

THE NEXT 90 DAYS

AN ACTIONABLE APPROACH TO ACHIEVING TOTAL CLIENT ENGAGEMENT: By Duncan MacPherson and Chris Jeppesen

As a professional advisor, your goal is to continually refine and optimize your business on a panoramic level so that you can avoid hitting a plateau. Chances are, you are currently doing many things right but there are a few gaps within your approach that need to be addressed so that you can achieve a breakthrough. If you think of your business as a lock, there are three numbers you have to dial into the combination, and there are gaps to varying degrees in all three areas that need to be addressed:

1. YOUR WEALTH MANAGEMENT PROCESS

This relates to your core solutions. You're probably quite strong in this area but, because of the commoditization of the industry, core competencies in wealth management are no guarantee of success. It is simply the first number in the combination. What separates the best from the rest is often determined in the second and third numbers.

2. YOUR PRACTICE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

A fully-actualized professional advisor runs his or her business like a business and creates an impeccable client experience through best practices. They don't get faked out into simply playing the technician's role of CIO, they understand the strategic role of the CEO and, in the process, they amplify the enterprise value of their business as they improve day-to-day productivity through loyalty and refer-ability.

3. YOUR RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT PROCESS

While the first and second numbers can, in fact, make a professional advisor refer-able, there are many refer-able advisors who don't get many referrals. That is because they are not effective at articulating their value and consistently communicating with their clients and strategic partners. This must be achieved through stewardship, not salesmanship.

Advisors that achieve a meaningful breakthrough in the quality and quantity of referrals they attract do not necessarily become better advisors, they were already good. They become better at practice and relationship management. Because of the commoditization of the industry and the velocity of competitive factors, simply being good at wealth management can mean that you have clients who transactionally buy investments from you and fixate on:

- *Products*
- *Pricing*
- *Performance*

Elevating your mastery of the second and third numbers can mean that you have enlightened clients who buy into your:

- *Philosophy*
- *Planning Strategy*
- *Process*



The quality of your client relationships impacts your productivity and enterprise value more than anything else you do. Your knowledge for wealth management is a skill, but it's not proprietary. It's your assets that are proprietary, and your client relationships are the greatest asset you possess. The key is to not lose sight of the fluid nature of relationships. You have to be continually striving to competitor-proof your clients.

There is an immutable law that affects relationships called The Law of Familiarity. Over time, the more familiar a relationship becomes, the more things can be taken for granted, and value can be trivialized. Loyalty fatigue can set in and put the relationship at risk.

ACHIEVE TOTAL CLIENT ENGAGEMENT

Do your clients understand everything you do, or do they fixate on what you've provided to them up to this point in the relationship?

Future-pacing ensures that clients understand that, as their life unfolds, their needs will evolve. Critical life events can occur that render a current financial plan obsolete. Totally engaged clients think of you as a personal CFO and empower you, fully enabling you to put all of the pieces of the wealth, risk, tax, estate and debt management puzzle together so they can have a complete and fully converged picture.

CONVERT CLIENTS INTO REFERRAL-GENERATING ADVOCATES

An advocate is the dream client. They empower you fully, are a joy to work with and they endorse you to anyone who will listen. They aren't referring someone to you so that you can build your business, they feel they are doing a friend a disservice by not making the introduction. In essence they are advocates for both you and their friend.

Taking Action

If nothing else, what you've read to this point is self-evident and at best a validation of what you already know. What will make this article valuable to you is

if it can help you get clarity on your gaps and then address them, and the best way to do that is to:

Make Your Clients the Voice You Listen to!

In my many years of showing elite financial advisors how to Crack the Code and unlock their full potential, nothing has been more revealing or measurably valuable than understanding how you are perceived and described by your clients. This isn't a bland client survey process but rather a client-centered state of the relationship process – and it's an essential step to helping you achieve Total Client Engagement.

It is non-optional that you are crystal clear in terms of how your clients perceive you and describe you. You are so close to your business – it's where you live a big chunk of your life - but you're not marketing to yourself.

How do you know if your branding strategy is really resonating? After all, it's not what you say that matters, it's what your clients hear that really counts.

Total Client Engagement provides many benefits but these three are probably the most important:

De-commoditize Yourself – by differentiating and elevating above the noise of the industry and media so that clients focus on what you're worth rather than what you cost.

De-personalize Your Relationship – so that clients don't just trust and identify with a person; they trust and identify with a person, a practice and a process that is leading them to financial independence.

De-Mystify Your Value – so that clients clearly understand and internalize everything you do, who you do it for and can, in turn, articulate your value to someone else in a compelling manner.

STEP 1 - MAKE YOUR CLIENTS THE VOICE YOU LISTEN TO

In your next round of calls with your top clients, at the end of each conversation, inform them that you have engaged a business consulting process to improve the client experience and the first thing

they have asked you to do it to “make your clients the voice”. In other words, if you’re going to improve service it makes sense to survey the clients on the receiving end of your service model. Using a client-centered approach, simply ask your client if you can ask them three questions at the end of the conversation:

1. What’s the one thing you value most about our relationship?

This question is designed to kick-start the conversation. They will say nice things about you but you will realize it is mostly about the person rather than about your practice and process.

2. What’s the one thing you feel we could add to the client experience?

Most clients will say, “You don’t need to change a thing.” To which you can say, “I appreciate that, but we know we can raise the bar and when we meet next I will outline some value-added services that I think you’ll really find to be of value.” This seed-planting will make the process linked and sequential. Other clients will make suggestions to you, often around things that you are already doing that they are unaware of.

Many issues are 2 or 3 questions deep. This is a Socratic Method that builds upon itself and reveals many things that probably didn’t occur to you, such as that your clients like and trust you, but they don’t appreciate your full array of solutions. In other words, they connect with the messenger but not so much with the proprietary aspects of your message. This exercise enables you to plant the seed that you will be raising the bar and introducing value-added services that they will find to be of value at an upcoming review meeting.

3. When you talk about me with a friend or family member, what do you say? How do you describe me?

You’ll realize your clients have no idea how to describe you short of superlatives, pleasantries and platitudes. If your client can’t describe you to you, they certainly don’t know how to describe you to a

friend. How many endorsements have taken place in the past that fizzled out because of vagueness and went to a friend’s head to die?

STEP 2 - A DEEPER DIVE



If the client is open and engaged in the conversation, they are effectively giving you permission to add some color and context. You can convey that, because of the uncertainty in the market place, you have found that many clients have friends and family members who are unsettled with current market volatility and, as a result, are looking to the future with apprehension instead of anticipation. Because of this you will make yourself available to be a Sounding Board for friends and family members. If they respond with interest you can then explain:

1. Why you do it – your sense purpose.
“If they’re important to you, they’re important to me. I became a financial advisor to help people tune out the noise and focus on what matters and what they can control. It’s the most fulfilling thing I do.”

2. Who you do it for – the ideal person.
“Your friend does not need to become a client of mine to take advantage of this service. If, however, after we meet they ask me if I will accept them as a client, it will only be if it’s a good fit based on my ideal client profile. As you know I’m not all things to all people, I’m all things to some people.”

3. How to make an introduction – your process.
“There is a process in place that clients use to make introductions. If someone asks about me, or if you feel compelled to introduce someone to me, call me and I’ll get the wheels in motion. And they will view

this as a tremendous investment of their time." Ideally you would have this conversation with all of your A, AA and AAA clients over the next 30 days. And keep in mind, it will take 10 conversations for you to feel completely comfortable with the process. You'll get to hear it 10 times and interpret the feedback and get yourself in a groove. After that, you'll be sailing along. Remember: Done is better than perfect.

STEP 3 - A LINKED AND SEQUENTIAL APPROACH

From this point, in all of your client review meetings, use an agenda, point to the conversations you've had in the previous steps and start drilling down:

"You'll recall we had that conversation on the phone a while back where I asked you some questions for the purposes of improving the client experience. I had many very revealing conversations with clients and it uncovered that there are many value-added services I provide that most of my clients are unaware of. Let me show you what they are, along with some of the enhancements we are building into the client experience."

You can now detail your full array of services and solutions, future-paced with stewardship, not salesmanship. You aren't asking them to buy something from you, you are asking them to buy into your fully integrated process using this scripting:

"There are many solutions I provide for my clients that aren't relevant to you, yet. As your life unfolds, your needs will evolve. I want to get out in front of this with my integrated process around wealth, risk, tax, estate and debt management. Each time we meet we will review your progress and needs and put all the pieces of the financial puzzle together so that you have the complete picture."

Keep imprinting and triggering moments of recognition and awareness for the concept of introducing friends and family members with understated stories and reminders about other clients who endorsed you.

THE FAVORABLE ADVISOR

Sales people ask their clients for favors, "Who else do you know?" "I get paid in 3 ways..." "I'm trying to grow my business..." All of that makes the advisor look needy.

The Favorable advisor positions the concept of introductions as a service they are providing to their clients, not as a favor they are asking of their clients. They simply keep reminding them over the lifetime of the relationship. As a result, their clients continually call them asking "Can you do me a favor? My friend is going through some issues right now and wants to meet you. I've explained your process and he totally gets it. Do me a favor – talk to him for me."

A CALL TO ACTION

This content is drawn directly from the new book written by Duncan MacPherson and Chris Jeppesen called The Advisor Playbook. You can find the Playbook at Amazon, Barnes and Noble and other booksellers.

To Learn more about Pareto Systems and the Total Client Engagement Process, please visit paretosystems.com.



Duncan MacPherson

Chris Jeppesen



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