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By John Graziano, CPA, PFS, CFP®.

Landing a new client is exciting for any firm, but before solidifying your working relationship, it's important to go through the onboarding process.

Onboarding is a simple and effective way to ensure everyone understands how the relationship will work and what will be expected of each party. Taking the time to plan and optimize your onboarding will improve efficiency and client satisfaction.

Here's how to onboard your clients the right way:

1. Define Your Ideal Clients

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When you have a clear definition of who your clients are, what they need, and how you can serve them, it will allow you to optimize and improve your onboarding.

2. Standardize and Centralize Onboarding

Along with defining your ideal clients, it's important to standardize and centralize your onboarding process. Standardization ensures consistency, while centralization eliminates confusion.

Standardizing and centralizing the onboarding process will ensure that:

- Every client goes through the same process and is asked the same questions
- There's no confusion about where and how to onboard new clients

Standardizing and documenting the client onboarding process will help build the foundation for a fruitful relationship between your firm and your clients. Through standardization, you ensure that your process is:

- Consistent
- Organized
- Carried out in a timely manner
- Meets or exceeds the client's expectations

Centralizing the process ensures that all onboarding-related documents are in one location for better organization and management.

3. Understand Your Client's Needs

Onboarding is a great way to get to know your client's needs and learn more about their desired outcomes. Discuss what success means to your firm and ask your client

the same. Doing so will open up the conversation about their goals, how you can

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same direction for each client. Every client is unique, but your ultimate goal is simply to learn more about their needs and desired outcomes.

4. Set Expectations

When onboarding clients, it's crucial to set clear expectations for all parties. Clients should know what to expect from your firm and vice versa.

Setting expectations now – in the early stages of the relationship – will help prevent future problems and missed deadlines.

Make sure that clients understand:

- When your firm is available and your response times
- When clients should be submitting their deliverables
- When and how payments will be made
- The scope of the work
- Any other important information related to your services

Setting clear expectations will eliminate confusion and prevent client dissatisfaction. Skipping this step will only create headaches for your firm.

For example, if you don't communicate your availability and response time, clients may assume they can reach out anytime and get an immediate response. When their expectations aren't met, they may become upset, and your team may wind up spending more time putting out fires. Each time your team has to quell client expectations, it takes time away from core tasks.

Setting expectations can help prevent this type of situation. It ensures that everyone is on the same page and knows what to expect from each other.

5. Introduce Team Members to Clients

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Conclusion

Client onboarding lays the groundwork for successful client relationships, but it's important to ensure that your process is optimized, standardized, and centralized. Otherwise, onboarding will be inconsistent and haphazard at best.

Defining your ideal client, setting expectations, and understanding your client's needs will help you better serve each client that your firm takes on.

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