



THE SHINY BALL TRAP

Why Advisors Abandon Good Strategies Too Soon

The promise of easy success is seductive. The work of building durable success is demanding. Advisors who confuse novelty with strategy often carry the same unresolved problems from one opportunity to the next.

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The Shiny Ball Is a Promise, Not a Plan

Financial advisors operate in an industry overflowing with promises. A new lead source promises better prospects. A new seminar promises fuller rooms. A new technology platform promises effortless efficiency. A new marketing vendor promises immediate appointments. A new affiliation promises better economics. A new script promises conversion without discomfort.

Some innovations are valuable. Some opportunities are genuinely strategic. The danger begins when novelty becomes an emotional escape from the difficult work already in front of us.

The shiny ball is any new tactic, platform, program, partnership, or idea that appears to offer easier success than the current plan. It becomes especially attractive when results are slow, obstacles appear, confidence declines, or the advisor is forced to confront a weakness in their own execution. Instead of diagnosing the problem, the advisor changes the plan. Instead of developing the skill, the advisor changes the tool. Instead of working through resistance, the advisor starts over.

Starting over feels productive because it creates motion, hope, and a fresh story. But movement is not progress. The unresolved problem travels with the advisor. If the real issue is inconsistent prospecting, weak discovery, poor follow-up, unclear value, low emotional intelligence, limited product knowledge, or resistance to coaching, the next marketing program will eventually expose the same weakness.

The shiny ball does not eliminate the obstacle. It changes the scenery around the obstacle.

The Advisor-Specific Evidence Favors Focus

The 2026 Kitces Advisor Marketing Study provides unusually direct evidence for this discussion. Among practices classified as intentional marketers, firms using four or fewer tactics generated median organic new-client revenue growth of 15%. Firms using

five or more tactics generated 11%. The focused firms also reported a lower median revenue acquisition cost, \$0.94 versus \$1.06.[1]

The study's conclusion is not that more tactics are always bad. Larger, high-growth firms can support more tactics because they have the staff, systems, delegation, and measurement needed to execute them. The lesson is that expansion must follow capability. Adding channels before mastering execution can diffuse effort and weaken results.[1]

INTENTIONAL PRACTICES	FOCUSED: <5 TACTICS	DIFFUSED: 5+ TACTICS
Median organic new-client revenue growth	15%	11%
Median revenue acquisition cost	\$0.94	\$1.06

Source: Kitces Report, Volume 2, 2026. Figures concern intentional practices taking at least four of eight intentional marketing steps.

High-Growth Practices Are More Intentional

The same Kitces study found that high-growth firms were more likely than other firms to use at least three inputs when building their marketing plan, design tactics to complement one another, and track prospects after they enter the pipeline.[1]

MARKETING DISCIPLINE	HIGH-GROWTH	OTHER PRACTICES
Use at least three planning inputs	65%	49%
Design tactics to complement one another	70%	44%
Track prospects after arrival	37%	25%

This is the opposite of shiny-ball behavior. High-growth practices do not merely collect tactics. They construct a plan, integrate the parts, track the pipeline, and use evidence to improve execution.

The Hidden Cost of Constant Switching

Switching strategies carries more cost than the visible expense of a new vendor or program. It also creates cognitive, operational, cultural, and emotional costs.

Attention must be reconfigured. Experimental research on task switching found measurable switch costs when people moved between tasks, especially as rules and complexity increased. The brain must stop one task set and activate another. In an advisory practice, every major change also requires new language, workflows, habits, systems, and expectations.[2]

Learning resets. A strategy produces useful information only after it has been executed consistently enough to expose patterns. Changing too early interrupts that learning. The advisor never discovers which message, audience, follow-up sequence, meeting skill, or conversion point requires repair.

The team loses confidence. When priorities rotate constantly, employees learn that today's initiative may disappear next month. Urgency becomes theater. Accountability weakens because no standard survives long enough to become cultural.

The advisor protects the ego. A new solution can become a convenient explanation: the leads were bad, the market changed, the platform failed, or the program was not a fit. Sometimes those conclusions are accurate. But when the pattern repeats across programs, the advisor must consider the common denominator.

**If the same problem follows you into every new
strategy, the strategy may not be the primary
problem.**

Self-Awareness Before Strategy

The shiny-ball habit is rarely solved by better information alone. Advisors already have more ideas, technology, training, vendors, and content than they can fully use. The solution begins with self-awareness.

Self-awareness requires the courage to separate the quality of the strategy from the quality of our execution. Before abandoning a plan, an advisor should ask:

- Did I execute the plan at the agreed frequency and volume?
- Did I remain consistent long enough to collect meaningful data?
- Did I follow the process, or did I improvise when I became uncomfortable?
- Did I seek coaching and accept feedback without defensiveness?
- Is the problem lead quality, or is it my speed, listening, presentation, follow-up, or conversion skill?
- Have I documented the obstacle precisely, or am I reacting to frustration?
- What evidence proves the current strategy is broken rather than merely unfinished?

These questions are uncomfortable because they move the conversation from blame to responsibility. That is exactly why they matter.

Persistence Is Not Stubbornness

Doubling down does not mean defending a bad plan forever. Discipline is not blind repetition. A mature advisor must know the difference between productive persistence and sunk-cost stubbornness.

DOUBLE DOWN WHEN...	CHANGE COURSE WHEN...
The target market and value proposition remain sound.	Evidence shows the market, economics, or compliance assumptions are invalid.
Execution has been inconsistent or below the required volume.	Execution has been consistent, measured, coached, and still fails the threshold.
The obstacle is a trainable skill or process gap.	The strategy depends on a capability or resource the practice cannot reasonably build.
Leading indicators are improving even if revenue lags.	Leading indicators remain flat or deteriorate across a defined test period.

DOUBLE DOWN WHEN...	CHANGE COURSE WHEN...
The team understands the plan and can name the next improvement.	The team cannot explain how the tactic supports the firm's strategy or client.

The decision should be made against predetermined evidence, not the emotion of a disappointing week. A disciplined change of course is strategy. An impulsive change of course is escape.

Practice Matters, but Practice Alone Is Not Enough

A meta-analysis of 88 studies, 111 independent samples, and 11,135 participants found that deliberate practice explained 12% of the variance in performance overall. The relationship varied substantially by domain, and the authors concluded that practice is important but not sufficient by itself.[3]

That nuance is useful for advisors. Repeating a weak presentation without feedback does not create mastery. Making more calls without improving the opening, listening, qualification, or next-step discipline may simply automate mediocrity. The answer is deliberate practice: structured activity designed to improve a specific performance gap, supported by observation, feedback, adjustment, and repetition.

This is where coaching and mentoring become essential. A coach helps identify the performance gap, establish a standard, observe execution, and measure improvement. A mentor adds perspective, pattern recognition, and judgment. Neither replaces the advisor's work. Both make the work more intelligent.

Turn Intention Into Action

A plan fails when it lives only as a general intention. 'I will prospect more' is not an operating system. 'I will call 20 qualified prospects from 8:30 to 10:00 every Tuesday and Thursday, record every outcome, and review the conversion data on Friday' is actionable.

A meta-analysis of 94 independent tests found that implementation intentions, often expressed as if-then plans that specify when, where, and how action will occur, had a medium-to-large positive effect on goal attainment, with an average effect size of $d = 0.65$.^[4]

The practical lesson is simple: commitment becomes more reliable when behavior is defined before emotion, distraction, and inconvenience arrive.

The C4G Shiny Ball Test

Before adopting a new marketing tactic, platform, vendor, affiliation, or lead source, require the opportunity to pass a disciplined review. The goal is not to reject innovation. The goal is to prevent novelty from becoming a substitute for execution.

1. **Diagnose the current problem.** Name the exact bottleneck. Is it activity, audience, message, engagement, discovery, presentation, follow-up, conversion, service capacity, or economics?
2. **Audit execution honestly.** Compare actual behavior with the agreed process, volume, frequency, quality standard, and test period.
3. **Review the evidence.** Examine leading and lagging indicators. Do not rely on memory, frustration, isolated anecdotes, or the vendor's promise.
4. **Repair before replacing.** Choose the smallest change that can test the diagnosis: training, scripting, role-play, workflow, follow-up, delegation, or targeted support.
5. **Define the decision window.** Set a reasonable test period, minimum activity threshold, success metrics, and scheduled review date.
6. **Measure the opportunity cost.** Identify what will receive less time, money, attention, or team capacity if the new opportunity is adopted.
7. **Demand strategic fit.** Confirm that the new tactic supports the target market, value proposition, client experience, operating capacity, and long-term vision.
8. **Assign coaching and accountability.** Name who will review execution, challenge assumptions, and keep the advisor from changing the rules after the test begins.

A Better Operating Rhythm

Successful marketing is rarely one brilliant move. It is a rhythm of execution, measurement, learning, coaching, and refinement. C4G recommends the following operating cadence:

CADENCE	DISCIPLINE	QUESTION
Daily	Execute and record activity	Did I do the work at the required standard?
Weekly	Review leading indicators and role-play	Where did the process break down?
Monthly	Analyze pipeline movement and conversion	Which constraint deserves focused improvement?
Quarterly	Evaluate strategic fit and economics	Should we improve, expand, reduce, or stop?
Annually	Revisit market, capacity, and business vision	Does the plan still serve the practice we are building?

The Courage to Stay With the Work

The shiny ball will always be there. It will arrive in a polished deck, an exciting conversation, a confident guarantee, or the testimony of someone whose business is different from yours. It will promise relief from the friction of growth.

But friction is not always a signal to leave. Often, it is the place where capability is built. The obstacle may be revealing the exact skill, habit, system, or truth that the advisor must confront before the next level becomes possible.

Sustainable success requires self-awareness to see the real problem, self-development to build the missing capability, courage to accept responsibility, discipline to execute when novelty fades, and commitment to remain with a sound process long enough to learn from it.

The strongest advisors are not closed to new ideas. They are selective. They do not confuse activity with progress or innovation with escape. They use coaching, mentoring, evidence, and a vetted process to decide when to persist and when to pivot. They fix what is broken before they abandon what is valuable.

At Catalyst4Growth, we believe advisors grow when they stop searching for an effortless answer and start building the capacity to execute the right answer. A marketing plan becomes productive when it is understood, practiced, measured, challenged, and improved. The bugs and obstacles are not proof that the plan is worthless. They are often the curriculum.

Do not chase the next promise simply because the current work became difficult. Diagnose the problem. Accept the lesson. Get coached. Repair the process. Recommit to the standard. Then execute with perseverance and consistency.

The shiny ball offers excitement. Disciplined development creates success.

Execution, perseverance, and consistency are the keys to success.

Sources and Research Notes

- [1] Kitces Research. (2026). How Financial Planners Actually Market Their Services: 2026 Marketing Study. Figures cited include focused versus diffused intentional practices and characteristics of high-growth practices. Observational survey findings show associations and should not be interpreted as proof of causation. [Source link](#)
- [2] Rubinstein, J. S., Meyer, D. E., and Evans, J. E. (2001). Executive Control of Cognitive Processes in Task Switching. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 27(4), 763-797. Laboratory task-switching findings are used as an analogy for the cognitive reconfiguration required when changing rules and processes, not as a direct estimate of advisor productivity. [Source link](#)
- [3] Macnamara, B. N., Hambrick, D. Z., and Oswald, F. L. (2014). Deliberate Practice and Performance in Music, Games, Sports, Education, and Professions: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Science*, 25(8), 1608-1618. Across 88 studies and 11,135 participants, deliberate practice explained 12% of performance variance overall, with substantial variation by domain. [Source link](#)
- [4] Gollwitzer, P. M., and Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation Intentions and Goal Achievement: A Meta-Analysis of Effects and Processes. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 69-119. The meta-analysis synthesized 94 independent tests and reported an average effect size of $d = 0.65$. [Source link](#)