

Ten Tips to be More Likeable

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When I ask advisors about what it takes to attract and retain clients, they give me answers like above average returns, preserving capital in tough markets and strong communication.

Those are all true – to these can be added delivering strong value and having clients trust your competence and integrity.

One other factor is often overlooked, however – and that's likeability.



The importance of being likeable

I've heard clients say they're a bit disappointed with recent returns or they haven't heard from their advisor in the last while quite as much as they'd hoped – but they really like him or her and just don't see themselves leaving.

Other times, I have talked to investors who selected a new advisor. These investors spoke to several advisors, all of whom seemed competent and interested – and ended up selecting the one they liked the most.

It's really quite simple – everything else being equal, clients like to work with people they like.

Some advisors believe that likeability is innate – we either have it or we don't.

That's true to a point. But there are specific things that advisors can do to be more likeable



Strategy one: Watch your attitude

The first thing that makes people likeable is being upbeat, positive and optimistic.

No one likes to spend time with someone who is constantly down in the dumps and sucks the energy out of every room.

In tough markets, it can be hard to stay positive. The best known researcher on strategies to improve optimism is psychologist Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania.

Click [here](#) to read an article on his book *Learned Optimism* that I wrote last year.

Strategy Two: Boost your energy

One way to convey a more positive attitude is to radiate positive energy – it's hard to look upbeat if you're slumped in a chair at the end of the day.

Exercise can play a big role in boosting energy – starting the day with a workout or a brisk walk can help.

And fresh air and sunshine can help as well. Taking five or ten minutes before an important meeting to get some fresh air will increase your energy level.

Or you can do what one advisor did to be more upbeat when talking to clients on the phone. He put a sign on his wall with the two words "Be positive" – and began to talk standing up. Just by doing those two things, he raised his energy level on the phone.

Strategy Three: Smile

When going out to greet a client in the lobby, make a point of smiling. It may feel a bit funny initially – but the impact that doing this and this alone can have is amazing.

Not only will clients see you as more positive – but you'll feel better as well. Ultimately, the goal is to make smiling a habit – so you don't have to do it consciously.

Strategy Four: Demonstrate interest

The next strategy is a simple one – and that's to demonstrate real interest when you talk to clients.



The best way to do that is to ask questions to get clients talking. The more questions you ask, the more clients will talk. When meeting with an existing or prospective client, the number one priority is always to ask questions to get clients engaged.

People who drone on about their views are the opposite of likeable – we all know paragons of pomposity who dominate every conversation; these are exactly the people everyone avoids at a party.

Strategy Five: Give your undivided attention

It's not just good enough to get clients to talk – they have to feel that you listen. You need to focus all of your attention on what they say. One way to do that is to make eye contact, looking away only to take notes.

One of the things that's been said about Bill Clinton is that when people talk to him, they feel that they have his undivided attention – for that moment or two, as far as he's concerned they are the only people in the room. You want your clients to feel the same way.

Strategy Six: Make genuine compliments

Strategy six is to seek out opportunities to make genuine compliments.

The key is to be sincere – being phony will work against you. But looking for opportunities to say that I truly admire the job you've done with your kids, your house, your business, your commitment to charity – these will all make you more likeable.

One advisor I talked to said that in every meeting his goal is to make one genuine, sincere compliment – and has been struck by the positive response from clients.

Strategy Seven: Seek to help

When I began working in the financial industry many years ago, I first came across the expression "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Trite and hackneyed as that line may be, it's absolutely true – just caring isn't enough, clients have to see you as caring.

Letting clients know you're there to help makes advisors likeable – especially when there's no revenue attached to it for you.



Let's say a client says that her son has lost his job.

You have three choices.

You can commiserate and say you're sorry to hear that, secretly hoping this doesn't mean your client will cash in investments to help him.

Better is to say "Please let me know if there is any way I can help."

Best is to offer that you have another client whose child went through a similar process before landing another job – and offering to call them to see if they'd be willing to meet with your client's son.

One way to be liked is to seek out every opportunity you can to help people – without regard to whether there's anything in it for you.

Strategy Eight: Remember little things

A while back, I interviewed a woman in her sixties who went on about the fact that every time she went to her advisor's office for a meeting, her advisor remembered how she took her tea and had her favorite cookies on hand.

I subsequently talked to this advisor – it turns out that her assistant made a point of recording these kinds of details in their database and made a special trip to the store if an important client was coming into the office.

It really makes a difference if you remember small details about clients – whether it be how they like their coffee and tea, where they went to university or the names and ages of their kids.

The key is to capture this info in your database and then make a point of referring to this before meetings, incorporating it into conversations in an appropriate fashion.

Again, you can go over the top and come across as phony – if I say the last time we talked you had just shot 93 and had a quadruple bogey on the last hole, how have you done recently, that's fine. But if I start reeling off your scores the last time you played before each of our past ten meetings, you've crossed the line.

Strategy Nine: Follow up and surprise clients.

In an interview a couple of years back, an investor told me about an experience that made a big impression.



While meeting with his advisor, he made an offhand mention that his 85-year-old mother was going on a tour to Egypt.

A couple of days later he got a package with a memoir written by someone who had traveled to Egypt, with a personal note from his advisor wishing his mother a great trip.

This investor went on to say “How could I not like my advisor when she is that thoughtful?”

The key is to focus on the little things.

In a recent post on making client gifts count, I talked about an advisor who had a stock of guidebooks to Disneyworld in his office to send to clients who were taking their children or grandchildren for the first time.

Or in the case of that client whose son lost his job, you could follow up with an article or a book on job hunting.

What’s important is to look for opportunities in every conversation to follow up with something that really demonstrates your interest and goodwill – and how much you value the relationship.

Strategy Ten: Let clients know it’s not all about you.

None of us like people who are self-centered and wrapped up in themselves.

One way to build likeability is to subtly let clients know what you’re doing to give back to the community.

This doesn’t apply to every client of course, but for many successful people sharing part of their wealth with those who are less fortunate is a priority – and given the choice want to work with people who share their values.

The key is to do this in a low key fashion, without tooting your own horn.

One way is to use holiday and Thanksgiving greetings as a way to let clients know that you’ve made a charitable contribution on their behalf – and to talk about what you and your team are doing to give back to the community.

If you’ve received awards from a local charity, you can hang them in your office or mention them in your newsletter.



Or you can do what I did and host a fundraising event – and invite clients to attend as paying guests.

For the last two years, I've co-chaired a fundraising dinner and online auction in Toronto for Amani Childrens Home in Tanzania, a terrific organization I came across on a trek up Mount Kilimanjaro that helps house, feed and educate over 300 orphans and homeless children.

Over the two years, we've raised \$150,000 – which was incredibly gratifying.

An unexpected benefit was a tremendous outpouring of goodwill from friends and clients who bought tickets to the dinner, despite writing a check to be there. The key was that the moving force behind Amani is a terrific young American woman named Valerie Todd who tells a remarkable story and really touches people.

You don't have to co host a big fund raising event to let clients know that your values go beyond a bigger house, faster car or more elaborate vacation. But by finding ways to let people you work with know about your commitment back to the community, in many cases you make yourself more likeable as a result.

As you think about your plans for 2010, there are likely many candidates for your list of new initiatives.

Chances are that you're already reasonably likeable – it's hard to be successful otherwise.

That said, few of us can't improve on this dimension. Consider going through this list of ten strategies and adding one or two to your New Year's resolutions – ramping up your likeability may be one of the more important things you do in 2010.

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