

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

Amy Vetter • Aug. 13, 2021



In an accounting world obsessed with advisory services, it's strange that we tend to overlook the foundational aspect of relationships: communication.

You don't need to be a research expert to find countless articles online detailing the vital importance of advisory services for accounting firms preparing for the future. As AI and machine learning advance, the thinking goes, compliance accounting based on computational accuracy and efficiency will become less valuable, forcing firms to lean on consultative services to generate value. The logic makes perfect sense, but knowing you need to improve and having the tools to do it are two entirely different

matters. And when it comes to advisory services, no tool is more important than

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

To frame it another way, you can't just be a good service provider; you have to make a **real connection** and be a trusted confidant. That trust is built through multiple interactions and conversations, and if you have the tools to make the most of those conversations, you'll be more helpful as an advisor. With that in mind, here are some ironclad communication tips for the advisory era.

Ask questions early and often

Whether you're having a first sit-down with a new client or chatting with a business owner you've known for years, you need to **ask pointed questions** in order to learn about the client's business. Understanding the mission and values of a business allows you to animate your analysis with knowledge of the qualitative parts of running a company. Similarly, learning the pain points your clients deal with regularly will help you provide individualized advice. No business owners want to feel like they're getting cookie-cutter suggestions.

You have to be willing to dig deeper for detail and reframe questions when you're not getting enough information. Taking the time to really investigate a client in as many ways as possible shows that you care and are invested in the client's success. It will also provide a much clearer picture of the client's operations.

Combine data and narrative

As an accountant, you know how to look at numbers and see the story they are telling. Many clients don't share this skill. You can't always show a client a spreadsheet and expect him or her to figure out its deeper meaning. To close that gap, it's so important that you contextualize numbers in order to help the client make sense of your advice. The hard truth is that the quality of your advice or its basis in statistical fact doesn't mean much if you cannot present it in a compelling way. If you've done your homework and asked good questions, you'll be able to attach your findings **to a story** that resonates with the client.

Becoming too reliant on narrative is also a problem, though perhaps one that fewer

Hello. It looks like you're using an ad blocker that may prevent our website from working properly. To receive the best experience possible, please make sure any blockers are switched off and refresh the page.

If you have any questions or need help you can email us

prefer unvarnished honesty in the simplest terms possible while others may require a more delicate touch. Delivering advice to clients in the style that makes them feel comfortable and cared for will go a long way toward the clients acting on your advice. In this respect, some clients may prove much more difficult than others. If you want to succeed in advisory, though, you have to make the effort to find the communication methods and styles that work best for the people you serve.

There are many ways to strengthen the suite of advisory services at your firm, but none will have as wide-ranging effects as focusing on the basic necessity of effective communication.

Advisory • CAS • Firm Management

CPA Practice Advisor is registered with the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) as a sponsor of continuing professional education on the National Registry of CPE Sponsors.

© 2024 Firmworks, LLC. All rights reserved