predictive than compensation or technology scores.

- 1 When you think about the last significant operational failure at your firm, how was it handled? Did you feel leadership owned it?
- 2 Has your confidence in your firm's leadership direction increased or decreased in the past 24 months? What specifically drove that change?

## Community

Think about the last time you solved a real practice problem by calling another advisor. That conversation happened because you had a relationship. The platform you're on either builds those relationships or it doesn't - and over time, that difference is enormous.

The best firms create genuine peer ecosystems: practice groups organized by niche, study groups, conferences worth rearranging your calendar for, and informal channels where advisors share what's actually working. The difference between a real community and a vendor hall with name tags is something you feel within the first year.

For advisors in specialized practices - retirement plans, business owner planning, fixed income, HNW - community carries an additional meaning: whether there's a critical mass of advisors doing what you do. Being the only retirement plan specialist in a generalist environment means spending your first year educating people internally instead of building externally.

*"Culture and leadership satisfaction are the strongest predictors of advisor retention - more predictive than compensation or technology scores."*

- J.D. Power U.S. Financial Advisor Satisfaction Study, 2024

- 1 How many advisors at your current firm would you call for genuine business advice - not just small talk at a conference?
- 2 Does your firm have a practice group or peer cohort specifically relevant to how you serve clients?

# Where most transitions get oversold

## Compatibility

Compatibility isn't a feeling. It's an analysis. The right question isn't "does this firm seem like a good place?" It's "does this firm serve clients like mine well, and does its operational model match how I actually practice?"

A firm built around mass-affluent clients and standardized planning models isn't the right home for an advisor with a concentrated HNW book who does fully custom planning on every household. The economics may look fine on paper. The day-to-day friction will tell a different story by month nine.

Compliance posture is the compatibility issue most advisors never raise before a move. Some firms run tight, risk-averse compliance operations that will slow your business in ways you didn't anticipate. Others have more permissive environments that give flexibility but less institutional protection. Neither is wrong - but they need to match how you practice and who your clients are.

### COMMON COMPATIBILITY FAILURE

A retirement plan specialist joins a firm where 401(k) work is treated as a commodity add-on. The firm can't support, price, or describe the practice internally. The advisor spends two years educating people before they can build their business.

- 1 Does your current firm have a critical mass of advisors who serve clients similarly to how you do?
- 2 Are there products or capabilities your clients need that your current platform makes difficult, expensive, or slow to access?

## Capability

Technology gets the most attention in recruiting conversations, and for good reason. A broken tech stack costs advisors real money in lost time and degraded client experience. But capability is broader than technology alone.

Back-office operations are where transitions most often break down. Research consistently shows system integration and data accuracy among the top post-transition challenges - meaning many advisors who moved to better technology found the operational infrastructure around it didn't match the demo they were shown.

The right way to evaluate capability isn't to ask about technology in the abstract. Ask about the specific workflows you run every day: new account opening, ACATS transfer timelines, fee billing accuracy, performance reporting turnaround. How long does each step actually take at this firm, and what's the failure rate?

*Advisor satisfaction with any given technology solution depends far less on whether the software exists and far more on how well the firm has built the operational infrastructure around it.*

- 1 When you last had a back-office failure that affected a client, how long did it take to resolve - and who owned the fix?
- 2 If you were onboarding a \$2M client tomorrow, how confident are you in the end-to-end process - account opening, transfers, reporting, and billing?

# The math most advisors only get half right

## Compensation

The transition check isn't the number that matters most. It's the most visible number, which is why it gets so much attention. But an advisor who takes a large forgivable loan and lands at a firm with an inferior net payout has made a trade that takes years to unwind - often longer than the loan vesting schedule.

The metric that actually matters is net-to-me: what you keep after the payout grid, technology fees, E&O, desk fees, compliance costs, and any required assessments.

**A lower headline payout with no hidden costs can outperform a higher advertised grid by 8 to 12 net percentage points over a decade.**

The transition check is one number. What you actually keep - after platform fees, E&O, desk fees, and compliance costs - compounded over 10 years, is the number that matters. Most advisors never calculate it before they move.

There's also the question of how the grid performs as your practice grows. Some structures are favorable at your current production level and change sharply above it. Know the economics for where you expect to be in five years, not just today.

- 1 Do you know your actual net-to-me payout after all technology fees, E&O, desk fees, and compliance costs?
- 2 At your current production level plus 20%, does your payout grid improve meaningfully - or flatten out? Do you actually know?

## Capital

Capital is the dimension advisors in their 40s often skip and advisors in their late 50s urgently wish they'd evaluated earlier. The platform you're on today plays a direct role in what your practice is worth when you're ready to slow down, sell, or transition clients to a successor.

**Succession infrastructure.** Does the firm have a functioning internal succession program with real financing options? Or will you navigate an open-market transaction largely on your own?

**Equity participation.** A growing number of platforms - particularly PE-backed and OSJ models - now offer advisors minority equity stakes in the enterprise. McKinsey research shows the share of clients seeking holistic advice grew from 29% in 2018 to 52% in 2023, driving practice valuations higher.

**Valuations in practice.** How practices actually trade at a given firm - what multiples are realized, what buyer pool is available, what seller financing looks like in reality - tells you more about Capital than anything in a marketing document.

*The firm you choose today is the firm that will either support your exit or complicate it. Most advisors don't find out which until the answer is inconvenient.*

- 1 What's your succession plan, and does your current platform have the infrastructure to support it on a realistic timeline?
- 2 If you wanted to exit in 8 years, does your current platform make that process easier or harder than the alternatives you're aware of?

# Four mistakes advisors make when evaluating a move

Most transitions that end in regret follow a recognizable pattern. Here are the four we see most often - and what a better path looks like.

## 1. Moving on a single-dimension frustration

Technology is slow, so the advisor explores firms with better technology. Payout feels low, so the advisor chases a higher grid. These are reasonable starting points for a conversation - not reasons to move. A single-dimension frustration rarely tells the full story, and the replacement platform may solve that one thing while introducing two problems you didn't know to ask about.

**The better path:** Score your current firm across all six dimensions before looking anywhere else. Establish an honest baseline. Then compare alternatives with the same rigor.

## 2. Taking platform descriptions at face value

Every firm presents its best version of itself during the recruiting process. That's not dishonesty - it's marketing. The most reliable information about what it's actually like to be at a firm comes from advisors who are there right now and advisors who recently left. Both conversations matter. Only one of them is on the referral list you'll be given.

**The better path:** Ask for a referral list. Then, **Independently find advisors who are not on the referral list you are given.** The gap between those two conversations tells you a great deal.

## 3. Confusing the transition check with the economics

Transition deals have gotten competitive. Baseline packages in the employee channel now routinely exceed 300% of trailing-12-month production at the largest firms. These are real numbers. They're also one-time numbers, often structured as forgivable loans with vesting schedules that function more as retention constraints than financial windfalls. The net-to-me payout differential over five years is almost always a larger number than the upfront check.

**The better path:** Model five-year net economics, not just the upfront package. Do it at your actual production level and at your projected growth rate.

## 4. Skipping Capital because retirement feels distant

Cerulli Associates projects that over 105,000 financial advisors plan to retire in the next decade. A meaningful share don't have a functioning succession plan and will discover too late that their current platform wasn't built to support one.

**The better path:** Ask any firm you evaluate to describe specifically how advisors have exited over the past three years. Real multiples. Real financing structures. Real buyer pool. Specifics reveal whether the succession infrastructure is operational or theoretical.

# See If Your Current Platform Still Fits

A private, five-minute check that shows where your alignment is strong, where friction is building, and what deserves a closer look. Instant results. No email required. A conversation only if you want one.

## OVERALL ALIGNMENT SCORE

Your score benchmarked against advisors at the same affiliation model and practice stage - not a fixed threshold. See exactly where you stand relative to peers like you, across all six dimensions.

## DETAILED CATEGORY ANALYSIS

Each dimension gets a full breakdown: Desired vs. Current score, gap, trend direction, and plain-language interpretation. Plus curated signals, questions to ask your firm, and due diligence prompts specific to your answers.

## RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

A prioritized action plan based on your results - whether that means optimizing where you are, having specific conversations with your current firm, or beginning a structured look at alternatives. Actionable, not generic.

## SAMPLE REPORT

### Your Alignment Results

Scaling Stage - Regional BD

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4.1

**Overall Alignment**  
Peer benchmark 3.1/5 (+1.0)

0  
CRITICAL

0  
SIGNIF. CANT

5  
ALIGNED

3.0  
PLANNING TIER

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FRICION TIME  
**2 hrs/week**

ESTIMATED ANNUAL ADVISOR TIME COST  
**\$15K**

ESTIMATED ANNUAL STAFF TIME COST  
**\$4K**

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**How To Read This Report**

**DESIRED VS CURRENT**  
Each category shows what you said you need and what you said you currently get.

**GAP**  
A larger positive gap means more misalignment to address.

**TREND**  
Trend indicates whether that area is improving, stable, or getting worse over time.

**BENCHMARK**  
Benchmark compares your satisfaction score to peer averages for your affiliation model.

### Detailed Category Analysis

Each category includes your key signals, due diligence prompts, and practical next steps.

MODERATE GAP

Culture

DESIRED  
5/5

CURRENT  
4/5

GAP  
1.0 short

TREND  
Stable →

Minor cultural friction that's likely addressable through normal channels.

**Based on your answer:** Culture is neither improving nor declining - what you see is what you get.

**SIGNALS**

- Occasional frustration with bureaucracy
- Generally positive but with specific annoyances
- Most things work but certain processes feel slow
- You can usually get what you need, but it takes effort

**ASK YOUR FIRM**

- Clarify specific boundaries where you'd like more flexibility
- Build relationships with people who can make exceptions
- Document specific examples to discuss with your manager
- Ask about upcoming changes that might address your concerns

**DUE DILIGENCE**

- Is this friction stable or getting worse over time?
- Are other advisors at my level experiencing the same cultural issues?
- What's changed in leadership or ownership recently that might affect culture?
- How do advisors who've been here 5+ years describe the culture trajectory?

**Bottom line:** This level of friction is normal. No firm is perfect. Focus on whether the overall value proposition works.

\*Autonomy and culture rank higher than compensation in advisor satisfaction surveys\*—J.D. Power, 2024

**5 min** TO COMPLETE.  
INSTANT RESULTS.

**100%** ANONYMOUS.  
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**40%** CONFIRM THEY'RE  
ALREADY IN THE RIGHT PLACE.

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