

Don't be fooled by communication mirages

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Many of us have created a "mirage" in our minds about what successful communication is. Because communication plays such a pivotal role in successful financial planning, it is important that advisors see through these mirages and move forward to improved communication.

Most of us have firm views on why some people are great communicators and, generally, why we are not so good. Each of the elements of this "mirage" can be exposed, helping you get on with the important task of communicating your way to greater happiness.

Mirage number one is that communication is for the stars. "He or she is a born communicator", we tell ourselves. We, on the other hand, (we tell ourselves) are not stars. This is negative and false. Everyone can communicate. Everyone can use communication to improve inter-personal relationships, and many financial planning clients are not looking for entertainment-style communication, but want a real and easily understood transfer of information. Most of the people we admire as good communicators have actually been through some form of training. If they have learned the art of communication, why can't you?

Mirage number two is that communication is all about instant results. This mirage says that since my own communication does not give me the power to get what I want, it must have failed. In reality, all communication produces results. Something will happen when we communicate. What is important is how you communicate, how you behave, how positive are your thoughts for others and so on. For financial planners, rather than impressing clients with your wit or entertaining them with humour, the key is to get a complex message across in simple language. Also remember that the greatest results from communication are the "intangibles" such as friendship, respect, intimacy and involvement.

Mirage number three is that any new communication approach is better than the old one. To move from a failure to a success, according to this mirage, we need a totally new communication approach. This view suggests out with the old, in with the new; and financial planning picks up fads at least as much as other sectors. In this ruthless quest for success, we can erode friendships, reduce trust and create an atmosphere of tension and competition. Improved communication is a gradual process. Take one step at a time on the path to better communication.

Mirage number four is that to communicate well you must conform. This is the "yes" man syndrome. We know that corporations where people are just clones do not go too far, and it is the same at a personal level. Be yourself. Differences are exciting, they make us strong as groups. From a client

perspective, these differences can become their strongest rationale for choosing you as their ongoing advisor.

The Gallup Organisation has researched different human characteristics and one group financial advisors can learn from is the "relator" type of person (you are in a business where relationships hold the key to success). Use these as personal goals in improving your own approach:

Communication

You generally find it easy to put your thoughts into words, are a good conversationalist and would make a good presenter.

Empathy

You sense the feelings of other people by imagining yourself in others' lives or others' situations.

Harmony

You look for consensus. You don't enjoy conflict, instead seeking areas of agreement.

Inclusiveness

You are accepting of others. You show awareness of those who feel left out, making an effort to include them.

Individualisation

You are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. You have a gift for figuring out how people who are different can work together productively.

Relator

You enjoy close relationships, finding deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

Responsibility

You take psychological ownership of what you say and do. You are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.

Wouldn't it be good if everybody developed these characteristics? That way, you would be less likely to fall for the mirages and more likely to deliver a form of communication that your clients are seeking.

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