

## Clear Client Communication

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Leaving a wirehouse? Establishing a new registered investment advisory (RIA) firm? Joining an independent broker-dealer? Of course you are going to think about things like compliance, operational issues, finding an office, and transferring accounts, but you may not have thought about the importance—the critical importance—of communicating clearly with your clients through every step of the process.

Clients may trust you. They may believe in you and your approach and they may want to follow you wherever you go. But they still want information and education. They want to know what is going on. They want to know—almost as soon as you know—what you are doing and why you are doing it.

While you cannot “solicit” your clients during your employment with your firm, you can talk with them about your “dream” of being independent. You can let them know the minute you have officially opened your doors under a new name and let them know what it means to them.

Once on your own, you will find that many of the things you used to “delegate” to others, you now have to do yourself, and this leaves less and less time for the things you care about most—your clients. You will need to find proactive ways to keep communication flowing—particularly during difficult market times. They will want to talk with you and get your reassurance that you are on top of everything. Here are a few ideas:

Instead of taking every call and repeating the same message over and over, consider sending a weekly or bi-weekly email with information about the market and about your approach. Write a personalized letter telling your clients what you see happening in the market and how it will affect their portfolios (all you have to do is personalize the name—the content itself may be the same).

Consider scheduling a client call-in opportunity once every month when you talk about the market and what you are doing. Allow for limited questions or questions sent in advance. And, after you have had the call for those clients who could not participate, make sure it has been recorded and leave it available for people to call in and listen at their leisure. And, if you have local clients who are accessible, hold a client dinner or a meeting in your office to thank your clients and provide education about current

market conditions. Prioritize the invitation list and the follow-up calling effort by identifying those clients you know to be “high touch.”

During difficult times, some RIAs send out emails every week, or even every day to keep clients informed. Others are on the phone calling, before clients call them, to let them know they are watching the markets.

Do not fall victim to allowing silence to be your spokesperson because clients want to know what is happening and tend to get nervous if they do not. Put a premium on proactive communication throughout every step of your transition process and after you have clients working directly with you.