

Financial Post: Advisor Post

**Profiling helps clients and advisors connect: Kolbe a index: Test identifies who will work together and who will clash**

**Victoria Knight**

Dow Jones

653 words

3 April 2006

[National Post](#)

National

FP12

English

(c) 2006 National Post . All Rights Reserved.

NEW YORK - Three years ago, Paula Harris left her job as a human resources director to help her husband, Bill Harris, grow WH Cornerstone Investments LLC, the financial advisory practice he started a decade ago in Duxbury, Mass.

While their home life was harmonious, in the office they clashed. To help overcome their work-style differences, they took the Kolbe A index, a psychometric profiler. Inspired by how it helped them to explain what made them both tick, the Harrises hit on a novel idea: Get their clients to take the same test.

"We saw it as a way of deepening our relationships with clients," said Ms. Harris, who is the practice's "people person" and marketing manager, while Mr. Harris, who is a certified financial planner, is the "number cruncher" and problem solver.

Typically, financial advisory firms use Kolbe to hire staff, coach employees and create teams. But, increasingly, advisors are using the assessment to build relationships with clients and screen out those with whom they clash. Top-notch advisors also are using advanced applications of Kolbe to help wealthy clients troubleshoot issues in their own businesses. But advisors need to guard against overstepping legal and ethical boundaries.

Unlike IQ tests, which tell you what you can do, and personality tests, which tell you what you want to do, Kolbe tells you what you will or will not do by measuring natural instincts. The instrument consists of 36 questions, can be taken online and takes around 20 minutes to complete. The results, which take the form of a seven-page computer-generated report, are issued instantly.

Kolbe defines four basic action modes: "Quick Starts" are innovators; "Fact Finders" are detail focused; "Follow Thrus" are natural organizers; and "Implementors" are people who typically build things. Its one-to-10 scale describes a person's intensity in each action. The four-digit number it generates is the Kolbe A index.

Advisors are using Kolbe with new clients to build rapport and tailor services. For example, the Harrises used it with a married couple who were clients -- the husband left meetings early, the wife fixated on minor household expenses. The result told the Harrises the wife was sabotaging herself by failing to execute her plans.

"We set up an automated savings system because we knew they weren't going to be able to save regularly on their own," Ms. Harris said.

For the husband, they made meetings bottom-line focused, adopted a more casual dress style and scheduled meetings for evenings rather than mornings. Moreover, they set shorter financial deadlines.

Advisors also are using Kolbe to screen potential clients and re-evaluate relationships with existing ones. Lydia Kolbas, a certified financial planner with a practice in Sarasota, Fla., has been in the business for 24 years and has used Kolbe for the past seven. Normally, she uses the test with potential clients but recently asked some long-standing clients to take the assessment as part of financial reviews. The results confirmed Kolbas's gut instinct.

"We weren't a good match," said Ms. Kolbas, who said the test validated her decision to drop the clients.

Typically, for two people to work well together, there should be no more than a three-point difference between scores in an action mode. A difference of four, while a red flag, can be bridged if advisors adjust their work style. However, this may mean devoting time and energy at the expense of other clients.

In Ms. Kolbas's case, referring the clients to another planner was not an option because she is a sole practitioner.

A key problem is broaching the subject with clients. Some advisors fear clients may react badly, but clients tend not to get offended, though some are skeptical.