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Replace the Commonplace: Start Client Conversations Without "How Are You?"

By: David Richman | April 30, 2024

Consider the cost of asking this question rather unwittingly, without a moment's reflection at the start of your follow-up phone calls: "How are you?" While cordial and somewhat deferential, it's oh so commonplace.

When you ask that question, you step past the opportunity to learn something more important about the person. Do they remember you? Do they seem receptive to hearing from you? We think learning the answers to these questions is far more valuable.

There's one question suited for virtually any situation that may be able to get you those answers. It has an important place in everything from an initial call with a prospective client, to a quarterly review with a longtime client. That "question" is a well-placed pause. Imagine if you ended your opening statement with a pause—now you're in learning mode. Let's consider the effect a well-placed pause can have on the following three follow-up scenarios.

A First Encounter

Advisor: "Good afternoon, it's David Richman from XYZ. It was great meeting you last week at the Save the Bay event. [Pause.]"

Prospect: "David, so great to connect last week and I'm glad you followed up and would love to continue our conversation about Magnificent Seven complacency."

What did you learn? Seems the person not only remembers you; she's also interested in continuing the conversation you started.

A Referral

Advisor: "Good afternoon, it's David Richman from XYZ. Bill Jones suggested I call. [Pause.]"

Prospect: ""Bill Jones, how is he? I haven't spoken to him in a while. Do you know if his daughter got accepted to her first choice?"

What did you learn? Appears he knows Bill rather well. Seems like Bill is a strong referral into this potential new client relationship.

A LinkedIn Connection

Advisor: "Good afternoon, it's David Richman from XYZ, I have enjoyed our back and forth on LinkedIn. [Pause.]"

Prospect: "Yes, I was intrigued by your recent post regarding the current state of the municipal bond market."

What did you learn? This person is interested in municipals and perhaps open to advice.

Bottom Line: Yes, the question "how are you" is deferential. Yet, consider whether leveraging the power of a pause might open doors to a more productive follow-up conversation.

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