



## Three Steps for Effective Client Meetings

By Dan Richards  
November 22, 2011

*Advisor Perspectives welcomes guest contributions. The views presented here do not necessarily represent those of Advisor Perspectives.*

Unless you achieve a few key objectives, your client meetings will be unproductive. You need to calm your clients' nerves, reassure them about their portfolio and instill confidence that they're working with the right advisor.

Your job is to make clients see those meetings as addressing their unique situation and as driven squarely by their agenda, not yours.

I recently set out some [guidelines](#) for effective client meetings. I firmly believe in Stephen Covey's precept to "Seek to understand before seeking to be understood." Here's a three-step process to make that happen:



### **Step one: Start with an agenda**

I've written several articles about the role of meeting agendas. That's because conversations with hundreds of successful advisors have convinced me that done right, a written meeting agenda is a powerful tool to maximize the chances that meetings will work.

For an agenda to be effective, clients have to see it as their agenda, not yours. One way to achieve that is to establish an agenda when you call to set up their review.

During that call, you could say:

*"I have a couple of things I'd like to cover when we get together, but first, what are the key questions you'd like to get answered and things you'd like to deal with when we meet?"*

Sit back and listen. The answer will be the core of the meeting agenda, to which you'll add any additional items.

### **Step two: Set the client's key goal for the meeting**

Another key to making meetings work is to set clear, written goals for them. Going into every meeting, you should write down two objectives – first, what do you hope to achieve that will leave the client better off and second, what's your objective for the meeting that will advance your business and leave you better off. Even if that second goal is no more



than leaving clients reassured and less vulnerable to defection, it's still important to put that down in writing, so you're focused on what you need to achieve.

It can also be helpful to get clients to articulate their key goals for meetings. When you sit down, start with something along the lines of:

*"Here's the agenda that we discussed on the phone. Tell me, what's the single most important thing you want to achieve today, whether it's on the agenda or not?"*

Again, sit back and listen. What you hear will set the direction for the next while.

### **Step three: Get clients talking**

Once clients have identified their top goal, respond by saying:

*"Let's make that the first thing we focus on. Just before we do that, many clients tell me that they've been a bit shaken by recent markets. Tell me, how have you found markets affecting you?"*

One last time, sit back and listen. The more clients feel truly listened to, the more effective your meetings will be.

Some keys to getting clients to open up:

1. Ask good questions – going into meetings, jot down three questions you want to ask
2. Follow up – the five most underused words by many advisors are *"Tell me more about that"*
3. Leave space – after clients finish a thought, pause for three seconds before answering. By counting to yourself *"One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi"* before responding to what your client has just said, sometimes they'll continue on and share important insights that you would otherwise have missed.

Use this three-step process – an effective meeting agenda, getting clients to articulate their key goal for the meeting and listen effectively.

You'll find your meetings much more effective as a result.



For those who want to see more about how to make agendas work, here are two recent articles:

[Ten Minutes to Much More Effective Client Meetings](#)

[The Best Way to Start a Client Meeting](#)

*Dan Richards is a top-rated presenter at advisor conferences and an award winning instructor in the MBA program at the University of Toronto, as well as author of Getting Clients Keeping Clients: The Essential Guide for Tomorrow's Financial Advisor. To learn more about his conference keynotes and workshops, email [dan@clientinsights.ca](mailto:dan@clientinsights.ca).*

[www.advisorperspectives.com](http://www.advisorperspectives.com)

For a free subscription to the Advisor Perspectives newsletter, visit:

<http://www.advisorperspectives.com/subscribers/subscribe.php>