

Delivering Your Value

Earning the right to the value connection.

By Leo Pusateri

"It is with the heart that one sees rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

—Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900-1944) from
The Little Prince

In our previous column [May 2004] on delivering your value, we took you through the first of seven stages of the process, "Developing a pre-call value strategy skill model," and described how important it is to be well prepared with all of the tangibles you need for client meetings. Now, we will move to the second stage, "Earning the right to the value connection."

First, let us remind you that successfully delivering your value is the result of correctly identifying what your clients truly value, and aligning your value (and your values) to theirs. To do this, you need a vital ingredient. It is the "emotional connection" you strive to develop during a meeting with a prospect or client. But how do you develop this emotional connection? Simply, by listening to acknowledge. Let's explore this concept.

Listening To Acknowledge

Without a doubt, this is a skill vital to all advisors. In brief, "listening to acknowledge" means that you must listen with your head, heart and instinct to properly connect with your client. You listen to understand, you then connect to what you understand and ultimately respond with questions and ideas, or if appropriate at the time, position your value.

Many advisors have a natural ability to connect to people; to other advisors who might have more difficulty connecting, this skill can be taught. It is important to remember the core tenet of earning the right to the value connection, which is that emotional connections must become a part of every conversation with a prospect or client. You must consciously train

yourself to "actively listen" and to really hear what your client is telling you. Many times, we all tend to "tune out" when the other person is talking, and we are just waiting for them to stop so we can begin talking. We are actually thinking about the next thing we are going to say, instead of acknowledging and digesting what the other person is telling us. You must consciously stop yourself and LISTEN. What is your prospect or client really saying to you? What is the music behind the message? What challenges, circumstances, concerns, frustrations, needs, opportunities and problems are they expressing to you? Are they verbal, or nonverbal?



When you discover, acknowledge and address these issues, you are making an emotional connection. This connection proves to the individual that you are listening to what he or she is saying, and that you understand and feel the issues as though they were your own. You are projecting, in essence, that you are putting yourself in their shoes and seeing things through their eyes. In other words, "Their business is your business."

Emotional Connection Skills

Before attempting to make an emotional connection, it is important to think about the client and what you both want out of the relationship, and not just about the bottom line of capturing more assets, or gaining a new client. By putting your prospects' and clients' needs and concerns first you demonstrate that you are trustworthy, and they in turn will have a greater appreciation and respect for you. Everyone wins.

The three important skills to help you accomplish this goal are: acknowledgement, clarification and confirmation. The more skilled you become in these areas of emotional connecting, the more powerful a communicator you will become. Let's define and discuss the three skills individually.

Acknowledgement. Any time a prospect or client expresses feelings, voices a concern or communicates a problem, you should acknowledge that you accept and understand. Effective acknowledging accomplishes five things—builds rapport with an individual; demonstrates that you’ve listened and understand; aligns you with how this individual is thinking, feeling and acting; allows you to gather necessary information and assimilate it; and helps you effectively respond and eliminate misunderstandings. Note: It is important to distinguish between acknowledging and agreement. Acknowledging another’s position does not necessarily indicate agreement, but rather that you understand their situation to the degree that you can “imagine yourself in a similar situation.”

Here are a few examples of acknowledging statements:

- “I sense that you are excited about this opportunity.”
- “It sounds like you are facing a real challenge.”
- “I can understand your frustration with this situation.”
- “You sound concerned about meeting the deadline.”

Clarification. Ask clarifying questions any time clients’ emotions are unclear as they attempt to communicate their concerns. Clarifying questions are likely to be “open questions.” For example, “Why do you say that?” or, “Help me understand why you feel ...” or, “Could you please describe your feelings in more detail?” By asking these types of questions, you eliminate confusion by obtaining the correct information right away.

Confirmation. Following the acknowledgement (or understanding) of client concerns and having asked clarify-

ing (or open) questions, you are ready to confirm what you already know. You do this by asking “closed questions” that will help you slow down a bit during your presentation, keep you at the same pace with your prospective client and demonstrate that you want to verify your understanding of all that has been shared up to this point.

Here are some examples of confirming (or closed) questions:

- “If I understand you correctly, you’re interested in using XYZ money managers?”
- “Are you saying you are not interested in continuing with this investment approach and would like to switch to the second approach we discussed?”
- “You would like at least quarterly reviews of your portfolio, is this correct?”

Being A World-Class Communicator

Remember to listen to your prospects and clients for “clues” to their inner emotions. As we mentioned at the beginning of the article, emotions encompass many feelings such as frustrations, fears, needs problems and so on. The clues you receive from prospects and clients will help you determine when it is appropriate to acknowledge, clarify and confirm the information they are sharing with you. Important: you do not have to follow the three skills in order. Depending upon your own situation, you may need to clarify first, and then acknowledge and confirm.


Here are five beliefs that will help you in making an emotional connection and, ultimately, in earning the right to the value connection with a client:

1. People make decisions emotionally, and will try to justify their behavior logically. This supports the adage that, “Business is first a meeting of

the hearts, then it becomes a meeting of the minds.”

2. Connecting to your client’s emotions requires a confident approach throughout the life of the relationship.
3. Be sensitive to your client’s pacing as you move along the emotional continuum. Do not “jog” if you client needs to “walk” first. The process of building a respectful relationship is accomplished one step at a time.
4. Listen empathetically with the intent to understand, not to respond. Maintain eye contact for maximum effectiveness. Speak from the heart. Consider the tone of your voice.
5. Control your own emotions; by doing so, you will stay focused, think clearly and maintain control of the client meeting.

It is important to remember that developing the “emotional connection” with your prospects and clients is one of the necessary ingredients to successfully delivering your value. Before each meeting, be sure to review these critical components: Identify the appropriate time to emotionally connect with a client by listening for clues; recognize that through conversation, using the three key skills of acknowledgement, clarification and confirmation allows you to make the connection; study the five beliefs and incorporate them into your process. By following these guidelines, you will earn the right to the value connection.

Next time, we will discuss how you can best dialogue with a prospective client using a “value mindset.” 

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