Client-centricity rule #3: be how you want to be seen

Wealth managers need to ensure they are 'professional' and use their superior knowledge to help their clients live at peace with their wealth. Only then do they stand a chance to be trusted, perceived and treated as true professionals.

Various surveys all reach the same conclusion: wealth managers are not held in high esteem. The well-known Edelman Trust Barometer supports this; year after year, financial services is the least trusted industry. Further, the Straits Times in Singapore reported recently of a poll which showed 72% of the local population do not know who to trust when it comes to getting advice about their money.

This is all quite troubling for an industry where trust is considered a key success factor. So how can we turn that around?

IT'S ALL ABOUT BELIEF

It may sound like a cliché, but I'm afraid there is no other way to put it: it starts with us as industry professionals.

We need to be perceived as a 'professional' – a term which usually refers to an implied standard of education and training. This enables the members of that profession to perform the role of that profession, governed by strict codes of ethical conduct.

This justifies a closer look.

The average wealth management professional has a university background and, in addition, is required to meet certain competency standards before being allowed to practice.

In other words, the time it takes to become a wealth manager is more or less the same as the time it takes to become a lawyer, an accountant, or a doctor. At the same time, like in these other (typically more respected) professions, wealth managers are required to continuously improve themselves and update their knowledge.

Yet if the backdrop to becoming a professional in the industry is more or less the same, why then aren't we able to demand a similar level of trust – and respect – from our clients?

Apparently, collectively, we do something that instills doubt in the minds of our clients about our ability to add value to their lives.

Many wealth managers 'blame' their clients for a lack of ability (by the so-called professional) to add value. They say things like: "My clients only want me to recommend transactions. That's all."

What does this mean? That their clients don't want them to be a professional? They don't want them to use their superior knowledge to conduct responsible wealth management to improve their lives? Or could it be the other way around? And because they as the wealth manager only recommend transactions, their clients simply don't perceive them as value-adding professionals.

It is not that complicated: wealth managers who aspire to be respected as a professional first have to ensure they are indeed a professional.

This means they require not only the knowledge and skills, but also the self-confidence and self-esteem, to add value to the lives of the rich.

Medical doctors have been highly-regarded by the public for decades, even though by a look at life expectancy in the 1950s, for example, they were not particularly successful.

However, they were – and still are – regarded as the best people to go to for a medical issue. That demands respect.

Similarly, wealth managers deserve to be regarded as the best available alternative for helping individuals with money to align their wealth with life goals and objectives. ■

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