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GORDON,**

*CLU, ChFC, is president of MAF Companies, a multi-carrier brokerage general agency (BGA) using proprietary concepts and solutions to serve the many general agencies and independent producers who work with them. MAF is proud to be a charter member of AimcoR Group.*

*Gordon has a wealth of brokerage experience going back to his childhood as the son of a major Chicago life brokerage general agent. He entered the business in 1981 with Home Life as a carrier agent selling life and disability insurance. In 1984, he became a brokerage manager for The Larry Gordon Agency.*

*Gordon joined MAF in 1993 as vice president of sales and an equity partner, and became majority shareholder and president in 2007. He spearheaded MAF's shift from serving as an independent marketing organization (IMO) with a single life insurance carrier focus into a multi-carrier brokerage general agency.*

*Gordon's past and current service to the industry includes NAIFA past president of Chicago North Branch, LIMRA, past chair of the NAILBA Marketing committee, and he currently serves on the NAILBA Membership committee and the NAILBA Charitable Foundation board. He has moderated LUTC classes for a number of years.*

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# Lifting Life Sales From Green To Black And Blue?

When you go to the mountains for downhill snow skiing, you choose the trail to descend based upon the green circle markings for beginners, a blue square for intermediate, or the black diamond for expert. If you are a beginner who gets stuck on a black trail, the descent can be scary, slow and not fun. Similarly, the expert generally finds green trails to be boring and also not fun. I say this as an intermediate skier who will go down



all trails, a few blacks for the challenge, some greens because the "roads" are often the only way to get from one side of the mountain to the other, and of course the blue trails for the fun and exhilaration of controlled speed.

This is an insurance distribution magazine, so why am I writing about downhill skiing? Because there are several apt metaphors to the financial products we promote. The less experienced in our industry tend to only feel comfortable promoting our green circle products, level term life insurance. There is

nothing wrong with level term and it fulfills an important need: Large amounts of temporary protection can be had for a low cost. My concern for those who are stuck on the green circle trails is that our role is basically that of an order taker. If low cost is the only criteria for the sale, we may be missing an opportunity for us to advise our clients about future concerns. One way we can step up towards a blue trail level of complexity is by offering riders on the term coverage that might not seem so important to the client right now

(hence the need to advise) but could become dramatically important years from now. Of course I am referring to conversion options, return of premium options, as well as chronic illness features that are now beginning to be made available on certain term life products. Of course adding riders raises the cost! But the service you provide differentiates you. No advisor is needed for providing a low cost "quote." The internet has killed our opportunity to serve that way because the information is too easy for anyone to get.

More rewarding as we gain confidence in our advising abilities is to move up to the blue trails of permanent life insurance. The vast possibilities involved in designing plans force the client to rely on the expertise of you, the advisor, because how can they realistically do their own research and get a meaningful quote? Our designs are superior to the simple

term products because they involve living benefits. We want our clients to actually collect from their policy by using their chronic illness benefits, perhaps a long term care rider, in some cases rewards for maintaining good health, and of course having the cash surrender value available as an emergency account built from the forced savings you know would never have happened unless you, the advisor, insisted this was best for the family. This is as exhilarating as swooshing down that blue trail. And it is so much more fulfilling for the advisor who is actually directing a discussion toward the client's entire financial needs, not just filling an order. Besides, when the advisor is actually advising, the commissions will be higher. Anyone have a problem with that?

OK, experts, time to tackle some black runs. What constitutes a black run life insurance product? I am most excited about the asset-

based long term care programs that combine life insurance with either LTCI or chronic illness coverages in various combinations, either lump sum, limited pay, or annual pay. Some of the new plans can take qualified money, offer shared pools for spouses to be jointly covered, and generally create tax leverage to a portfolio. These designs can get very complicated very quickly. Hence, these are our black trails. But, what does confidence in providing these services do for us as advisors? We are no longer order takers because people are valuing our knowledge and our ability to complete real plans that work for a family for a lifetime!

So, you want to ski some green trails? Sure, sometimes you need to. But don't be afraid to try some blue and then some black because that is when you know you have conquered the entire mountain. 🌐