

How an Advisor Turned 20 Minutes into \$2 million

By Dan Richards
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I regularly hear from advisors who've implemented an idea they've read in my newsletter or heard at one of my talks and want to share their results.

But I've seldom heard of an outcome as dramatic and immediate as the one obtained by an advisor who translated an investment of 20 minutes into \$2 million in new assets.



Focusing on your top clients

The concept that I discussed at that talk was dead simple: All advisors know they should pay special attention to their top clients. The challenge is how to do this.

One solution is to learn from sophisticated sales organizations like IBM. If you're the account manager for IBM with responsibility for a major bank, you'll spend two months each year preparing a comprehensive, 200-page plan outlining how you've going to maximize opportunity with that customer.

Of course, advisors shouldn't spend two months preparing a 200-page plan for even their largest and most important client. But in my talk I did propose that, for their top 10 to 20 clients, advisors invest 20 to 30 minutes to prepare a four-page plan.

And then I walked the audience through a four-page *Client Opportunity Template*, showing what that plan might look like.

Identifying key opportunities

The first three pages of the template contain 13 categories of information on the client, from unmet needs and hot buttons to contact preferences and their network of family members, close associates and professional advisors. This is intended to summarize all of the relevant information about key clients in one place.

The fourth page is where the focus shifts to action. On this page, advisors answer five questions about this top client:



1. Key issues / problems / challenges in dealing with this client
2. Key opportunities to add value to the client's situation – how to drive their agenda
3. Key business opportunities with this client – how to drive your agenda
4. Top three priorities and goals with this client in the next 12 months
5. Planned activities to achieve these goals

Creating an action plan

After returning from the conference where I spoke, the advisor – let's call him Jon - sat down with his two assistants and walked them through the Client Opportunity Template. They agreed to schedule two Friday sandwich lunches, booking two hours to establish action plans for their top 10 clients.

They set aside 20 to 30 minutes to develop the Client Opportunity Template for each key client; to use their time more efficiently, prior to the meeting one of Jon's assistants partially completed each template with as much information as she had available.

One of the first templates they completed was for Jon's largest client, Bob, who owns a number of successful fast food franchises and has accounts with several different advisors.

In 20 minutes, Jon and his assistants completed the background on Bob and identified key goals and actions for 2012. Here's what the action plan with Bob looked like:

1. Key issues / problems / challenges in dealing with this client (if any)

The relationship while good could be deeper; at times, Jon feels that he's viewed as a supplier rather than a trusted partner

2. Key opportunities to add value to the client's situation – how to drive Bob's agenda

The multiple accounts mean that it can be challenging for Bob and his accountant to keep track of where they stand overall. As well, because there's nobody coordinating the overall investment strategy, there is overlap in some positions and the accounts are not always managed in the most tax-effective fashion.

3. Key business opportunities with this client – how to drive Jon's agenda

Jon and his assistants agreed that their biggest near-term business opportunity was to become Bob's principal advisor and to consolidate some of the accounts held elsewhere.

4. Top three priorities with this client in the next 12 months



- a. Help Bob better monitor total performance of portfolio
- b. Help Bob and his accountant improve portfolio efficiency and after-tax returns
- c. Increase Jon's share of Bob's assets

Making a plan happen

At this point, Jon had a clear sense of what he wanted to achieve. He then identified three steps to make this happen.

First, in a meeting in January, he offered to have his assistant Mary each month compile consolidated performance of all of his accounts. Starting in February, a week after each month end, Mary contacted Bob's accountant to get all of his statements, then created an excel spreadsheet to track month-over-month performance and any portfolio changes; this was sent to Bob and his accountant within three days.

Second, Jon sought out opportunities to get to know Bob better. He discovered that the local business school from which Jon graduated hosts an ongoing breakfast and lunch speaker series with successful business leaders.

One of those was a presentation by the chief marketing officer of a fast food chain that is a key competitor of the franchises that Bob runs. When Jon invited Bob to this talk, Bob changed a previous commitment to attend – and asked if it would be possible to invite two of his fellow franchise holders. The session took place at 5 pm and cost \$25 – Jon invited Bob and his fellow franchise holders to dinner afterwards to talk about what they heard. When he offered to pay, Bob would have none of it and insisted on picking up the bill.

Finally, in June Jon arranged a meeting with Bob and his accountant to talk about duplication and overlap in the holdings in Bob's accounts. He pointed to some areas where there was an obvious opportunity to make improvements – and offered to help coordinate and quarterback Bob's investments.

They agreed to meet again in a week's time – at that meeting, Bob told Jon that he'd decided to streamline the number of advisors he was going to work with going forward ... and would be transferring \$2 million in new assets to Jon as a result.

Not all stories will have an ending as happy as this one – but Jon's experience is a dramatic demonstration of the benefits of focused, targeted and well-thought-through activity directed to your top clients.

The week leading up to Christmas is traditionally a time when things slow down and you're more likely to have two or three hours to put together action plans for your top clients. A copy of the four-page Client Opportunity Template is available [here](#). Once you receive the



template, amend to fit your practice and how you work. The goal here is quite simple – to develop the right format for you in order to focus activity on your top 20 clients.

Who knows, your story may have the same happy ending as Jon's.

[Dan Richards](#) conducts programs to help advisors gain and retain clients and is an award winning faculty member in the MBA program at the University of Toronto. To see more of his written and video commentaries, go to www.clientinsights.ca. Use A555A for the rep and dealer code to register for website access.

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