

inside your client's mind

A CLIENT EXPLAINS HOW YOU CAN ENHANCE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH CLIENTS AND PROVIDE THE VOICE OF REASON THEY'RE SEEKING.

By Robert Gignac

I don't do what you do. But, I'm a very important part of what you do: I'm a client. I would like to share with you the things that we — your clients — obsess about when we aren't with you.

I hope this doesn't scare you, but we don't think about you very much. When we do, it is imperative that we are on the same page and functioning as a team. How do we do that? Clients need to understand the value you bring to the table as their advisor. There are too many sources of information available today, and most of them are telling your clients that they don't need you — they just need some term insurance and a couple of mutual funds, and their lives will be financially secure. We know that isn't true, but how do you convince them?

Following are five steps to get your clients thinking realistically about their future — and what you need to know to help them.

UNDERSTANDING CURRENT REALITY

We don't understand your industry — it frightens us. There is too much terminology, and the media

make many of us feel incredibly nervous about our financial futures.

For too many people, money is an emotional issue. It's how they keep score in the game of life. To determine your prospects' and clients' emotional state about money, ask them two critical questions. The first is: What is rich?

We, your clients, are torn between two thoughts about money at the exact same time: "Get rich now!" and "Will I ever be able to retire?" Holding these two thoughts in our head at the same time is difficult, and given the recent turbulence in the economy, we are leaning toward one more than the other.

The second critical question is: What is the eighth



We — clients and advisors — should all have a picture in our minds representing what we want to achieve in life.

wonder of the world? Of course, the answer is compound interest. As professionals, you understand how it works, but do your clients?

The next time you see your client, find out. If they don't understand, you have just created a teachable moment. Every time you teach us something we don't know, your value goes up in our eyes. Every time your value goes up, you keep us longer as a client.

RICHLY IMAGINED FUTURE

I like the phrase "richly imagined future." It gets people thinking, allowing them to dream. When you ask your clients about their richly imagined future, it will help to answer the question, "Why do we work?" For the vast majority of your clients, they get up and go to work every day to accomplish goals that they have set for themselves and with their families — not necessarily all financial goals.

You need your clients to share their goals to create a comprehensive financial plan. Sounds simple, except we don't want to share our goals with you. We are desperately afraid of being judged by you. I know you don't do that, but that's what your clients and prospects fear, so you'll have to guide them through the process by teaching them how to set goals.

When a client comes to you with their goals — or you help them craft a list — make sure the list contains their goals. It's too easy to get excited about things other people want for us when we never really have any intention of following through. Then, when we don't follow through, we get frustrated and angry, and we try to shift some of that blame onto you for getting us interested in the first place.

APTITUDE FOR DISRUPTION

Disruption is how we stop doing the things that are not giving us the future we want. It will shock some of your clients to find out their current behavior will not get them the financial future they want.

How do you demonstrate this concept of disruption? Remind clients of the magic of Lego toys. What do kids understand about Legos that adults have forgotten? You build it — break it — and rebuild it again. It's more fun the seventh time than it was the first six.

Think about how this relates to your clients. What has happened to their financial futures recently, to their retirement nest eggs? How are you approaching their plans and managing their anxiety? Take the time to explain

how you are going to put them back together, creating better plans. Explain that this was an opportunity to get some new parts that might not have existed when their plan was first created.

POWER OF CHOICE

Speaking as a client of the industry, the greatest thing is the sheer volume of choice we have of tools to create a successful financial future: life insurance, disability insurance, critical illness insurance, stocks, bonds, treasury bills, mutual funds, certificates of deposit, hedge funds, and so on. Speaking as a client of the industry, do you know what the worst thing is? It is the sheer volume of choice that we have. Frankly, it leaves us confused.

To get to our richly imagined future, we need to make choices. Help us make those choices and understand why Option A is better than Option B, and that Option C can be a fallback. Most importantly, get us to understand that we shouldn't be doing it on our own.

People are trying to cut corners with their personal financial futures. They took a book out of the library, read a magazine article or talked to their watercooler buddy. Then they opened an online stock trading account, and now they are the master of their own financial future.

I'm passionate about the concepts of insurance and having a written financial game plan. They are choices that can get missed because we get busy with life, or because we assume we'll have time to do it later.

We all have stories of people who waited too long, and they — or their families — suffered the consequences. Are you having these discussions with your clients? If not, start now.

PICTURE IN FOCUS

We — clients and advisors — should all have a picture in our minds representing what we want to achieve in life. Don't talk to clients about products, as these are only the means to help them obtain the picture. Get them focused on that picture, and you can get them to make the sometimes difficult choices and commit to the plan you create for the long run. Show us that you are committed to us obtaining that picture, and we'll honor that with our loyalty to you as clients. ■



.....
This article is based on a session from the 2009 MDRT Annual Meeting. Read the manuscript in its entirety in the "Proceedings" found on www.mdrt.org.