

A 13-Point Plan for Top Clients

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Time is our scarcest currency. We must be cautious about taking on significant new commitments, and the only exception is when there's absolutely clear cut evidence of a substantial return. That's why a simple way to get your top clients to look forward to your meetings is incredibly important.

Late last year, an advisor told me about how he formulates action plans for top clients in 30 minutes. He has seen an overwhelmingly positive response from clients and significant progress in his business as a result.



The concept behind these plans is simple: If you're an account manager working for Procter & Gamble with responsibility for managing the Walmart or Costco account, every year you'll spend 30 days developing a comprehensive, 200-page business plan for that account.

It clearly doesn't make sense to develop a 200-page business plan for even your largest clients – but how about 30 minutes to develop a four-page plan? This advisor attended a workshop in 2009, in which he saw the template for a short plan for use with key clients. The plan summarized the client background and identified opportunities and setting out specific actions.

In early 2010, this advisor and his team developed these plans for their top 20 clients – they took about half an hour each initially per client, with a further 15 to 20 minutes to update them a year later.

At the start of each quarter, this advisor sits down with his team and reviews the plan for each client, identifying things that have to happen in the next 90 days. As a result, his activity with top clients is more proactive and focused. Both he and his clients are better off as a result – one outcome is that clients generally see more concrete results from meetings and as a consequence are more enthusiastic about future meetings. In this advisor's view, the time he and team spend compiling, reviewing and acting on these plans is his highest-return activity.

13 critical plan elements



The first step is to concisely summarize the key background for each top client. Here's what the background portion of the plan template might look like, documenting client information in 13 areas. Use this as a starting point for your own top-client plans, modifying it to your own situation.

1. *Current situation – a short summary of key trends in assets and revenues:*

For 2009, 2010 and 2011, show your revenue for each year from this client, as well as assets at the end of the year.

In addition, document how long you've been working with this client – and how you came to work together.

2. *Financial priorities*

Summarize this client's top three financial issues and priorities.

3. *Assessment of client satisfaction – how satisfied is your client with your relationship?*

On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is low, 5 is high), write down your assessment of how satisfied your client is on key dimensions of your relationship:

- Performance of investments
- Confidence that the client is on track to achieve goals
- Frequency of communication
- Quality of communication – feels listened to, key questions and issues are addressed
- Overall relationship

4. *Plans in place – an overview of the written plans this client has in place*

List the kinds of written plans this client has in place, whether they have been completed in whole or in part, when they were prepared, when they were last updated and who prepared them.

Among the plans to include are:

- financial plan
- investment plan
- retirement plan
- estate/insurance plan
- tax plan
- cash-flow plan.



5. *Key gaps*

Identify important gaps in this client's plans and financial affairs.

6. *Preferred contact – how does this client want to hear from you - and how often?*

Document the client's preference in terms of contact:

- Face-to-face
- Telephone
- Email
- Mail
- Lunch presentations
- Evening presentations
- Other

As well, identify the frequency with which you used each of these methods to communicate with this client in 2011 – and your goal for each of these in 2012.

7. *Your knowledge of the client*

This section identifies gaps in your knowledge of the client. Rate your knowledge from high to low in terms of their financial situation (hopefully high), work situation, family situation, hobbies and interests, retirement plans and any health and personal issues.

Then identify knowledge gaps that you need to fill in the next 12 months.

8. *Professional advisors*

List the name and contact information for this client's accountant, lawyer and other professional advisors. On a scale from 1 to 5, note whether you've met those professional advisors and, if so, the strength of your relationship with them.

9. *Percentage of assets held*

Approximately what percentage of this client's assets do you hold? Where are outside assets held, what do they consist of and what is their approximate value?

What's your history in terms of bringing on additional assets from this client? When was the last time that you talked to this client about this? If clients hold assets with outside firms, have you offered to prepare a consolidated quarterly snapshot of all of their assets?



10. *Relationship with heirs – where you stand in terms of your connection with your client's spouse and family members.*

List the name of each person who will receive a substantial inheritance from this client, starting with the spouse and including adult children. In each case, identify whether you have their account currently and rank your relationship with them from 1 to 5, where 1 is low and 5 is high. Include any comments on your relationship with each of your key client's heirs.

11. *Past referrals provided*

Record cases where this client introduced you to friends and family, including the date, the assets involved with the potential referral, and the outcome.

12. *Close associates*

List this client's closest family members, friends and work colleagues. For each case, indicate whether at some point you've met them.

13. *Past social activity*

Here's where you summarize cases in the past where you got together with this client socially. List the event or activity, the date and any response or feedback from the client. Based on that feedback, should you repeat these activities in future?

Capitalizing on opportunities

Once you have the background documented, next is a five-step process to identify opportunities and formulate a plan to capitalize on those opportunities. This drives the agenda for client meetings and shapes the conversations that take place.

1. *Hot buttons*

What are the one, two or three issues that this client worries about the most – and that will motivate him or her to act? Create an opportunity checklist – a quick summary of gaps in this client's financial affairs.

2. *Opportunity checklist*

Here's where you identify any things that need to be done to ensure the client's basic affairs are in good order. Here's a list that you could use as a starting point – for each of these, indicate if there is work to be done on them in 2012, whether for the client or for family members:



- Cash management account
- 401(k) plans and IRA accounts
- 529 or other college savings accounts
- Tax-free savings account
- Critical care insurance
- Life insurance
- Long-term care insurance
- Power of attorney
- Will

3. *Key client opportunities for 2012*

Write down the one, two or three key ways you can help improve the client's situation in the next 12 months.

4. *Key business opportunity for 2012*

Identify the one goal for this client that would advance your own business in the next 12 months

5. *Key steps for 2012*

What specific steps are you going to take in 2012 to achieve these goals?

The last four years have tested many client relationships, a process that is ongoing. Looking forward, it will be critically important to be proactive and disciplined in managing relationships with your most important clients – a *client opportunity template* such as the one this advisor uses will play a key role in making that happen.

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