

SELLING WISDOM IN A SUPER-SATURATED MARKET

By Harry A. Olson, Ph.D

Traditionally, as a Financial Advisor, you have sold product, information, and wisdom. Also traditionally, the boundaries within the profession have been very clear, both to advisors and to the buying public.

Everyone knew what the Insurance Agent brought to the table; likewise the CPA and the Stock Broker. The notion of "How do you position your uniqueness in a crowded market?" was an unheard-of question.

Today, it's a different world, and much more confusing to potential clients. As a result, this unheard-of question has popped to the top of many advisors' marketing strategies. Effective marketing has now gotten much tougher.

Enter three facts:

1. Product and information are now available on the web - in dizzying super abundance. So all you really have left to justify your existence is the wisdom you have to offer. Fortunately, with the recent highly-storied crash of the day-traders, wisdom is a greatly prized commodity.
2. All goods and services appear equal to an unsold buyer. Here's where your uniqueness comes in. You've got to position yourself as standing out in the crowd. You need to become top-of-mind for your prospect when she or he is ready to act.
3. Today, especially, buying decisions are made in the gut, not the head. Reason only comes into play to justify the decision emotion has already made. The challenge now is, how do you connect emotionally with the client? Or as I frame it with my clients, how do you market heart-to-heart?

That said, how do you market Wisdom?

The classical buying motives have been Fear of Pain (translating in financial services to risk management and having enough money through retirement) and Desire for Gain. Typically most FAs have appealed to these motives. By the way, behavioral finance studies clearly show that the desire to avoid loss outweighs, hands down, the desire to achieve gain as a buying and investing motive.

To best market Wisdom, however, you need to take a slightly different tack. Your task is to create uncertainty. If you raise an issue which causes the client to feel unsure of his situation, or unsure of how to respond, the emotional implication is that you know all about the issue that you raise. By implication, you have the answers the client now discovers he needs.

The tactic is to sow seeds of doubt. Emotionally, doubt is painful. It cries for resolution, which in this case is relative certainty. Doubt causes inner unrest. It anxiously niggles around and around in your head until you find an answer which finally puts your doubt to rest.

How do you ethically instill doubt? Here are a couple of oversimplified possibilities:

"You seem to have a fine plan in place, but is it completely impregnable? You look to be in great health. What if you live to be 100, and the bottom falls out of the economy. Will you really have enough - given your current plan - to sustain you?"

"You've heard it said, 'the good is the enemy of the best'. That means if we're experiencing satisfactory performance right now, we may become satisfied and not push for greater excellence. Sounds like you're doing fine with your current plan. But how do you know it's getting you the most you're capable of attaining?"

The above questions are designed to lead the prospect to now second-guess that which she previously took for granted. The first leads to doubt appealing to the pain motive. The second raises doubt in the context of the desire for gain. Choose whatever words you like, or any relevant prospect issue, your task is the same – to create potential dissatisfaction with the status quo. Naturally, once you have sewn the seeds of doubt, you can, without pressure, casually offer a no-obligation opinion. Or second opinion, as the case may be.

Emotionally, a climate of uncertainty creates a vacuum that must be filled. The only things that will do it are Ideas and Structure. Both are required. This is where Wisdom comes in. Wisdom blends Ideas and Structure into a reasoned course of Action. Wisdom supplies new, more creative ideas and concepts, and orchestrates them on a broader or higher plane of thinking than the client is operating on. This new Wisdom then serves as the basis for the creation of a new and improved structure for the client's plan and assets. As Einstein said, "You can't solve a problem with the same mindset you had when the problem was created. You need fresh thinking."

Needless to say, it is essential to employ this exercise with integrity, sincerity, and genuine caring. Any lesser motive can easily backfire. It is the integrity, sincerity, and caring which most forge the emotional bond with the prospect.

In October, new compliance rules are going into effect which will define and limit how advisors will be allowed to position and define the nature of their practices. In the light of this event, **NOW** is the time to re-examine your positioning, marketing and selling strategies, and to incorporate the selling of Wisdom more centrally into your overall marketing plan. Doing so will help put you out in front of the pack.

As Jesus of Nazareth said, "Those that have ears to hear, let them hear."

Harry A. Olson, Ph.D. coaches Financial Advisors in practice branding and positioning issues as well as overall practice and personal development. Harry has over 30 years of coaching top achievers and consulting with organizations to achieve peak performance. He also authored five books. Harry is a former member of the Board of the Maryland Chapter of the FPA, and is a member of the Nazrudin Project. Contact him at 410-581-0817 or e-mail Harry at ho@harryolson.com