

General Conversation Guidelines

The work you do goes on within the context of a trusting, professional relationship with your client. Good conversations at the outset of the engagement creates a framework in which future discussions proceed in an organized and orderly fashion. Without it you risk having a chaotic, less successful and more time-consuming process.

Tips for conversation style

- Make eye contact. Speak in jargon-free language. Repeat questions, as needed.
- Set a trusting, warm and collaborative tone including via the use of relaxed body language.
- Describe concepts in a step-by-step manner.
- Start conversation with a kind manner or caring question: "It's nice to see you. So, how are you/the family?", "So, how are you spending your time these days?"; or, "Please tell me about a typical day." Invest the few minutes in this type of casual conversation. It shows you care about your relationship with the client.

Tips for setting the conversation environment

- Offer a private, calm, quiet, well-lit, easily accessible office setting in which your credentials are prominently displayed. Keep meetings brief. Offer a glass of water.
- Turn off your phone(s) to avoid distractions.
- Offer documents in large-print/font format. Offer the information in bullet point format.
- Consider using contrasting color paper for increased legibility.
- Ask the method of communication client prefers: phone, email, in-person
- Be transparent about your fees. Schedule the next meeting before the current one ends.

When dealing with a grieving widow/widower

- As your client ages, it will become increasingly important to talk with clients and their family members about aging, dementia/memory loss, and financial decision-making.
- You should always try to have at least one family member or trusted friend or adviser in the room for each meeting. A person with dementia or memory issues will likely not remember

the pertinent facts needed to make sound financial decisions, and he or she may not remember important decisions that were made during the meeting. The trusted family member or friend can also review or remind the client of the important issues discussed after the meeting.

- Be aware that the client will likely not remember many details of the previous meeting.
- Ask the client to write down dates, next steps, and other important information where possible. After the meeting, send them a note outlining the discussion and follow up information.
- Call the client shortly before each meeting to remind him or her about the upcoming meeting.

Key principles and practices

Respect. Above all else, respect your clients, especially people who are aging and losing abilities they used to have. Take the time to learn about the person's life. Find an area where they are knowledgeable and ask them questions in that area. Be interested. They will light up like a Christmas tree when they realize they are teaching you, they are explaining something to you, having value in your eyes.

Listening. Experts often feel they need to be active, give advice, and earn their keep, so to speak, by talking a lot. This is a big mistake, especially with older people. Learn to listen. Tolerate moments of silence without feeling you have to fill "dead air" as if you were a radio host.

Curiosity. Let your client explain to you his situation. Let him tell you his story. This may take some time, but it is time very well spent. It is also, usually, interesting. Furthermore, as he talks, you will begin to get a feel for his emotional hotspots, which is valuable information.

Empathy. Empathy, is the understanding of another person's reality. It takes time to develop, but if you follow the first three bits of advice, empathy will develop naturally. You will start to know your client in ways that most financial advisers don't.

Alliance. With empathy, an alliance develops. This is golden. When your client feels that you know him and understand him, he will trust you.