

What's new in building high-trust client relationships?

By Bill Bachrach, CSP, CPAE

Over the years, 20+ now, I've studied a lot, taught a lot, and written a lot about building high-trust client relationships. Lately I've found myself saying to our core group of committed advisors who implement the Values-Based Financial Planning turn-key business model that, "trust is *not* the objective, trust is a *by-product* of the other things that you do, like your behavior, your communication, and the quality of your work."

I've come to believe that if gaining your clients trust is your objective then the focus is on the wrong place: you. When, of course, the focus should be on *them*. When your goal is to establish trust it might be to further your agenda, like, "I have to get them to trust me... so they hire me... so they give me assets... so they buy my product or idea, etc. etc. etc."

Consider this point of view instead: "I am going to show up relaxed, be authentic, behave with an extremely high level of professionalism, skillfully execute my process for creating a great client interview experience or progress meeting experience, ask great questions, listen with empathy, be well-organized, be respectful of their time by not bragging about myself or my company or boring them with over-explanations of financial concepts and ideas, and be selective about only letting the truly right-fit people join my community of Ideal Clients. And if, in the process of *behaving* this way, they trust me and hire me, fine. If not, that's okay too."

Some advisors try to force things to happen with everyone they meet by using sales, influence, or persuasion tactics to "close the deal." This is akin to a woman desperately seeking a husband because her "biological clock is ticking" instead of looking for the right partner with similar goals and values who is best suited for the two of them to create a life together of happiness and fulfillment.

I'm in the business of helping successful advisors double-quadruple their business revenue in 4 years or less, so what I'm writing about here is not purely altruistic. You may be concerned that "relaxing" or abandoning a more intense sales focus will diminish your results. Actually, the contrary is true. Which "way of being" do you think is more likely to attract successful people to want to become your clients, the relaxed Trusted Advisor or the intense salesperson? Relaxed doesn't mean wishy-washy or lacking in passion for helping people make smart choices about their money. It means that you don't show up with what we used to call "commission breath."

Think of each client relationship more like a professional marriage. The objectives are for them to have the best possible experience, whether they become a client or not, and for only the "right-fits" to become clients.

Here are a few time-tested ideas for behaving in ways that create the by-product of trust and a few thoughts about not-to-do behaviors that erode trust.

- 1 Look for "right fit" people to join your client community versus a "they have money therefore I want them" mentality. Create an Ideal Client Profile where the personality element of the people you meet is equally important to the money element in order for them to earn an invitation to join your client community. Notice the difference in how it feels to think of *inviting* people to do business with you versus "closing the deal."
- 2 Ask good questions.
 - a. Values (What's important about money to you?)
 - b. Goals (What are your tangible goals that require money and planning to achieve? How much do you want to have for that goal? By when? What are two or three words that describe what you are thinking and feeling once you have achieved that goal?)
 - c. Does the idea of having a comprehensive financial plan which gives you a higher probability of achieving your goals and fulfilling your values appeal to you?
 - d. Would you like to join our client community and have us do this work for you?
- 3 Listen with empathy. The tendency, especially during an initial client interview with people you may have never met face-to-face, is to think more about what you are going to say next while they are answering your questions. When you do this you don't really hear what they said, therefore it's hard to be empathetic to things you weren't fully present, mentally, to hear. The solution is to have your questions memorized so you don't have to think about what you are going to ask next, thus allowing you to be fully present and a much more empathetic listener.
- 4 Record your client meetings, especially the initial client interview. I've written in this magazine before about recording client meetings and to save you the trouble of searching back issues here's a script for introducing the recorder. "I appreciate the investment of time and effort you made to be here today. The fact that you have done so tells me that you must be serious about your money, is that true? (pause for answer) You'll notice that I'll ask many relevant questions, take copious notes, and I also record the meeting. (refer to the recorder and pause) The reason I record is because I'm very thorough. (pause) Do you know how you can watch a movie a second or third time and see things you missed the first time?" (Nice long pause for them to respond.) "Well giving you advice about your money so you can achieve your goals is obviously much more important than a movie, so I want to make sure our advice is right for you. If we choose to work together, I'll listen to this recording at least one more time to make sure to get it right." (pause) Ask your first question. (See "ask good questions" above)
- 5 Give advice with conviction. Salespeople tend to offer alternatives and let the prospect or client choose. Trusted Advisors gather all the information they need, consult with other experts where appropriate, and give the best advice for the client... with conviction. There may be more than one way to achieve a goal, but there is only one *best* way. Find the best way and give advice with conviction.

- 6 Tell the truth even if doing so jeopardizes the relationship. Serious and successful people don't want to pay good money for a rubber-stamp, yes-person kissing their butts and telling them only what they want to hear. It's your job to tell the truth, *especially* when it's what they need to hear and not what they want to hear.
- 7 Avoid direct statements or indirect implications that you can do the impossible. Ie: beat the market. The primary determinant of a person achieving their goals is their own behavior. Your job is much more about managing your clients' choices and actions than it is about managing their money. The bottom line is that there is no guarantee of anything. The best you can do is to help people get their entire financial house in order, make the best choices possible at the time, and be in the strongest position possible to adapt to whatever non-controllable events occur. The less you play the predict-the-future game the more credible you are.
- 8 Be inspiring. Focus on helping clients and prospective clients create a compelling vision for their future and become their bridge to make it happen. Being a future vision creator is much more trust-building than being a problem-solver.
- 9 Avoid the use of the old-school greed appeal: "work with me and you'll get a better return because our guru has a better beat the market black box."
- 10 Avoid the use of the old-school fear tactic: "buy gold (or whatever) now because the big deficits and weak dollar mean inevitable inflation coming to erode your buying power! You could outlive your money and end up a burden to your family, living off community hand-outs, or on the government dole. How would that make you feel?"
- 11 Be a comprehensive financial professional. It's interesting that most financial advisors claim to be comprehensive. But what does that really mean? What is "comprehensive financial services?" At the very least, *comprehensive* implies "everything." Do you really help your clients take care of *everything* related to their money? How many things is that? I know of one advisor who has done such a great job of defining comprehensive financial services that many advisors look to him for leadership on this subject. Check out www.trustedadvisor toolkit.com for the best information I know of about delivering truly comprehensive financial services.
- 12 Put the client first. Duh. I know. It sounds almost silly and certainly cliché. And yet there is a lot of discussion and controversy by the regulators and industry leaders about the fiduciary standard. Am I the only one who finds it absurd that legislation is necessary for our industry to step up and adopt a fiduciary standard? Isn't that simply always, in all situations, and under all circumstances putting your client's needs ahead of your own? Isn't that what you already do? Do you really need a law about that? Apparently the industry does. The good news is that your competition needs somebody else to define integrity for them. And speaking of integrity...
- 13 Have no conflicts of interest. Notice I didn't say "*disclose* conflicts of interest." Run your business without any conflicts of interest. Why should there be any conflicts of interest to disclose?

Keep in mind that these are not "tactics" to build trust. These are the powerful behaviors of financial professionals who are very good at what they do and who

genuinely care about helping people get their financial house in order, achieve their goals, and fulfill their values. By behaving at this very high level of professionalism trust is the *by-product* of that behavior.

The bottom line is that you can't "technique" your way to trust. You earn it by who you are and what you do.

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Bill Bachrach, CSP, CPAE is a very popular keynote speaker, best-selling author, and the creator of the Values-Based Financial Planning™ turn-key business model which helps advisors create their Ideal Life in 4 years, or less. Go to www.billbachrach.com to learn more.