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## New Year's Resolutions for Your Clients?

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With 2014 already well under way you may have forgotten about your own New Year's resolutions but have you given any thought to your clients' resolutions?

It seems to me that, whether we call them resolutions or not, we are conscious of our own aspirations and commitments for the New Year. On the other hand we may not have given much thought to what other people are wishing or planning for 2014. I think that financial advisers are missing a great opportunity to revisit their clients' objectives if they don't use the fresh thinking of the first quarter as a catalyst for a valuable conversation.

You may think that you know your clients well and I am not suggesting that you don't. However, just as you may have altered some of your personal goals in the last few years so might they. It would be dangerous to assume that your past records of your clients' financial plans, no matter how well maintained and filed, are still current. Family situations, career paths, key relationships, community affiliations, health status and leisure interests are all dynamic aspects of life that can and do change. Even if the change does not directly impact their financial life there will be some implications for you as their adviser.

In the same way any such changes, positive or negative, are likely to influence their outlook for 2014 and generate fresh thinking about the future. I would hope that, as their adviser, you would like to be part of their new thinking about any of the following real life examples:

- Re-thinking the timing of down-sizing the family home now that the children are unexpectedly moving away from home
- Considering working reduced hours as a result of a new opportunity to contribute to a charitable cause
- Exploring possible relocation to live closer to a family member with health challenges
- Taking advantage of a redundancy opportunity to alter career path
- Discovering that dragon boating is a wonderful (but expensive) excuse for the family to travel to exotic locations

If you don't see why all of these examples are relevant to you as their adviser then that is a different problem. I believe that your role as an adviser is to assist your clients to achieve all their aspirations that require money and planning. Isn't that why they are paying you?



The critical step is to conduct the conversation with your client in a manner that is absolutely aligned with your role. That means:

1. Listening with an open mind – so literally start with a fresh page rather than with your existing notes and plans.
2. Suspending judgment – so avoid overlaying your opinions, experiences and preferences.
3. Understanding their beliefs – so explore why they want something not just what they want or how they want to get there.
4. Investigating the implications for them – so don't start thinking about the implications for you (eg your strategies, your products and your fees).
5. Potentially redefining your relationship with them – so you may need a new engagement letter.

These skills are easy to list but difficult to deliver in practice, especially with existing clients who already have an old image of what you can do for them. They are also difficult to deliver because of the temptation to rely on assumptions and the temptation to resort to rapport when the conversation becomes serious but uncomfortable. These are the meetings when the presence of a second member of your team, someone who does not know the client at all, could be very useful in keeping you on track.

These are the best of times to enjoy a deep and meaningful conversation with each of your clients to better understand their new (or old) aspirations.