

Using the Voice of the Client to Drive Engagement and Growth: Action Plan



Introduction: Unlocking Client Value

An effective client survey does more than simply gather feedback on the service you provide; it can help you improve client engagement and drive growth. This guidebook draws on years of experience in conducting thousands of client feedback programs for financial advisors and is designed to help you use client input to effect real and positive change in your business.

Using Client Feedback

While it's easy to think of client feedback simply as a way to assess how you are doing, it is so much more. Executed effectively, client feedback will not only engage your clients but will help you drive growth.

More specifically, an effective client feedback program will allow you to:

- gauge satisfaction on all key aspects of the service you provide;
- understand what is most important to your clients;
- uncover client expectations;
- identify additional revenue and service opportunities;
- identify clients who are willing to provide referrals;
- assess client reaction to current or planned communications or activities; and
- demonstrate your commitment to your clients.

This guidebook is provided by Absolute Engagement to help you take action.

"The most successful financial professionals have achieved Absolute Engagement. It drives significant, meaningful growth and is created when you engage intentionally with your work, your clients and your team. Drawing on research among successful professionals, their clients and their teams, we examine and share proven tactics that will not only re-ignite your passion for the work you do, but help you achieve significant growth."

Julie Littlechild
Founder, Absolute Engagement

We're here to help! [Click here to schedule a live demo of Client Insights](#), our client feedback solution for advisors.

The Case for Client Feedback

Client feedback is a critical part of your overall client management strategy. Not only does it help you to define or refine a meaningful service plan, the process demonstrates leadership and helps you to drive client profitability and growth.

While there are a number of ways to gather and use client feedback, it's critical to have a consistent and objective way to understand what your clients are thinking. For many advisors the need to ask clients for feedback is self-evident. However, there are two specific reasons that should be important to all advisors.

1. Client feedback is linked to **client profitability** because it helps you:
 - identify specific clients at risk, thereby reducing attrition;
 - target individual clients who are comfortable providing referrals;
 - uncover opportunities to increase share of wallet; and
 - highlight individual opportunities to cross-sell clients on other services, based specifically on their interests and needs.
2. Client feedback is a **driver of client engagement** and engaged clients are among your most loyal, satisfied and profitable relationships because they also provide virtually all of your referrals. Investor research, conducted by Absolute Engagement, highlights the gap between the desire to be asked for feedback and the percentage of advisors doing so.¹

How important is it to you that your advisor ask for your input or feedback to help shape the service you receive?

70%

Say 'Important or Critical'

Has your advisor ever asked you for your input or feedback to help shape the service you receive?

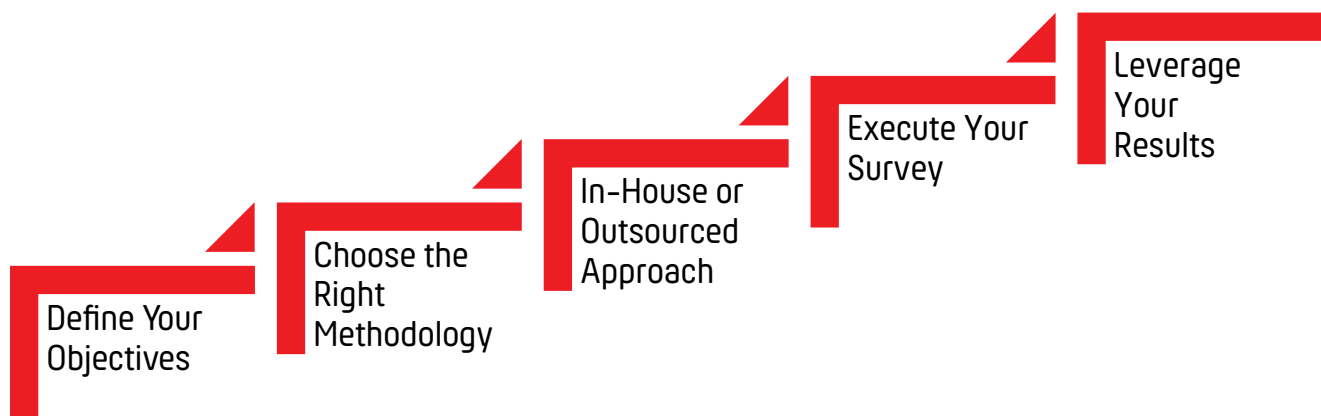
48%

Say 'Yes'

Defining the Process

An effective client feedback program should be well defined and driven by clear objectives for the business. Your process should consider why you are gathering feedback, how you will do it, what you will ask and, most importantly, the way in which you will leverage your results.

There are five key steps to consider for your client feedback program.



Define Your Objectives	What do you want to understand and how will you use the information in your business? Engagement? Growth? Both?
Choose the Right Methodology	Based on your objectives, do you need qualitative or quantitative feedback, or a mix of both? Most advisors use a quantitative survey to establish a benchmark.
In-House or Outsourced Approach	Will you do it all yourself or work with an outside expert such as Absolute Engagement?
Execute Your Survey	Send on-line or paper survey to clients and give them 2-3 weeks to respond.
Leverage Your Results	Focus time and attention on crafting a plan to use your results. You'll find examples of how to use feedback to drive growth, later in this guidebook.

Building a Better Survey

The effectiveness of your survey depends on two things: the extent to which the questions allow you to assess clients' needs and expectations (the survey) and the extent to which you can take meaningful action on the results (the analysis, tools and plan).

To follow is an overview of the key success factors for an effective client survey.

1. Ask questions on a range of topics.

Consider the following question categories when structuring your survey: satisfaction, expectations, communication, opportunities and profile. These question categories will allow you to structure, measure or refine a meaningful client experience and uncover additional opportunities among existing clients. Sample question types are included in the "What Do I Ask" section.

2. Keep it short.

An effective survey should take no more than 5-10 minutes for a client to complete, which is roughly equal to 20 questions. You can consider a shorter survey to increase response rate, however you should balance that against the quality and depth of the information that you gather.

3. Dig deep.

It's not only important to understand how clients rate you on specific aspects of service, but also the value they place on those things. By asking about both, you can prioritize your effort, focusing only on improving those things that are most important to your clients.

4. Ask actionable questions.

It's important to generate feedback on aspects of the practice that are within your control. For every question that you include, ask yourself a simple question: How will I change my behavior, or my business, in response to the answers to this question?

5. Set the stage.

Help your clients understand the importance of the survey, not only to your business, but to your ability to meet their needs. A cover letter is your best opportunity to build your case and encourage your clients to take an active role in the relationship.

Building a Better Survey (cont'd.)

6. Include a deadline for returning the survey.

In order to allow you to analyze your survey results effectively, you'll need to ensure that you receive all responses by a specific date. Two to three weeks is a reasonable timeframe, the former if all surveys are online and the latter if you are using paper surveys.

7. Include an incentive to respond.

An incentive to complete the survey should be included and clearly linked to the deadline you have established.

8. Make the client's name optional.

While it's frustrating to get specific suggestions from a client whose name is not included, making the name optional will increase your response rate and encourage clients to respond more honestly. If you're doing the survey yourself, rather than outsourcing to a third party like Absolute Engagement, this won't be an option.

9. Follow up with all clients.

Send a follow-up communication to your clients. It's important for clients who completed the survey to know that you have reviewed their comments and are making changes to reflect the needs of your clients. They need to know it was worth their time to participate.

10. Include an open-ended question.

Include a final question that asks clients how you can improve the business. It allows them to compliment or criticize, with fewer restrictions than the other questions.

What Do I Ask?

To provide you with some support in developing your questions, here are some suggested themes and an overview of how you might use the information.

Category	Description
Quality of Relationship	Assess the overall quality of the relationship. You may choose metrics such as satisfaction, loyalty or Net Promoter Score (likelihood to refer). This information is a starting point to evaluating performance over time.
Detailed Satisfaction	Assess satisfaction on a range of more specific service issues, such as confidence in the team, frequency of contact or investment performance.
Importance	Assess what is most important to your clients in a relationship with a financial advisor. This provides you with critical information on what your clients value. This information allows you to assess your current positioning and can help you to prioritize your time.
Expectations	Assess client expectations regarding the scope of contact, as well as the form of contact. This information allows you to manage expectations and structure a meaningful service plan.
Preferences	Assess preferences with respect to receiving other client communications (e.g. newsletters) and the way in which you communicate (e.g. e-mail vs. mail). This information allows you to assess your return on the communications/ events that you provide to clients and, potentially, to streamline the communication process.
Opportunities	Assess specific marketing opportunities among your clients, including referrals, share of wallet and cross-selling opportunities. This information allows you to target your client marketing efforts and increase average revenue per client.

Common Mistakes

Effective client feedback is part art and part science. You can improve your odds of success by avoiding these common pitfalls.

1. Asking questions that are too general.

If two people can interpret the meaning of the question differently, then you cannot accurately interpret the data.

2. Asking questions that are not linked to action.

For every question you create, ask yourself a simple question: so what? If you don't know what you will do with the answer, don't ask the question.

3. Asking too many questions.

You need to find the right balance between the number of questions and response rate.

4. Asking complicated questions.

The questions on a written/on-line survey need to be clear and concise, so that clients can easily answer them; if the question is difficult to interpret, the quality of the data will decline.

5. Asking two questions in one.

Advisors will often ask a question that includes two separate elements, making it impossible to interpret the data. For example, if you ask clients to rate satisfaction with the 'efficiency and knowledge of your team', you are actually asking two separate questions.

6. Focusing only on satisfaction.

An effective survey includes questions that assess satisfaction and identify new revenue or referral opportunities.

7. Focusing only on performance.

An effective survey provides information on how you are doing, but also helps you assess how to respond by assessing what is most important to your clients.

8. Focusing only on the averages.

Your survey data will be most helpful if you can isolate the responses from your top clients.

Using Feedback to Drive Growth

While asking clients for their feedback can be an 'engaging' process in and of itself, the process should lead to meaningful insights that drive real action. Here are just a few ideas on how you can use the results to grow your business.

#1. The Opportunity:

Uncover cross-selling or service opportunities.

The Question:

Which, if any, of the following are you interested in learning more about?

The Details:

Assess which services are of most interest and run lists of clients who have specifically indicated they are interested in learning more. Follow up to address unmet needs.

#2. The Opportunity:

Identify referral opportunity on a client-by-client basis.

The Question:

Have you provided a referral to your advisors in the last 12 months?

The Details:

Run a list of clients who say they provided a referral in the past 12 months, whether the advisor met the person or not. Follow up to turn the referral into an introduction.

#3. The Opportunity:

Identify clients at risk before they leave.

The Question:

How satisfied are you with your overall relationship with your financial advisor?

The Details:

Identify which clients are potentially 'at risk', based on their overall satisfaction ratings. Review their individual responses before following up directly.