HAPPY AGENT

Master the 9 Main Objections to take Full Control of Your Destiny

COACH PETE D'ARRUDA

CoachPete.com

HAPPY AGENT

HAPPY AGENT

Master the 9 Main Objections to Take Full Control of Your Destiny

COACH PETE D’ARRUDA

FINANCIAL SAFARI PRESS

Published by Financial Safari Press.

First edition.

Cover and interior design by Financial Safari Press.

CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383 · Pete@CoachPete.com

Printed in the United States of America.

For the families at the kitchen table, and the advisors brave enough to tell them the truth.

For the advisor who wants to help families and still sleep at night.

You can do both.

This is how.

Contents

BACK MATTER

START HERE

How to Use This Book

This is a working book, not a shelf book. It is the whole method I have taught hundreds of advisors, laid out in the order a real relationship actually moves. Read it once cover to cover so you can see the shape of the thing. Then keep it on the desk and open it to the part you need before a seminar, before a first appointment, before the call you have been putting off.

The book has six parts. The first is the mind you bring to the work, because everything downstream depends on it. The second is how you fill the room, on the air and from the stage. The third is the kitchen table, where the plan actually gets made. The fourth is the nine worries every prospect carries, and how to answer each one before it is ever spoken. The fifth is the close and the years that follow it. The sixth is the business behind the practice, the numbers that turn effort into a living.

You will see three tools repeated throughout. A Say This box gives you the words, close to how I would really say them, so you are not inventing language in the moment. A pulled line in the margin is the one sentence from a section worth remembering. And the figures are the pictures I draw on a legal pad at the table, cleaned up so you can copy them.

In the back you will find the Advisor's Toolkit: ten worksheets you can photocopy and use with a real family, from the Green-Flag Count to the Pipeline Scoreboard. Every one of them came out of a real appointment or a real week in the business.

One promise before we start. Nothing in here asks you to trick anybody. The whole system is built on saying the plain, honest thing to people who are scared about their money, and being the advisor they are glad they said yes to. Do it that way and it works for thirty years. Do it any other way and it works until it doesn't.

Figure 1. *One architecture at several altitudes; the Power Plan contains the rest.*

FOREWORD

A Word Before We Start

I have spent well over three decades on the same errand. Sit across from a family, listen until the real worry comes out, and help them turn the money they spent a lifetime saving into a paycheck they cannot outlive. I have done it at kitchen tables, on the radio, from a stage with a seven-foot game-show wheel, and I have taught a lot of good advisors to do it too.

Here is what I have learned. The families who need us most are not looking for a genius. They are looking for someone who will tell them the truth in plain words and then stand next to them while they act on it. The market does not scare them nearly as much as the feeling that nobody will give them a straight answer.

So this book is not a bag of closing tricks. It is a way of working. It starts with a belief, certainty over probability, and it ends with a practice full of families who send you their friends. In between is every honest move I know, in the order you will actually use them.

You do not have to be the loudest advisor in your town. You have to be the one who says the plain, honest thing, and then keeps showing up. That is the whole trade. Let me show you how I do it.

Coach Pete D'Arruda

PART ONE

The Mind of the Coach

Everything downstream depends on the mind you bring to the work.

CHAPTER 1

Coach, Not Salesman

A salesman wants the sale. A coach wants the win. Only one of them gets sent ten more.

The Prime Directive

I want to start you off with the only rule that matters, and everything else in this book hangs off it. Sell so the client wins. That is the whole job. Not so you win. Not so the sale closes today. Sell so that the family across the table is better off for having met you, and if that is not true, do not sell them anything at all. Say it back to yourself until it stops sounding like a slogan and starts sounding like a compass. Sell so the client wins.

Most people in this business have it pointed the wrong way. They wake up thinking about their number. The mortgage, the quota, the trip they want to earn. And the prospect can smell it. A retiree who has been around the block seventy years can smell a man who needs something from them before he has said his name. The minute they smell it, the door in their chest closes, and you are talking to a polite face with nobody home behind it.

So we point the whole thing the other way. When you walk in wanting the family to win, and only that, a strange thing happens. You relax. You stop performing. You start listening, because you actually need to know what winning looks like for these particular people, and you cannot know that until they tell you. The sale, it turns out, is a byproduct. It is what happens on the way to doing right by somebody. Chase the win for them and the sale follows you home. Chase the sale and you go home empty more often than not.

> *Sell so the client wins. Everything else in this book is a footnote to that one line.*

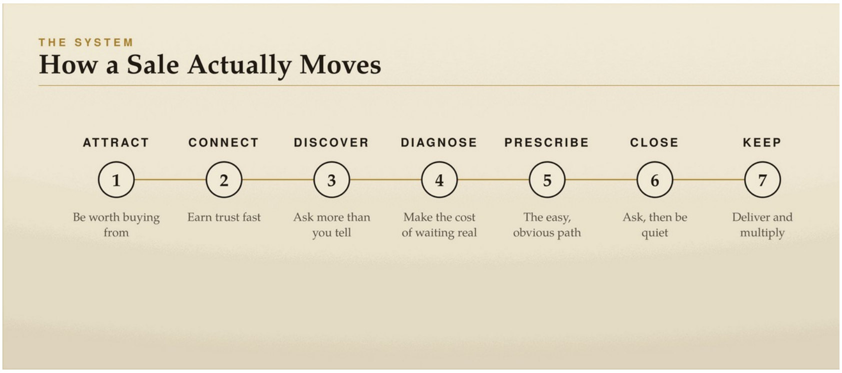

Figure 2. *How a sale actually moves, from attract to keep and multiply.*

Trust Is the Whole Product

Here is a thing that took me years to understand, and I want to hand it to you today so it does not take you years. You are not selling annuities. You are not selling a plan, a paycheck, or a piece of paper. You are selling trust. The product is trust. The annuity is just the thing trust rides in on.

Think about what you are really asking a person to do. You are asking a seventy-year-old to hand over money it took them a lifetime to save, money they cannot go back to work and earn again, and to believe you when you say it will be there for them for the rest of their life. There is no bigger ask in a person's financial life. The car, the house, all of it is smaller than this. So the question in their mind is never really about the product. It is about you. Can I trust this person with the thing I cannot afford to lose.

That means trust is not a nice-to-have. It is the whole inventory on your shelf. And here is the part that should keep you honest for the rest of your career. Trust does not scale the way you want it to and does not forgive the way you hope it will. Do right by one family and they do not just stay. They send you their brother, their bowling league, the couple three doors down who has been worried about the same thing for a year. A well-served client sends you ten. That is not a nice story. That is how a practice gets built.

Every good book of business I have ever seen was built on the backs of people who felt taken care of and could not stop talking about it.

Now the other side, and this one is heavier. A burned client costs you ten. Not one. Ten. Because a person who feels wronged tells everyone, and they tell it with feeling, and the story grows teeth. You will never meet the ten deals you lost. They just never call, and you never know why. That is the cruelty of it. The bad you do is invisible to you and loud to everybody else. So protect the trust like it is the only thing you own, because in this business it is.

> *A well-served client sends you ten. A burned one costs you ten you will never even meet.*

The Posture at the Door

Let me show you how a coach walks into a first meeting, because the posture is set before you say a word about money. You are warm. You are certain about what you know, and honest about what you do not. And you are never, ever desperate. Desperation is the one thing that ends a meeting before it starts. A retiree has been sold to their whole life, and they have a radar for it, and the second that radar pings, you are done.

So take the pressure off the room. Yours and theirs. Here is how I open, and I want you to hear how much I give away in the first minute.

> **SAY THIS** *"Folks, thanks for coming in. Let me tell you how I run these, so nobody is uncomfortable. Today is not the day you decide anything. Today I just want to understand your situation and see if there is even anything I can help with. Sometimes there is. Sometimes there is not, and if there is not, I will tell you that too and we will part as friends. Fair enough?"*
>
> *"I am going to ask you a lot of questions before I say a single thing about what I do. Because until I understand what you are trying to protect, anything I told you would just be a guess, and you did not drive down here for a guess."*

> *"And here is my promise. I will never talk you into something you should not do. If what you already have is working, I will be the first one to tell you to leave it alone and go enjoy your grandkids."*

Read those lines again and notice what they do. They tell the prospect they are safe. No decision today, no cornering, an honest man who will send them home if home is where they belong. When you take the pressure off, the guard comes down, and only then can you actually help. The paradox of this whole craft is that the less you push, the more people move toward you. Certainty is magnetic. Neediness repels. Be the calmest, least-needy person that family has talked to about their money in years, and watch what happens.

Lead With Questions, Talk Less Than They Do

A coach leads with questions. Always. If you leave a first meeting and you did most of the talking, you blew it, even if you were brilliant. Especially if you were brilliant. The goal is that the prospect talks more than you do, by a wide margin, because people trust the room where they were heard, and they buy from the person who understood them, not the person who impressed them.

So ask, and then get quiet. The quiet is the hard part. Most advisors ask a good question and then step on the answer with their own voice because silence makes them itch. Do not do that. Ask, then sit in it. Let them fill it. The good stuff, the fear that actually drives the decision, comes out in the second half of the answer, after the polite first half, in the space you left open.

> **SAY THIS** *"What does a good retirement look like to you? Not the numbers. The picture. Walk me through a Tuesday."*
> *"What keeps you up at three in the morning about your money? Everybody has one thing. What is yours?"*
> *"If nothing changes, and we just keep going the way you are going, how do you feel about where that lands you in ten years?"*

Those are what-and-how questions, and they do a job. They cannot be answered yes or no, so they open a person up. They make the prospect the one describing the problem out loud, in their own words, which means by the time you say anything, you are not selling them your idea. You are handing back their own words with a solution attached. That is a completely different thing, and it closes itself.

Honest to a Fault

Now I am going to teach you the move that separates a coach from a closer, and it is going to feel backward the first time you do it. Name a downside. On purpose. Out loud. Before they ask.

Every honest product has a trade-off, and the safe retirement income we build is no exception. When you put money in a vehicle that guarantees you a paycheck for life, you give something up to get it. You give up some liquidity. You accept a cap or a participation limit, so you share in the gain but not all of it. There is a surrender period where getting to all of it early costs you. These are real, and any guarantee rests on the strength of the company standing behind it, not on the government. A weak advisor hides all that and prays the client never reads the fine print. A coach says it first.

> **SAY THIS** *"Now let me tell you what I do not like about this, because there is always something. Your money is not as reachable here as it is in your checking account. If you needed every dollar of it next Tuesday, this is the wrong place for it. That is the trade you are making. In exchange for a check that cannot stop, you give up some of the getting-at-it. If that trade does not sit right with you, we should not do it."*

Watch what that does. When you volunteer the flaw, two things happen at once. First, you take away the thing they were bracing for, the catch, the hidden hook, and there is a visible relief in the room. Second, and this is the big one, everything else you said just became believable. The man who told me the bad part must be telling me the truth about the good part. You cannot buy that kind of credibility. You can only earn it by being willing to talk yourself partly out of the sale. Name a downside to earn belief. It is the most powerful trust move there is, and almost nobody has the nerve to use it.

> *The advisor who names the flaw first is the only one in the room the client fully believes.*

Suitability First, and the Power of Walking Away

Here is where a lot of good-hearted people still go wrong. They believe in what they sell, which is right, and then they slide into believing everybody needs it, which is wrong. Suitability comes first. Before the plan, before the pitch, you ask one honest question in your own head. Is this right for this particular person, in this particular situation, right now? Sometimes the answer is no. And when it is no, you say so, and you sell them nothing, and you mean it.

I have sat across from people whose safe income was already handled. Pension, Social Security, enough guaranteed money coming in to cover the life they wanted, with room to spare. They did not need one thing I sell. And I told them exactly that.

> **SAY THIS** *"You know what? You are in better shape than you think. The paycheck side of your life is already covered. If I sold you something today, I would be solving a problem you do not have. Go enjoy it. And if anything changes, you know where I am."*

I want you to feel how strong that is, not how much it costs. Yes, you walked away from a commission. But you walked away clean, and clean is worth more than the money. That couple will tell that story for years. The advisor who told us we did not need him. Do you know how rare that is? They will send you every friend they have, because you just proved the one thing everybody is desperate to find and almost never does. That you can be trusted even when trusting you costs you. Walking away from a bad fit is not lost business. It is the single best piece of marketing you will ever do, and it does not cost you a dime of your integrity.

> *Walking a bad-fit prospect out the door clean is the best marketing you will ever do.*

A Guide, Not a Peddler

So let me tie the whole thing together for you. There is a world of difference between a peddler and a guide, and you get to choose which one you are every single morning. A peddler has a thing to move and is looking for a person to move it to. The product came first and the person is just the destination. A guide starts with the person, learns where they are trying to go, and knows the safe path to get them there. The peddler serves the sale. The guide serves the traveler. Same industry. Two entirely different men.

When you sell safe retirement income the right way, you are a guide, and it is one of the most honorable things a person can do with a working life. Think about who you are actually helping. A schoolteacher who spent forty years afraid of running out. A widow who does not know if the money will last and is too proud to ask. A couple who saved every dollar the hard way and are terrified of one bad market wiping it out at the worst possible time. You are the one who can hand those people a night of real sleep. Not a hot tip. Not a lottery ticket. A paycheck that cannot stop, and the peace that comes with it. That is not selling. That is guiding somebody home.

Our whole promise is the glide path to a safe landing. A pilot does not just get the plane in the air. Anybody can get it up. The pilot gets it down, gently, everyone safe, exactly where they meant to land. That is your job with a family's money. Not the excitement of the climb. The certainty of the landing. So carry yourself like the guide you are. Warm, certain, honest to a fault, in no hurry, and pointed at one thing only. Sell so the client wins. Do that, and the sales, the referrals, the practice, all of it comes and comes and does not stop. Do the other thing, and it dries up, and you will never be sure why. Be the coach. It is better business, and it lets you sleep at night, and those two things were never really separate at all.

> *The peddler serves the sale. The guide serves the traveler. You choose which one you are every morning.*

CHAPTER 2

Certainty, Not Probability

A probability is a bet. Certainty is a plan. For the money a family lives on, only one of those is a kindness.

The Belief That Powers Everything

In the last chapter I gave you the compass. Sell so the client wins. Now I am going to give you the engine, the single belief that powers this entire system, and if you do not believe it in your bones, none of the scripts in this book will ever sound like you mean it. Here it is. For the money a family lives on, you want certainty, not probability.

Read that again. Not for all their money. For the money they live on. The rent, the groceries, the light bill, the medicine, the money that has to be there on the first of every month whether the market went up or down. For that money, a probability is not good enough, and I do not care how high the probability is. Because a family does not spend a probability. They cannot take a percentage to the pharmacy. They spend an actual dollar, on an actual Tuesday, and either the dollar is there or it is not.

Everybody in this business talks about returns. Coaches talk about certainty. That is the whole difference, and once you see it you cannot unsee it. Your prospect has been trained for forty years to chase the number, the growth, the beating-the-market. Your job is to walk them, gently, to a truth nobody ever told them. In retirement, certainty beats performance, because certainty is the thing that lets you sleep, and sleep is what they actually came in for.

> *A family cannot take a percentage to the pharmacy. They spend a dollar, on a Tuesday, and it is either there or it is not.*

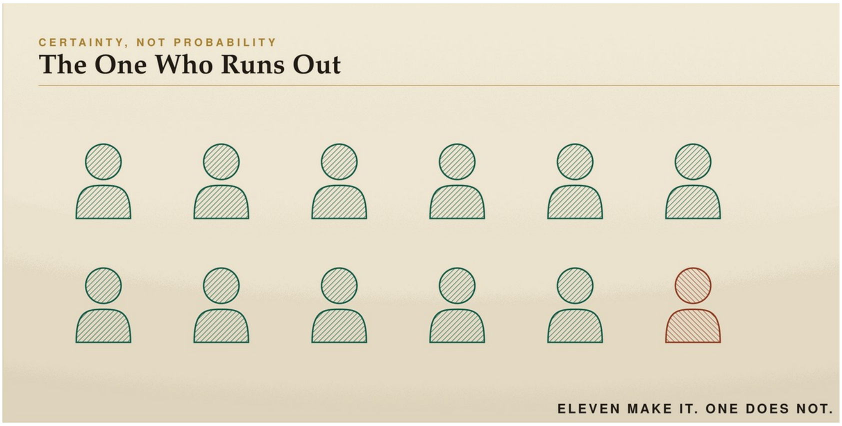

Figure 3. *A backtest that fails part of the time still fails a real family.*

A Probability Is Not a Promise

Now let me hand you the tool that opens this up at the kitchen table, because you are going to run into a famous number, and you need to know what it really is. It is called the four percent rule. Somebody, an advisor or a magazine or a brother-in-law, has told your prospect that they can safely pull four percent out of a pile of money in the market every year and never run out. It sounds like a law of nature. It is not. It is a probability wearing the costume of a promise.

Here is where it came from, plainly. A fellow ran the numbers on American market history and found that if you pulled four percent a year, adjusted for inflation, your money lasted thirty years in most of the stretches he tested. Thirty years. That is the fence around the whole thing, and almost nobody says that part out loud. He did not test forty years. He did not test a couple who retires at fifty-eight and lives to ninety-eight. And he used American history, which happens to be the single best run of markets any country has ever had.

So what you have is a rule of thumb that worked most of the time, over one length of retirement, in one lucky country's past.

That is genuinely useful information. It is also not a promise, and the industry has spent decades letting people believe it is. Your job is not to attack the number. Your job is to tell the truth about what kind of number it is.

> **SAY THIS** *"Somebody told you four percent is safe, right? Almost everybody has heard that. Let me tell you what that number actually is, because it is not what you think. It is not a guarantee. It is a backtest. It means it worked most of the time in the past, over thirty years, in the American market. That is a probability. What you are trying to plan is a certainty. Those are two very different animals, and I want to make sure you know which one you are betting your groceries on."*

You Get to Live It Once

Here is the line I want you to carry into every meeting for the rest of your career, and I want you to say it slow. It works most of the time in a backtest. But you do not get to live your retirement most of the time. You get to live it once.

Sit with how heavy that is. A probability describes what happens across a thousand imaginary retirements. Your prospect is not having a thousand retirements. They are having one. For them, the outcome is not ninety-two percent. It is either fine or it is a catastrophe, and there is no in-between, and no do-over. The success number invites a person to feel like the average of a thousand strangers, comfortable and blurry. The truth pulls them back into their own single life, which is the only place they have ever actually lived.

This is why I never let a probability sit in the room dressed up as safety. When an advisor tells a retiree there is a ninety percent chance their plan works, that advisor is describing something real and hiding what it means. Because ninety percent chance it works is the same sentence as one in ten of these people runs out of money. Same arithmetic. Completely different feeling. And only one of them is the honest way to say it.

SAY THIS *"Let me flip that around for you, because ninety percent sounds like an A on a report card, and this is not a report card. A ninety percent chance it works means one in ten runs out. Picture ten couples just like you, in a room. Nine make it. One does not, and they run out at eighty-six with the house already sold. Somebody is that couple. Nobody in that room knew it would be them."*

> *You do not get to live your retirement most of the time. You get to live it once.*

The One in Twelve

Let me give you the number I actually use, and where it comes from, so you never have to guess and never have to stretch it. For a healthy couple retiring in their late fifties, the money has to last closer to forty years, not thirty. And when you run that famous four percent over forty years instead of thirty, it fails about one time in twelve. One in twelve. Not one in a hundred. Not a rounding error. One family in twelve, out of money while they are still alive to need it.

Notice that I do not say it succeeds ninety-two percent of the time, even though that is the same fact. I say one in twelve fails. Always quote the failure, and always as a count of human beings, because that is what the number means and that is what your prospect is deciding about. Ninety-two percent is a grade. One in twelve is a room with twelve couples in it and one of them broke. Say the thing the number means.

And it gets worse the longer the retirement, which is exactly the direction longevity is moving. Stretch it past forty years and the failure rate climbs. There are three things that break this rule, and you should be able to name all three at the table. A bad market early, when you are selling shares at the bottom to buy groceries instead of buying them cheap. The order the years arrive in, which matters more near the goal line than the average ever will. And any retirement longer than the thirty years the thing was ever tested for. Name those three and the prospect understands, in their gut, that four percent was never the sure thing they were promised.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is the part nobody mentions. That four percent was tested on a thirty-year retirement. If you retire at fifty-eight and live to ninety-eight, that is forty years, and over forty years it fails about one time in twelve. Now, would you get on a plane with a ninety-one percent chance of landing? Of course not. You would not put your grandkids on it either. So why would you put the rest of your life on those same odds?"*

That plane line does a job, so use it and then get quiet. But do not leave them scared, because fear is not the point. Structure is the point. The very next thing out of your mouth is the honest follow-through. It works most of the time. You just do not get most of the time. You get once. So let us build the part you live on out of something that does not have odds attached to it at all.

From the Winning Game to the Keeping Game

Now I need to teach you the biggest shift in your prospect's whole financial life, because most of them are standing right on top of it and cannot see it. There are two completely different games, and the rules that win one will lose the other.

The first game is the accumulation game. The saving years. This is the winning game, and the market is your friend here, genuinely. When you are working and putting money in every month, a crash is quietly a gift, because your same paycheck buys more shares while they are on sale. Time is on your side. Volatility is on your side. You can ride out any bad year because you are not touching the money, you are feeding it. For thirty or forty years, the goal is simple. Grow the pile. Win.

Then one day they stop working, and the game changes underneath them, and almost nobody tells them. Now it is the income game. The keeping game. And every rule flips. Now you are not feeding the pile, you are eating it. A crash is no longer a gift, it is a wound, because now you are selling shares at the bottom to pay for groceries, and those shares are gone, they are not there to recover with the rest. Time stops being your friend. The very same market that built the wealth can now take it, at the worst possible moment, in exactly the ten-year window when a big loss hurts the most.

That window has a name in our shop. We call it the Financial REDZONE®, the years from about fifty-two on, or within ten years of the day they stop working. I got the picture from Rocky Bleier, the four-time Super Bowl champion, who told me on my own radio show that when you finally get the ball down to the goal line, the worst thing in the world you can do is fumble. That is the red zone of a retirement. A fumble in the saving years, you recover. A fumble at the goal line can cost you the whole game. So the whole task changes. It stops being how do I win, and starts being how do I keep, and how do I turn this pile I built into a paycheck that shows up for the rest of my life.

> *The saving years are the winning game. The retirement years are the keeping game. Every rule flips, and almost nobody warns them.*

What a Retiree Is Actually Buying

So here is where all of this lands, and it is the thing I most want you to understand about the person across your table. A retiree is not buying a rate of return. They are buying certainty. That is the actual product. Everything else is packaging.

Think about what they are afraid of. It is not that they will earn eight percent instead of ten. Nobody lies awake over that. What they lie awake over is running out. Becoming a burden to their kids. Watching a market they cannot control decide whether they can stay in their house. That fear is about the floor, not the ceiling. And you cannot answer a floor fear with a ceiling promise. You cannot calm a man worried about running out by showing him a chart of how much he might make. You calm him by showing him a paycheck that cannot stop, no matter what the market does, for as long as he and his spouse are alive.

That is the shift you are selling, from probability to certainty, from a bet to a plan, from I hope this lasts to I know this lasts. When you get that couple to see the difference, you will watch their shoulders come down. It is a physical thing. Because for the first time in years, somebody finally answered the actual question, which was never how do I get rich. It was always, quietly, will I be okay. Certainty is the only honest answer to that question, and certainty is what you are here to build.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me ask you something. When you think about your money, what would mean more to you? A shot at a little more, with a chance you run short? Or knowing, for certain, that a check hits your account every month for the rest of both your lives, no matter what the market does? Because we can build either one. But for the money you live on, I only ever want to build the second one. That is not the exciting choice. It is the one that lets you sleep. And you did not come in here for excitement. You came in here to be okay."*

So carry the belief. For the money a family lives on, you want certainty, not probability. Say it until it is yours. The four percent rule is a probability, not a promise. Your prospect gets to live their retirement once. The game changed the day they stopped working, and the thing they are truly buying, under all the numbers, is the certainty of a safe landing. Get that into your bones, and you will never again sell a retiree a bet and call it a plan.

CHAPTER 3

The Glide Path to a Safe Landing

A good pilot does not hope for the runway. He flies the glide path down to it.

The Rocket and the Plane

Here is the whole promise you sell, folks, in one picture. Retirement should feel like a plane gliding down to a smooth landing. Wheels touch, brakes ease on, everybody claps a little, and the family walks off with their bags. It should not feel like a rocket you strap yourself to and hope does not blow up on the pad.

Most of the people who sit across your table have been flying a rocket their whole working life and did not know there was another way. Their money went up, their money went down, and somebody told them that was just how it works. When they were forty that was fine. A rocket is thrilling at forty. You have twenty-five years to recover if the thing shakes itself apart. But they are not forty anymore. They are sixty, or fifty-eight, or sixty-three, and they are getting ready to land.

Your job, when you sit down with them, is to change the picture in their head. You are not selling a product on page one. You are selling the difference between a rocket and a plane. Get that picture set and the rest of the conversation gets easy. Miss it and you will fight for every inch.

> *A rocket is a bet on the takeoff. A plane is a plan for the landing.*

A pilot flying a real plane does not white-knuckle the last ten minutes and pray. He gets on the glide path miles out. He trims the speed. He lines up the nose. He brings it down slow and steady so that when the wheels find the ground it is almost gentle. That is what a good retirement feels like from the inside. Steady. Boring, even. And boring, in retirement, is a beautiful thing.

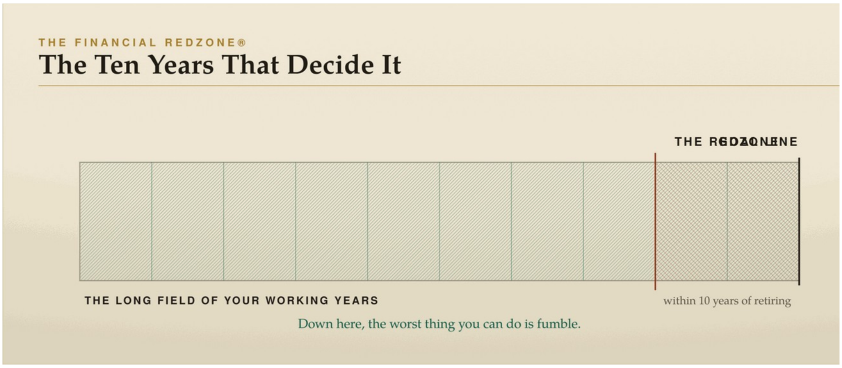

Figure 4. *The ten years where a loss hurts the most.*

You Only Land This Plane Once

Now here is the line I want you to burn into every prospect, and I want you to say it slow. You only land this plane one time. There is no second attempt. You do not get to circle back around and try the runway again with different weather.

This matters because of a lie that has been sold to your prospects for thirty years, and it wears a respectable suit. It is called the four percent rule. The idea is you can pull four percent out of a pile of market money every year and, most of the time, it lasts. And I want you to hear the trapdoor in that sentence. Most of the time.

Most of the time is a probability. It is not a promise. It works in a backtest. It works on a spreadsheet where you get to run the retirement a thousand times and average the results.

> *You do not get to live your retirement most of the time. You get to live it once.*

Run a hundred retirements on a computer and a few of them go broke. Call it one in twelve, roughly, depending on whose numbers you use and how the market behaves right after the person quits work. On paper, one in twelve is a footnote. Across the kitchen table it is a person. It is a real man and a real woman who did everything the brochure said and still ran out of money at eighty-one because the market fell apart in the first few years after they retired and their withdrawals dug the hole deeper.

Teach your prospect this and teach it plainly. If eleven planes land fine and one goes off the end of the runway, that is a wonderful statistic for the airline and a terrible day for the twelfth family. And nobody knows in advance which plane they are on. That is the part that should keep a person up at night, and it is the part you were put in that chair to fix.

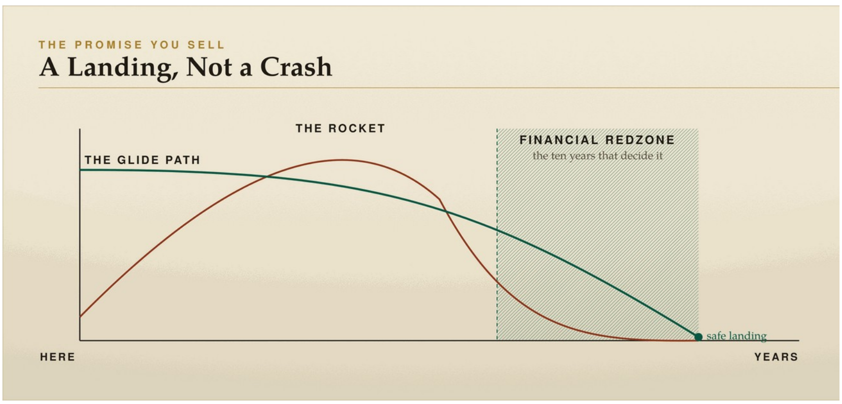

Figure 5. *A landing you can count on, not a crash you hope to avoid.*

Ten Years From the Goal Line

So when does the flying change? When do you take your hand off the throttle of the rocket and get on the glide path? The most important timing question in this whole business has a name. The Financial REDZONE®.

The Financial REDZONE® is the ten-year period leading to retirement. That is the definition. Ten years out from the day the paycheck stops, you have entered it, and once you are in it the rules of the game change.

Let me tell you where the name came from, because the story is the reason people remember it. I did a financial radio show years ago with Rocky Bleier. Four-time Super Bowl champion, ran the ball for the Pittsburgh Steelers. And on the air he said to me, Coach, when we got down to the goal line, the worst thing you can do is fumble the ball. That stuck with me. A team can fumble at midfield and shake it off. You punt, you play defense, you get the ball back. Fumble on the goal line, with the game on the line, and you can lose the whole thing right there.

> *Fumble at midfield and you punt. Fumble on the goal line and you lose the game.*

Your prospect's money is on the goal line in the last ten years before retirement. A big loss at forty is a bruise. A big loss at fifty-eight, right as they are lining up to score, can cost them the game. Not because the percentage is bigger. Because they have no time and no paycheck left to make it back. That is the whole argument, and a running back handed it to me in one sentence on the radio.

Most people I sit with plan to retire around sixty-two. Ten years out from sixty-two is fifty-two. So if you want a plain rule of thumb for a prospect who has not picked a date yet, fifty-two and up is a fair place to start the conversation. But hold the ten-year window as the real definition. Somebody who intends to work until seventy is not in the REDZONE® at fifty-two. They are eighteen years out, and they can still fly the rocket a while longer. Somebody retiring at fifty-five entered the window at forty-five and nobody warned them. The clock runs from the landing, not from the birthday.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me ask you a straight question. When do you want the paycheck to stop and the freedom to start?"*

> *"Okay, sixty-two. So you are ten years out. In football they call that the red zone, inside the twenty, where every mistake counts double. You are inside the twenty on your own retirement right now. That is not a reason to panic. It is a reason to change how you carry the ball."*

Protect First, Grow Second

Here is what changes inside the window, and it is four words. Protect first, grow second. Say it in that order every time, because the order is the whole point.

Notice what I did not say. I did not say stop growing. I did not say sell everything and hide it under the mattress. Growth does not stop when a plane starts its descent. The engines are still running the whole way down. What changes is the priority. On the way up, growth leads and safety tags along. On the way down, safety leads and growth follows behind it.

A young pilot climbing to altitude can be aggressive. A pilot on final approach flies with a different kind of care, because the ground is close now and there is no altitude left to trade for a mistake. Same airplane. Same pilot. Different phase of the flight. Your prospect has flown the climb beautifully. Now you are going to teach them the descent.

> *Growth is how you got here. Protection is how you land.*

This is where you separate yourself from the fellow who has your prospect a hundred percent in the market at sixty and calls it a strategy. You do not have to say a word against that other advisor. You just draw the plane and the rocket on a napkin and ask which one they want to be riding when they touch down. The picture does the arguing for you.

What a Safe Landing Actually Means

Now be careful here, because a lot of advisors think a safe landing means the account never goes down. That is not it. That is not even possible, and if you promise it you have lied to a person who trusted you. A safe landing is not a number on a statement that never dips.

A safe landing means the income shows up. Every month. No matter what the market did that morning.

Ask a retiree what actually scares them and it is almost never the account balance in the abstract. It is a smaller, harder thing. It is standing in the grocery store doing math on the milk. It is looking at the calendar and the checking account at the same time. It is the fear that the money that is supposed to feed them for thirty years will not be there in year eighteen. A safe landing is the end of that specific fear. It is the day the retiree stops watching the news to find out whether they can eat this month, because their income does not take orders from the news.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me tell you what a safe landing feels like, because it is not what most people think. It is not a bigger number on a page. It is the fifteenth of the month, and a check is in the mailbox, and you did not have to check the market to know it would be there. It shows up if the market is up. It shows up if the market is down. It shows up if the market is closed for a holiday and the whole world is at the lake. That is a safe landing. The worry is just gone."*

That is the promise. Income that does not care what the Dow did. Money that arrives the way sunrise arrives, whether or not you were watching for it. When you can make a sixty-year-old feel that in their chest, at the table, you have done the most important thing you will do all day. The product that delivers it comes later. First they have to want the landing.

And here is the part that makes it real for a married couple, so do not skip it. Set the income up right and the survivor keeps the check. When one of them is gone, the other one is not suddenly doing the milk math alone at eighty-four. The plane lands safely for both of them, and it stays landed. That is the difference between a paycheck you allocate and a paycheck you own for two lives.

Flying the Glide Path with a Prospect

Let me give you the whole picture the way I paint it at the table, so you can hear how the pieces connect. You do not lecture this. You draw it and you let it breathe.

> **SAY THIS** *"Picture your retirement as an airplane. For thirty-five years you have been climbing. Higher, faster, more altitude, and that was exactly right. That is how you got up here with something worth protecting."*
>
> *"But you are not climbing anymore. You are getting ready to land. And nobody wants a pilot who flies the whole trip like a rocket and then just points the nose at the ground and hopes."*
>
> *"A good pilot gets on the glide path. Slow, steady, lined up with the runway, and he brings it down gentle. That is what the next ten years are about for you. Not stopping. Landing."*
>
> *"Here is the only question that matters. When those wheels touch down, do you want to be sure, or do you want to be hoping? Because you only land this plane one time."*

Then you go quiet. That is the discipline most advisors never learn. You ask the sure-or-hoping question and you close your mouth and you let them sit in it. The silence is doing your selling for you. Whoever talks first in that moment usually loses, and it should not be you.

When they answer, and they will answer sure, you have your opening, and it is an honest one. Now you can talk about the glide path in real numbers. What must get paid every month no matter what. What is already guaranteed against it. What the gap is. And how you close that gap with income that shows up like the sunrise. But none of that lands until the picture is set. Rocket or plane. Hoping or sure. Land it once and land it right.

> *You are not the pilot. They are. You are the one who teaches them how to descend.*

That is the mind of the coach. You are not there to fly their plane for them and you are not there to sell them a shinier rocket. You are there to hand a person who has been climbing their whole life the one thing nobody ever taught them. How to come down safe, on purpose, one time, and never fear the landing again. Plan it once, plan it for life, and let them walk off the plane with their bags and their spouse and their whole retirement still in front of them.

PART TWO

Fill the Room

Be worth buying from, on the air and from the stage.

CHAPTER 4

Become Someone Worth Buying From

The advisor the town already trusts has half the sale made before the first handshake.

Chasing Is a Losing Game

Let me start with the hardest truth in this whole business, and I want you to sit with it. If you spend your career chasing people, you will be tired, you will be broke, and you will be treated like every other salesman who ever cold-called them during dinner. Chasing is a losing game. The prospect can smell it. The moment a person feels chased, they pull back, because in their whole life the people who chased them hardest were the ones who wanted something for themselves.

There is a different way to work, and it is the way I have worked for thirty years. You make them come to you. You become the person in your town that folks already know, already trust, and already want to sit with before they have met you one time. When that happens the whole feeling of the business flips. You stop begging for appointments. People start asking for one.

> *A salesman chases. An authority gets sought out.*

Now I am not telling you this so you can feel good. I am telling you because it is the most practical thing you will read in this book. Every technique I teach you later, every question, every script, every close, works ten times better when the person across the table already believes you are the expert. Authority is not a nice-to-have. It is the ground everything else stands on. So before we ever talk about filling a seat, we are going to talk about becoming somebody worth buying from.

Reputation Is the Asset

Most advisors think their asset is their book of business. It is not. Your real asset is your reputation, and the difference matters more than you know. A book of business is what you have. A reputation is what walks into a room ahead of you and warms the chair before you sit in it.

Think about how people actually pick an advisor. They do not read a prospectus. They ask a neighbor. They hear a name three times and start to trust it. They see a fellow give a straight answer on the radio and think, that is who I want handling my money. Reputation is the machine that turns strangers into people who already like you. And a reputation is built on purpose, the same way you build a plan, one honest brick at a time.

Here is the good news, and I want you to hear it. You already have the raw materials. You have helped families. You have real stories of people who slept better after they left your office. You have years of doing the right thing when nobody was watching. The only thing you have not done is make sure your town knows it. That is the work of this chapter. Not becoming someone new. Becoming known for who you already are.

Teach, Do Not Pitch

Here is the single most important word in authority, and it is not sell. It is teach. The person who teaches is trusted. The person who pitches is watched with one hand on the wallet. Same information, completely different reception, and the only variable is which chair you chose to sit in.

A pitchman walks into a room needing something. He needs the appointment, he needs the sale, he needs to hit his number, and everybody in the room can feel that need coming off him like heat. A teacher walks into the same room with something to give. He is there to make people smarter about their own money, and if some of them want more help afterward, wonderful, and if they do not, they still leave better off than they came. That posture, that generosity, is what people mean when they say somebody has presence.

> *Nobody ever felt chased by a teacher.*

> **SAY THIS** *"I am not here to sell you anything today. I am here to teach you three things about retirement income that most people find out the hard way, ten years too late. If at the end you want to sit down with me, my door is open. If you just want the three things and a good cup of coffee, that is fine too."*

Say that and mean it, and watch what happens. The room leans in. Because you just did the one thing the last four financial people who talked to them did not do. You took the pressure out of the air. And here is the quiet part nobody tells you. The teacher closes more business than the pitchman ever will, precisely because he was not trying to.

Be the Voice

Now let me tell you how you scale trust, because you cannot shake every hand in your county one at a time. You become a voice they hear before they ever meet you.

For me that voice was the radio. Years ago I started doing a show, and I built it into The Financial Safari®, and I turned that work into a company called Broadcasting Experts® because I believe every good advisor should be the expert their community hears from. Radio, and podcast, and television, and video. When a person hears you every week explaining retirement in plain words, giving straight answers, telling the honest downside as readily as the upside, something happens in their mind that money cannot buy. You become familiar. You become the one they already know.

Think about the first time a radio listener walks into your office. They have heard your voice for a year. They know your stories. They have laughed at your jokes in their car on the way to work. To them you are not a stranger with a business card. You are practically a friend who happens to do this for a living. That whole first meeting, the one that is awkward and cautious for the advisor with no name, is warm and easy for you. The voice did that. The voice arrived before you did.

You do not need my show and you do not need my company. You need a microphone and a schedule and the discipline to show up. A weekly segment on a local station. A podcast you record in your office. A video every Friday that answers one real question a retiree actually asked you that week. Consistency is the whole trick. The voice folks hear once is noise. The voice they hear every single week becomes the expert in their head.

Put Your Name on a Book

Here is a piece of authority that outranks almost everything else, and it costs you time more than money. Write a book. Put your name on the cover. Nothing on this earth says expert like a book, because in the mind of the public only experts write them.

I do not care that you and I both know plenty of thin books get written by people with thin ideas. The prospect does not know that. To a sixty-year-old couple deciding who to trust with their life savings, a book is proof. It is heavy in the hand. It sits on the coffee table. When you hand it across the desk and say, I wrote this, the entire balance of the conversation shifts. You are no longer a person selling a thing. You are the author of the book on the thing.

> *You cannot argue a man out of trusting the fellow who wrote the book.*

> **SAY THIS** *"Before we get started, I want you to have this. I wrote it. It walks through everything we are going to talk about, in plain English, so you can read it at your kitchen table with no salesman in the room. Take it home. Mark it up. Come back with your questions."*

Watch a couple hold that book. They handle it differently than a brochure. A brochure gets glanced at and dropped in the recycling. A book gets taken home and respected. And every day it sits on their counter it is teaching them and vouching for you at the same time.

Own One Position

Now a warning, because this is where good advisors dilute themselves into nobody. Do not try to be known for everything. The advisor who is a little bit of stocks and a little bit of insurance and a little bit of taxes and a little bit of everything is remembered for nothing. Authority comes from owning one clear position and repeating it until your town says it back to you.

Mine is simple. Straight answers and guaranteed retirement income, with no pressure. That is it. That is what I am known for. When somebody in my area thinks about protecting their retirement so the income cannot run out, my name is the one that surfaces, because I have said the same clear thing ten thousand times and never muddied it. Repetition of one position beats variety every time. The market does not remember complicated. It remembers one thing, said often.

So pick your one thing. Say it on the radio, say it in the book, say it from the stage, say it on the sign, say it in the first sentence out of your mouth. Do not get bored of it. You will get sick of your own message years before your market has even started to hear it.

The One Who Shows Up

Authority is also built with your feet, in your own town, where you already live. This is the part an advisor with no budget can start on Monday morning, and I want you to write these down.

- Offer to teach a free class at the public library on retirement income, no product talk, pure education, and let them put it in the community calendar
- Get on the schedule at the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis, the chamber of commerce, and every service group that is starving for a good speaker who will not bore them

- Teach a class through the local community college continuing-education program, where being the listed instructor puts the word expert next to your name in a catalog thousands of people receive
- Show up at the events that already draw the people you serve, the church supper, the veterans hall, the senior center, not to sell but to be seen being helpful
- Answer the one retirement question in the local paper or the neighborhood newsletter every month, for free, with your name on it

None of that costs much. All of it compounds. The advisor who shows up, again and again, at the library and the Rotary and the church supper, becomes the retirement guy in that town within a couple of years. Not because he was the smartest. Because he was there, and the others were home. Showing up is a strategy almost nobody runs, which is exactly why it works.

> **SAY THIS** *"I teach a free class at the library on the second Tuesday of the month. Come sit in. Bring your spouse, bring your questions, bring a skeptic if you have got one in the family. Worst case you learn something and I buy the coffee."*

Send the Proof Ahead of You

When somebody does raise their hand and ask to learn more, do not answer with a thin little postcard. Send them a package that overwhelms them with honest proof of who you are. The book. A one-page plain-English piece on how you work and what to expect. A handful of real, honest reviews from people you have helped. Maybe the schedule of your class or a link to your show.

Here is why this works. Trust is a curve, and every piece of genuine proof you put in a person's hands bends that curve down toward yes before you have spent one minute together. By the time they walk into your office they have read your book, seen your reviews, and heard your voice. The suspicion that the other advisor has to spend the whole first meeting overcoming, you handled in the mailbox a week early.

> **SAY THIS** *"I do not ask people to trust me because I said so. I hand them the book, the reviews, and a plain plan, and I let them judge me on all three. Take your time with it. This is your retirement, not mine."*

Why It Shortens Every Conversation

Let me close by connecting this back to the money, because that is why we are doing any of it. Everything in the rest of this book, the discovery questions, the diagnosis, the prescription, the close, gets shorter and calmer when authority is already in place.

Think about the two versions of the same first meeting. In the first, nobody knows you. You spend forty minutes proving you are credible, defending against the suspicion that you are just another salesman, and clawing for a little trust before you can even ask a real question. In the second, they read your book, they heard your show, a neighbor sent them, and they walked in already believing you are the expert. That whole first forty minutes is gone. You start at trust instead of ending there. The sale that took three meetings for the stranger takes one for the authority.

> *Authority is a tax cut on every conversation you will ever have.*

That is what it means to become someone worth buying from. You are not learning to be slicker. You are becoming, in public and on purpose, the honest expert your town needs anyway. You teach, you show up, you put your name on your word, and you let the proof arrive ahead of you. Do that for a couple of years and you will stop chasing appointments for the rest of your career. People will call you, and they will already be halfway to yes. Plan Once, Plan for Life®, and let the whole town know you are the one who will help them do it.

CHAPTER 5

The Financial Safari® on the Air

A stranger who has heard your voice every Saturday for a year is not a stranger. That is the whole secret.

The call that doesn't feel cold

Let me tell you what happens when radio is done right. A woman calls the office on a Tuesday. She is 64, her husband handled the money and he passed in the spring, and she is scared. But here is what she says to my assistant before she says anything else. She says, "I feel like I already know Coach Pete." She has never met me. She has never shaken my hand. She has been riding around in her car with me every Saturday morning for a year, and somewhere in there I stopped being a voice on the radio and started being the fellow she trusts. That call is not a cold lead. There is no such thing as a cold lead when your voice has been in somebody's kitchen for a year. That is the prize, and everything in this chapter is about how you win it.

Most advisors think a show is where you talk about the market. It is not. A show is a machine that goes out and gets the appointment for you while you sleep, and keeps working whether or not there is news and whether or not you feel like showing up. I have been on the radio since 2003, better than fifty stations now, and I will tell you the honest part first. The price of that machine is boredom. It is a Tuesday, the segment is due, nobody would notice if you phoned it in. You do not phone it in. Consistency is the whole strategy. The person who hears you once forgets you. The person who hears you forty times feels like family.

How many green flags go up on your mailbox?

Here is the single most useful thing you can do on the air, and it costs you nothing. You teach one picture and you ask one question. The picture is The Financial Fill-Up®. Set up right, every single month a green flag goes up on the mailbox, a check arrives that you cannot outlive, and if you go first your spouse keeps that check. Then you ask the question that does all the work.

> **SAY THIS** *"So let me ask you something, and I want you to actually answer it out loud in the car. How many green flags go up on your mailbox each month? How many checks show up that will keep showing up no matter how long you live and no matter what the market does?"*
>
> *"For most folks the honest answer is one. Social Security. That's it. One green flag. Everything else in the plan is a hope, and a hope is not a paycheck."*

Now watch what you just did. You did not sell anything. You did not name a product. You handed the listener a mirror and a number, and the number is one, and one is not enough, and they know it before you say another word. That is teaching, and teaching is what earns you the right to ask for anything later. The green-flag question is the best diagnostic I have ever put on the air, because the listener answers it in their own head, in their own driveway, and nobody argues with a conclusion they reached themselves.

> *You cannot talk a person into trusting you on the radio. You can only be useful enough, often enough, that they decide it on their own.*

Investtainment first, the ask comes later

I am in the excitement business. My own word for it is Investtainment, and it is not a gimmick. People remember what they enjoy. If a lesson makes somebody laugh or lean in, it sticks, and a lesson that sticks is a lesson that changes what a person does with their money. Serious does not have to mean boring. So the first job of the show is never the ask. The first job is to be genuinely useful and genuinely enjoyable, so that turning the radio off feels like a small loss.

Be useful first. Answer the caller's real question without a hook in it. Tell the story. Do the bit about the antique gas pump and the ding-ding sound the old pumps used to make, because every adult on earth understands a gas tank and almost nobody understands a distribution rate. Give them one thing they can use on Monday whether or not they ever call you. That generosity is not weakness. It is the whole business model. You are building a thing that goes out and gets leads for you and never asks for a raise, and it only works if the listener believes you would help them even if they never became a client.

> **SAY THIS** *"I am going to give you the answer to that whether you ever come see me or not, because that is how this works. You keep the tip. If you want the plan, you know where to find me."*

Pre-handle the nine worries before anyone raises them

Here is a move that separates the advisor who books appointments from the one who just fills airtime. Every prospect walks around with the same nine worries, and if you wait for them to say them out loud, you are already behind. So you handle all nine on the air, out loud, before a single prospect ever raises one. You do it with open-ended questions, the kind that start with what and how, because a question the listener answers in their own head lands ten times harder than a claim you make about yourself.

The nine worries are the whole objection backbone, and every one of them can be softened on the air weeks before the person calls. Fees and cost. The stall, "let me think about it." "I already have an advisor." "I'll just do it myself." "I need to talk to my spouse." "Now's not a good time." "I don't trust annuities." "Why go safe now?" And the biggest one of all, "why should I trust you?" You do not attack these. You get out in front of them.

Take the fee worry. You never lecture. You ask.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is a question worth asking about any plan you already have. How are you paying the person who manages your money, and is that fee coming straight out of your account every single quarter whether the market went up or down? I call a fee like that a financial termite. You can't see it, and it never stops eating."*

Take "I already have an advisor." You do not knock the other fellow. Ever. The gracious move is a second opinion, never an attack.

> **SAY THIS** *"If you already work with someone, good. Keep them. All I would ask is this. When is the last time anybody showed you, on paper, how many of your dollars are actually protected if the market has a bad year right when you retire? If your advisor can show you that, wonderful. If they can't, that is worth a conversation."*

Take "I don't trust annuities." You meet it head on, with a question and the honest trade-off in the same breath.

> **SAY THIS** *"A lot of folks tell me they don't trust annuities, and I get it. So let me ask you. What would it be worth to you to have one check that shows up every month for the rest of your life and your spouse's life, no matter how long you both live? Now, every tool has a trade-off, and I will always tell you the trade-off first. You give up some access to that money, there can be a cost for the income rider, and the guarantee rests on the strength of the company standing behind it, so I show people the ratings and let them judge for themselves."*

> *The advisor who names the downside first is the one who gets believed about everything else.*

Take the biggest worry, "why should I trust you?" You never answer that one by bragging. You answer it by being the person who says the hard, honest thing on the air when nobody made you. When you tell a room that the four-percent rule is a probability and not a promise, that it works most of the time in a backtest but you do not get to live your retirement most of the time, you get to live it once, the listener hears something they have never heard from a commercial. They hear the truth against interest. That is what buys trust, and you cannot fake it.

The engine: two hundred questions as fuel

Now, how do you never run dry? A weekly show is hungry. It eats material faster than you can write it, and the advisor who tries to wing it every week burns out inside a year. So you build an engine. Behind my show sits a bank of two hundred questions, built off my own guides and frameworks, and it is the fuel that keeps the show running week after week without me staring at a blank page on a Tuesday.

The bank is built in a fixed recipe. One hundred trivia questions with three choices each, the kind that make a listener realize they got retirement wrong. Twenty-five fill-in-the-blank questions. Twenty-five caller questions, prompts built to get a listener to actually pick up the phone. And fifty open-ended, thought-provoking questions written for exactly this, to read on the air or across the kitchen table, each one built so the listener rethinks their own situation and, in the end, wants to come see you. One hundred plus twenty-five plus twenty-five plus fifty is two hundred, and every one of them is drawn from the same frameworks you teach, so the show and the plan always tell the same story.

That last fifty is gold on the air. An open-ended question does not put the listener on defense. It opens a door and lets them walk through it themselves.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is one to sit with this week. If your paycheck stopped tomorrow and never came back, how many months could you live on what is protected, before you had to sell something in a down market to eat?"*
> *"Here is another. When you picture your spouse handling all of this alone someday, what is the one thing you most hope is already taken care of before that day comes?"*

You never run those two together without a breath between them. One question per beat. Let it hang. The silence is where the listener does the work, and the work is what brings them in.

Turn a listener into a consultation

Everything above earns you one thing, the right to make a clean, no-pressure ask. And you make it the same way every time, after you have been useful, never in the middle of the teaching. The ask is not a pitch. It is a no-cost, no-obligation consultation. You are not asking them to buy. You are asking them to come find out where they stand, and you spell out exactly what happens so there is nothing to fear.

> **SAY THIS** *"So here is what I would like you to do, and do it sitting down, not from a stoplight. Grab a pen. If any of this hit home, call the office for a no-cost, no-obligation consultation. We will look at what you have, we will show you how many of your dollars are truly protected, and if your Core is already covered and you don't need a thing from me, I will be the first to tell you so and send you home. That is a promise."*
> *"Text the word PETE to 600700. That's P-E-T-E to 600700. Or call us at 800-661-7383, or come find us at CoachPete.com. Plan Once, Plan for Life®."*

Notice the three pieces in that ask. It is no-cost and no-obligation, so there is nothing to lose. It carries a real promise, that if the person is already fine you will say so and sell them nothing, which is the most disarming thing you can say on the air. And it is one ask, spelled out slowly, with the keyword said letter by letter, because a listener in a moving car cannot rewind you. One ask. Never two. Two asks is no ask.

Leave that call to action up the rest of the segment. The texts do not come during the ask. They come two minutes later, when the person has pulled into the driveway and is still thinking about the one green flag on their mailbox. That is the glide path to a safe landing, and it starts with a voice in the car on a Saturday morning that, forty Saturdays from now, does not feel like a stranger at all.

> *Be useful long enough, and the appointment stops being something you chase. It becomes something people bring to you.*

CHAPTER 6

The Seminar That Sells Without Selling

Nobody has ever left one of my seminars saying, "what a thorough explanation of sequence risk." They leave saying, "you have got to see this guy's wheel."

Fun is a business strategy

I need you to believe one sentence before we go a single step further, because the whole chapter rests on it. People do not remember what you explain to them. They remember how they felt while they were with you. A technically perfect presentation delivered to a dead room produces exactly zero appointments. The information was fine. The experience was a funeral. So when I tell you fun is a business strategy, I am not being cute. I am telling you the mechanism by which a room full of strangers decides to trust you with the thing they are most afraid of.

Here is what fun actually buys you, and it buys it in order. First it buys attention, which after minute twelve you cannot get any other way. Second it buys disarmament, because a person who is enjoying themselves forgets to be afraid of you. Third, and this is the one that matters, it buys the truth. In this business the real sentence always arrives late. It comes forty minutes in, after the small talk and the coffee, and it sounds like, "I'm scared I'll be a burden to my daughter," or "I don't actually understand what I own," or "my husband handled all of this and now he's gone." You never get that sentence from somebody who is bored, and you never get it from somebody who is on guard. Fun is how the truth gets in the door. That is the line, and it is the reason for everything below.

> *Fun is how the truth gets in the door. A bored prospect never tells you the one thing you needed to hear.*

Now, fun does not mean goofing around, and saying so out loud from the stage costs you three seconds and buys back every skeptic in the room. So you say it. You look at the man with his arms crossed in the third row and you tell him the truth about why you run the room this way.

The cold open

Walk out and stand still for two full seconds before your first word. Most speakers start talking on the walk to the microphone, and it reads as nervous, and it wastes the only free attention you will ever get in your life. Do not say your name first. Do not thank the organizers first. Open on a scene with a year, a place, and a person in it, and tell it at full speed. Concrete beats clever every time.

> SAY THIS *"In 1994 a man sat across my desk with a shoebox. Not a briefcase. A shoebox, held together with a rubber band. Inside it was every financial decision he had ever made, and he set it on my desk and he said six words I have never forgotten. He said, "I did everything they told me." He had. He had done everything they told him, and he was still going to run out of money at 81, and he knew it, and that shoebox was him hoping I could tell him different."*
>
> *"I could not tell him different. He came to me ten years too late. And tonight is really about one thing, making sure nobody in this room ever has to carry a shoebox into somebody's office at 79 and hope."*

That is a cold open. A scene, a real object, a person, and a stake. No résumé yet, no product, no pitch. You have bought the room's attention with a story, and now, and only now, you can spend five seconds on who you are before you abandon the subject entirely and get back to them.

The story sequence, dark then light

Here is a rule that most speakers get backwards and it flattens their whole talk. You tell the cautionary tale first and the happy ending second. Always in that order, always both. If you reverse them, you leave the room sitting in the dark part with no way out, and a talk that ends heavy does not produce appointments, it produces silence and a quiet drive home.

So the shoebox man is your cautionary tale. You deliver him slowly. When you get to the worst line, the one about running out at 81, you say it and then you stop talking for three full counts. It will feel like forever from the stage. That silence is the exact moment the room decides you are telling them the truth, so you do not rescue it and you do not fill it with a joke.

Then, between the dark and the light, you put the teaching. Here is what it cost that man. Here is the question that would have prevented it. Here is what it looks like when somebody asks that question in time. And then you give them the happy ending, and you deliver it warm and a little lighter, because the tempo has to change or the whole evening reads as one gray note.

> **SAY THIS** *"Now let me tell you about a couple who came in the other direction. They walked in at 58, not 78. They were nervous the same way, they had the same shoebox in their hearts even if it wasn't on my desk. But we had ten years to work with instead of ten months. And last Christmas they sent a card, and the whole card said one line. It said, "for the first time in our lives, we are not afraid of the mailbox." That is the difference. Same fear, ten years earlier, completely different ending."*

The game show and the Financial Fill-Up®

Somewhere in the middle of the evening, the talking has to stop and something has to happen that is not you talking. Every talk over twenty minutes needs at least one thing in it that is not the speaker. Mine is a game show. I had a wheel built in Holland, seven and a half feet tall, lit up and branded, and it runs a game I invented called the Financial Fill-Up®. There is a host, there are contestants pulled from the audience, and there are questions about retirement that ordinary, smart people get wrong every single day.

Here is why it works, and it is not because people like prizes. An audience playing that game spends twenty full minutes thinking hard about the difference between a guarantee and a hope, and not one person in the room feels sold to, because they are not being sold to. They are playing. Attention is not bought by importance. It is bought by participation. The person who is guessing at an answer is leaning in, and the person leaning in is learning, and the difference between that person and the bored one is entirely in what they believe they are doing.

The name carries the whole thing, so you never get clever with it. The game is the Financial Fill-Up®, the strategy is the Financial Fill-Up®, and the little fuel gauge I draw at the kitchen table is the Financial Fill-Up®. One name, three tools, all teaching the same picture, that you are filling a tank. And the picture is the antique gas pump, the old kind that went ding-ding when the fuel flowed. Set the plan up right and every month a green flag goes up on the mailbox, a check arrives you cannot outlive, ding-ding, and your spouse keeps it when you are gone. Every adult alive understands a gas tank. Almost nobody understands a distribution rate. So you teach the tank.

> *Gamifying is a tool. Investtainment is the whole job. Anything that makes a person lean in before you ask them to learn is doing the same work.*

If you do not have a seven-foot wheel, you do not need one. Find the one stretch of your presentation where a normal human being would rather be at the dentist. You already know which stretch it is, because you can hear the clock ticking during it. Change that one thing. Make it a game, make it a picture on a whiteboard, make it something they hold in their hands or something they guess at out loud. That is the transferable move, and it works in a room of ten as well as a room of two hundred.

The honest trade-off that buys back the skeptics

Near the end, before you ask for anything, you say the honest thing out loud, plainly, at normal speed. Not rushed, because rushing it signals you wish you had not said it. This paragraph never gets cut for time. If you are running long, you cut a story. You never cut this.

> **SAY THIS** *"Now, I want to be square with you, because that is the whole job. Every tool has a trade-off, and my job is to tell you the trade-off before you find it yourself. The kind of accounts I use put a cap or a limit on the upside, so you share in the gain but you do not get all of it. The income that lasts for life usually carries a cost for the rider. And the guarantee is only as good as the company standing behind it, so I show you the ratings and I let you judge for yourself. If anybody ever sells you something and only tells you the good half, keep your hand on your wallet."*

Watch what that paragraph does to the man with his arms crossed. He came in braced for a pitch, and instead he just heard you argue against your own product for thirty seconds. That is the single most persuasive thing you can do from a stage, because the advisor who names the downside first is the one who gets believed about everything else. You do not buy the skeptic back with a better claim. You buy him back with an honest one.

One ask, and only one

Here is where most seminars fall apart, right at the end, because the speaker gets greedy and asks for three things. Text this, and fill out that, and also visit the website, and also grab a book. That is no ask at all, because a room that is told to do four things does none of them. You pick one ask, and you pick it before you write a single other word of the talk, because the ask determines the shape of everything.

And the ask is never a hard sell from the stage. You never close a room the way you would close one person at a kitchen table. From the stage there is exactly one thing you want, and it is the appointment. Not the sale. The appointment. A no-cost, no-obligation review where you sit down and look at what they actually have.

You make it after the emotional close, never inside it. You land the happy ending, you let them applaud, you take the applause, and then you change your tone to something ordinary and almost administrative.

> **SAY THIS** *"Alright, one housekeeping thing before they turn the lights up, and I want you to do it sitting right where you are, because nobody ever does it in the hallway. On the card in front of you, or on your phone, right now. If anything tonight hit home, come see us for a no-cost, no-obligation review. We will look at what you have, we will show you how many of your dollars are truly protected, and if your Core is already covered and you need nothing from me, I will shake your hand and tell you so. That is a promise, and it is the best appointment you will ever keep either way."*
> *"Text the word PETE to 600700. That's P-E-T-E to 600700. Or call 800-661-7383, or find us at CoachPete.com. Plan Once, Plan for Life®. Now go get yourselves some dessert."*

One ask, spelled out slow, said sitting down, with a real promise attached that you will send them home if they are already fine. You leave that call to action up on the screen through the questions, because that is when the texts actually arrive, not during the ask but a few minutes after, while somebody is still turning the shoebox story over in their mind. Land the evening, never end on the questions, and take the microphone back for one last line so the room leaves on your energy and not on the last person's question about required distributions.

> *From the stage you sell nothing. You earn one appointment, honestly, and you let the kitchen table do the rest.*

PART THREE

The Kitchen Table

Where the plan actually gets made.

CHAPTER 7

The First Appointment

The first appointment is not where you close. It is where you earn the truth.

You Are Not Here to Close

Let me take the pressure off you first, because if it comes off you, it comes off them. The goal of the first appointment is not the sale. It is not the paperwork. It is not the moment where you dazzle a couple with a chart and they gasp. The goal of the first appointment is two things, and only two things. Earn the truth, and earn the second appointment. That is the whole job. When you walk in believing you have to close today, the couple across the table feels it in the first ninety seconds, and every wall they own goes up. When you walk in knowing you only need the truth and a reason to meet again, you relax. And a relaxed advisor is the most trustworthy thing a nervous retiree has seen in a long time.

I want you to picture where this really happens. Not a boardroom. A kitchen table, or a den, or a conference room that we do our level best to make feel like a kitchen table. This is where a couple raised their kids, paid their bills, and argued about money for forty years. You are a guest there. Guests do not barge in and start selling. Guests take their shoes off, so to speak. They ask permission before they touch anything. Carry that posture into every first meeting and you will already be ahead of every fast-talker who ever sat in your chair.

> *Earn the truth and earn the second appointment. Everything else is getting ahead of yourself.*

The Mindset That Closes More by Needing It Less

Here is a strange truth I have watched play out for over thirty years. The advisor who does not need the sale gets more of them. Seniors have a desperation detector, and it is finely tuned, because every pushy salesperson they have ever met has sharpened it for you. They can smell need from across the room. So do not carry any. You do not have this client yet, which means there is nothing to lose. You cannot lose what you do not have. That single thought lets you ask the honest question you are afraid to ask, and it lets you say the bravest sentence in our business, which is, I do not think this is right for you.

Say that sentence out loud when it is true and watch what happens. The right couple leans in. They have been waiting their whole lives for someone in a suit to tell them the truth against his own wallet. When you are willing to walk away, everything you do say becomes believable. So detach from the outcome and attach to the couple. Care deeply, stay unhooked. A no is not a verdict on you. It is information about fit. Next call. That calm is not an act. It is the natural state of an advisor who knows he is there to help a good person make a good decision, not to corner anybody.

Set the Frame Before You Say Anything Else

Most bad endings are caused by a fuzzy beginning. The couple who says, we need to think about it, and vanishes, usually did that because nobody ever agreed on what this meeting was or how it would end. So we fix that at the very top with what the Sandler folks call an up-front contract. It is a short, out-loud, mutual agreement about three things. How long we will talk. What we will each try to get out of it. And what happens at the end, including the freedom to say no. It is not a trick. It is the opposite of a trick. It tells a wary retiree exactly what to expect and hands them explicit permission to decline. That permission is the very thing that lets them relax enough to actually engage.

Here is how I set the frame. I slow my voice down, I sit back, not forward, and I say it like I have said it a thousand times, because I have.

> **SAY THIS** *"Before we dig into anything, let me tell you how I like to run these, and you tell me if it works for you."*
> *"We have about an hour set aside. Does that still fit your afternoon?"*
> *"Here is what I would like to do. I am going to ask you a lot of questions, probably more than you are used to, because I cannot help you until I understand you."*
> *"Then, if and only if it looks like there is something here worth showing you, I will walk you through what your options could look like, in plain English, no jargon."*
> *"So this hour is worth your time, what would the two of you most want to walk out of here with today?"*
> *"Now here is my only rule, and it runs both directions. Honesty. If I look at what you have built and you are already in great shape, I am going to tell you that and sell you nothing."*
> *"And if something I show you is not for you, I need you to tell me that, right to my face, and we will part as friends. Deal?"*
> *"At the end of today, one of three things happens. It is a fit, and we set a time to take the next step. It is not a fit, and we say so. Or you would rather sleep on it, which is completely fine by me."*
> *"The only thing I would ask is that we do not leave it at maybe. Maybe helps nobody, least of all the two of you. Is that fair?"*

Notice what that little script does. It caps the time, so nobody is watching the clock in a panic. It asks for their agenda before I ever mention mine, which tells them this hour belongs to them. It gives me permission to disqualify us out loud, which builds more trust than any credential on my wall. And it makes no a normal, welcome answer, while quietly ruling out the maybe that would otherwise ambush me at the door. When they say fair, they have agreed to be honest with me and to give me a real yes or a real no. That is worth more than any close I could invent.

> *A fuzzy beginning is what causes the maybe at the end. Fix the beginning.*

Rapport, and How to Build It Fast

Rapport is not small talk about the weather. Rapport is the felt sense that you see them as people, not as an account. You build it fastest by being genuinely curious and by shutting up. Walk in and notice the room. There is always a photo, a fish on the wall, a garden out the window, a grandkid's drawing on the fridge. Ask about it and then be quiet. People do not bond with the advisor who talks. They bond with the advisor who listens like it matters, because to them, it does.

Match their pace. If they are slow and deliberate, you be slow and deliberate. Speed feels like pressure to a retiree, and pressure is the enemy. Drop into what Chris Voss calls the late-night radio voice, calm, warm, gently tilting down at the end of your sentences. That voice is contagious. It tells their nervous system that they are safe, that there is no rush, and that nothing is going to happen in this room that they did not choose. You are not performing warmth. You are lowering the temperature so two anxious people can think clearly about the most important money they will ever touch.

And do not rush past this to get to your good stuff. The couple has to like you and trust you before a single number you say will land. Five honest minutes about their fishing trip or their late golden retriever is not wasted time. It is the foundation the rest of the hour stands on. If you skip it, everything you build later wobbles.

Get Both Spouses at the Table

This one is not negotiable, and you settle it before the meeting is ever booked, not at the door. In a marriage, the retirement decision belongs to two people, and if only one of them is in the room, you are not having the real conversation. You are having half of it, and the missing half becomes the objection that kills you later. Talk to my spouse is not an objection you overcome. It is a mistake you prevent, by insisting kindly and early that both of you be here.

The up-front contract is the natural place to make sure of it. If a husband tells me his wife trusts him with all this, I do not fight him. I say, I hear you, and here is my worry. If something ever happens to you first, she is the one who inherits every decision we make today. I would never want her sitting across from a stranger, confused, at the worst moment of her life. Would you do me the favor of having her here so she knows my face and my number? None of that is a sales tactic. It is the truth, and it happens to be the surest way to get the survivor in the room. Remember, the whole point of a lifetime paycheck is that the spouse keeps the check. She should be part of designing the very thing built to protect her.

> *Both spouses, or it is not the real conversation. Settle it before you book it, not at the door.*

Open the Door to Discovery

Once the frame is set and the room is warm, you open discovery, and the way you open it sets the whole tone. You do not open with a pitch. You do not open with your firm's history. You open with a wide, gentle question that hands them the floor and asks for their story. The best opener in our business is simple and it is theirs.

> **SAY THIS** *"Tell me, what does a good retirement actually look like for the two of you? Paint me the picture."*

Then you stop talking. You let the silence sit. Four seconds feels like four minutes, and it is exactly in that silence that a real answer comes out. Most advisors cannot stand the quiet and they rush to fill it, and they step right on the truth that was about to arrive. Do not be most advisors. Ask, then wait. The next chapter is entirely about what you do from here, how you ask more than you tell and let a couple talk themselves toward the decision. For now, understand this. The first appointment is where you prove you are a listener. If you prove that in this hour, you will have earned the truth, and that is what earns you the second meeting.

How the First Appointment Ends

You are not closing today, so how do you end well? You end by naming what you heard and by booking the next step you agreed to at the top. If it is not a fit, you say so with a clear conscience and you mean it, and you will be shocked how often that honest no turns into a referral six months later. If it is a fit, you do not lunge. You say, based on what you have told me, I think there is real work worth doing here, and I would like to put your actual numbers together and show you what your options could look like. That is a promise of value in exchange for a next step, and it is a fair trade. It is also why you never hand over the full plan for free at the first meeting. Your analysis is the product. You trade it for a real second appointment, not for a tire-kicker's afternoon.

Offer it the way I have offered it for years. There is no cost and no obligation for us to sit down again and look at your real situation. That is how we do it, Plan Once, Plan for Life®. If it is right, you will know. If it is not, I will be the first to tell you. Then set the day and the time, write it down in front of them, and shake two hands on the way out.

That is the first appointment. You did not sell anything. You set a clear frame, you took the pressure off, you got both of them to the table, you listened them into feeling understood, and you earned the right to see them again. That is not a slow way to build a practice. It is the only way that lasts. It is the glide path to a safe landing, for them and for you.

> *You did not sell anything today. You earned the truth and the next meeting. That is the win.*

CHAPTER 8

Ask More Than You Tell

The advisor who talks the most learns the least. Trade places.

The Rule Behind Every Great Discovery

Here is the whole chapter in one sentence, so if you remember nothing else you remember this. Ask more than you tell, listen more than you talk, and let the prospect talk himself toward the decision. You have two ears and one mouth, and in discovery you use them in that ratio. The advisor who lectures a couple about index caps and participation rates for forty minutes has told them everything and learned nothing, and he will wonder why they went home to think about it. The advisor who asked good questions and got quiet learned everything, and he does not have to think about it, because they already told him what they need and why.

People do not argue with their own conclusions. That is the mechanic under everything I am about to teach you. When you tell a man he needs protection, he defends the market. When you ask him a question that leads him to say out loud that he cannot afford a big loss right now, he owns that sentence, and he will defend it against you. Your job in discovery is not to win an argument. It is to ask the questions that let a good couple arrive, in their own words, at the truth that was already sitting in their chest. Then you barely have to present at all.

> *People do not argue with their own conclusions. Let them reach the conclusion.*

Calibrated Questions, the What and the How

Statements create resistance. Questions create movement. So we lead with questions, and not just any questions. We use what Chris Voss calls calibrated questions, the open-ended kind that start with

What and How. They cannot be answered with a yes or a no, which means they keep a person thinking and talking. And they hand the couple the pleasant illusion of control while they do the work of solving the very problem you are there to solve. Notice one word I am leaving out. Why. Why feels like an accusation to most people. Why do you have it all in the market sounds like you are scolding them. What made that feel like the right move at the time asks the exact same thing and opens a door instead of a defense.

Let me give you a run of them, the ones I reach for at a kitchen table. Read these slowly, because the wording is the tool.

> **SAY THIS** *"What does a good retirement look like for the two of you, the real one, not the brochure?"*
> *"What worries you most when you think about your money, is it taxes, a market drop, or the idea of running out?"*
> *"How are you thinking about the money you will actually live on, versus the money you could afford to put at risk?"*
> *"What would have to be true for you to feel genuinely secure, on paper and in your gut?"*
> *"How would you want to handle it if the market dropped thirty percent the year after you retire?"*
> *"What is it about a paycheck that shows up every month, no matter what, that appeals to you?"*
> *"What is the one thing you would want to be sure of before you would ever feel comfortable moving ahead?"*

Look at that last pair. What is it about a guaranteed paycheck that appeals to you makes them sell themselves to you, in their voice, which is a thousand times stronger than my voice. And the final question turns any stall into a next step, because now I know the exact thing they need answered, and I can go answer it. Calibrated questions are your steering wheel. You do not push the couple down the road. You ask the question that makes them turn toward it themselves.

The Pain Funnel, from the Surface Worry to the Real One

People do not change over a surface concern. They change over a real, personal, emotional problem, the kind that sits in the stomach at two in the morning. Most couples will hand you the surface version first, because that is all they have let themselves look at. I guess I am a little nervous about the market. That is the top of the funnel. Your job is to gently walk them down it, one honest question at a time, until they are looking at the true cost in their own words. You are not creating pain. That worry was already there. You are helping them see clearly what they have been avoiding, so the decision to act becomes theirs and not yours.

Here is the funnel, and the whole art of it is that you ask one question and then you go quiet and let the answer pull the next one out of you.

> **SAY THIS** *"Tell me more about that."*
> *"Can you give me an example, a time you actually felt it?"*
> *"How long have you been carrying that worry?"*
> *"What have you done about it so far? Did that settle it for you?"*
> *"If the market took another big drop right as you retired, what would that actually cost you, and I do not just mean dollars, I mean the trip you would cancel, the help you could not give the kids?"*
> *"How does it feel to know your income is riding on that?"*
> *"Is now the time to fix it, or are you okay living with it another year?"*

By the bottom of that funnel, the couple has said out loud, to you, why they want certainty. They talked themselves there. You did not sell it to them, you listened them into it, and there is a world of difference. A senior trusts the person who helped them understand their own problem far more than the one who announced it to them. Ask, then be quiet. The silence is where the truth lives. Four seconds of it feels like forever, and whoever talks first usually fills the space with something honest. Let it be them.

Labels and Mirrors, the Cheapest Tools You Own

Two little moves keep a person opening up, and neither one requires a clever line. The first is the mirror. You simply repeat the last one to three words they said, back to them, as a soft question. They say, we are just not sure the timing is right. You say, the timing is right? And they will explain, and keep explaining, and hand you the real story. It is the cheapest way in the world to keep someone talking, and it makes them feel heard while it does it.

The second is the label. You name the emotion you are hearing, gently, starting with it sounds like, it seems like, or it looks like. It sounds like you have been burned before. It seems like protecting this money matters more to you than squeezing out every last point. When you name a feeling out loud and get it right, the person relaxes, because they feel understood, and when you get it a little wrong, they correct you, which is even better, because now they are telling you exactly how they feel. Labels defuse the fear in the room, and mirrors keep the conversation flowing. Use them and then stop talking. Restraint is the skill.

> *A mirror is three words and a question mark. It does more than a page of your talking.*

Write It Down and Let the Silence Work

One more habit separates the advisor who hears from the advisor who only waits for his turn to talk. Take notes, by hand, and let them see you do it. When a woman tells you she is terrified of being a burden to her daughter, and you write that down, you have told her without a word that it mattered, that you are not going to forget it, and that this hour is about her and not about you. Later, when you play that phrase back to her exactly the way she said it, she will feel more understood by you than by people she has known for thirty years. Her own words, returned to her at the right moment, are the most persuasive thing in the room, and they are free, because she gave them to you.

And guard the silences with your life. The hardest discipline in this whole business is learning to ask a real question and then close your mouth. Most advisors cannot bear four seconds of quiet, so they answer their own question, or they soften it, or they pile a second question on top of the first, and every time they do it they step on the very truth that was climbing up the person's throat. Do not rescue people from silence. Slow everything down. A slower pace reads as confidence and care to a retiree, while speed reads as pressure. Ask, sit back, and let the quiet do the heavy lifting. Whoever speaks first fills the space with something honest, and in discovery you want that person to be them, every single time.

> *Ask the real question, then close your mouth. Their truth is climbing up their throat. Do not step on it.*

The Green Flag Count, the Best Diagnostic I Know

Somewhere in discovery, when you are talking about the money they will actually live on, I want you to ask one specific question. It is the finest diagnostic in my whole library, because it asks for a count and not an opinion.

> **SAY THIS** *"How many green flags go up on your mailbox each month?"*

They will look at you funny, so you explain the picture. Imagine that every month a check you cannot outlive gets delivered to your mailbox, and the mailman puts a little green flag up to tell you it arrived. Money you never have to worry about, because it comes again next month, and the month after, for the rest of your life, and if you go first, it keeps coming for your spouse. So how many of those green flags go up each month? Almost every couple gives the same answer. One. Social Security. That is the whole conversation cracked open, and notice how you did it. No number quoted. No product named. No pressure applied. Just one honest question that let them discover the gap themselves.

That is the Financial Fill-Up® Strategy showing its face. If you set your accounts up correctly, every single month of every single year you go to the mailbox and a green flag goes up, a new check, deposited automatically, all the way through the rest of your life, and your spouse keeps it if you pass first. It is just like the old days pulling up to the filling station, rolling over that little hose, and hearing the ding-ding as the tank filled. That is a Financial Fill-Up®. You are not selling that yet in discovery. You are just letting them count their green flags and feel, in their own gut, that one might not be enough.

The Two Hundred Question Engine

Where do these couples come from in the first place? They come from the same thing we are doing at the table, only upstream. Our whole practice runs on questions, hundreds of them, and I mean that literally. On the radio, in the books, in the mail that lands in a retiree's box, we are always asking, never lecturing. Do you know how much of your savings is actually at risk right now? Do you know what your income would look like if the market fell thirty percent next year? How many green flags go up on your mailbox? A person hears a question like that, reaches for the answer, and realizes he does not have one. That gap is uncomfortable, and comfort is a phone call away, a no-cost, no-obligation consultation, no pressure either way.

That is what I call the question engine, and here is the part most advisors miss. The question that hooks a listener on air is the same species of question you ask across the kitchen table. Discovery is not a separate event from your marketing. It is the same conversation, continued. The two hundred questions we ask in public are designed to make a good person realize he does not know his own answers, which is exactly what books a real appointment. Then, when he is sitting in front of you, you keep asking, because the engine that filled your calendar is the same engine that fills your understanding. An advisor who lives by questions never runs out of prospects and never runs out of trust.

Master the question and you have mastered the craft, because in this business, the one asking the questions is the one leading the room, and you are leading it toward the truth.

> *The question that books the appointment and the question that runs the appointment are the same tool. Live by it.*

CHAPTER 9

Make the Cost of Doing Nothing Real

Doing nothing feels free. It is the most expensive thing a retiree ever buys.

The chair that costs the most

Here is something I learned at a few thousand kitchen tables. The most expensive chair in the house is the one your prospect is sitting in right now, doing nothing. It does not feel expensive. That is the whole trouble. Nobody mails you a bill for the plan you never made. The market does not call to warn you the year it takes a bite out of your income. Doing nothing feels safe and cheap and easy, and it is none of the three. Your job in the diagnose step is not to frighten a good person. It is to take a cost they cannot see and set it on the table next to the electric bill, where they can look right at it.

Most advisors skip this step, and I understand why. It feels rude. You have built rapport, the coffee is poured, and now you are supposed to tell a nice couple that standing still has a price tag. So the advisor softens it, waves at it, and moves on to the pretty solution. That is a mistake, and it is a cruel one dressed up as manners. If you do not make the cost of waiting real, the prospect will do what feels safe, which is nothing, and the doing-nothing bill will arrive anyway. It will just arrive later, when they cannot do anything about it, and you will not be in the room.

> *A cost you cannot see still gets paid. Somebody just decided not to tell you the number.*

So we are going to make it real. Honestly. No haunted-house tactics, no market crash predictions, no fear for the sake of a signature. We name three costs that are already running, quietly, in almost every account that walks through your door. The termite. The sequence. The clock. Once a person can see those three, they stop asking why they should do something and start asking how soon they can.

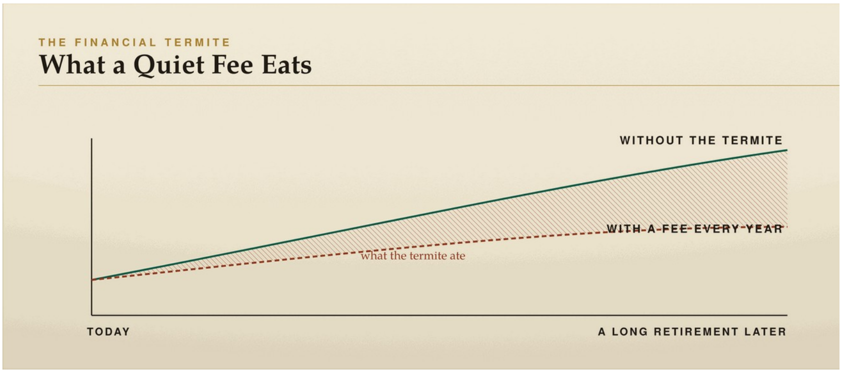

Figure 6. *A quiet fee, charged every year, quietly eats the house.*

The financial termite

Let me tell you about the termite, because it is the cost nobody feels and everybody pays. Termites do not knock the house down in a day. They work quiet, out of sight, a little every year, and the family living inside feels nothing at all until the porch gives way. A fee pulled straight out of the account works exactly the same way. One percent, one and a half, sometimes two, skimmed off the top every single year, in the good years and the bad years alike, whether the account went up or down. The client never writes a check for it. It never shows up as a line they have to approve. It is simply gone, chewed out of the balance before the statement is even printed.

Here is how you make that vivid without a lecture. You do not say the word fees. You do the arithmetic on their own money, out loud, and then you let it sit.

> **SAY THIS** *"Do you mind if I do a little math on a napkin here?"*
> *"Say you have five hundred thousand dollars working for you, which is right about where you two are. A one and a half percent fee is seventy five hundred dollars a year. That is real money. That is a nice trip."*

"Now here is the part that gets me. That seventy five hundred comes out in the down years too. The year the market drops fifteen percent, they still take theirs. You lose, and you pay for the privilege."

"Over twenty years of retirement, at that balance, you are looking at well past a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and that is before you count the growth that money would have made if it had stayed in your house. That is the termite. Quiet, every year, eating the porch."

Notice what you did not do. You did not attack anybody. You did not say the other advisor is a crook. You did the client's own math and let the number do the talking. The gracious move here is never an attack on the person who sold the plan. It is a second look at the plan. When the client asks whether their current advisor is charging that, you do not answer for the other fellow. You say the honest thing.

SAY THIS *"I would never guess at what somebody else charges. But it is on your statement, in black and white, and you have every right to see it. Pull it out. Let's find it together. If it is not costing you what I think, I will be the first to tell you to stay right where you are."*

> *The termite is not the other advisor. The termite is a fee that comes out whether you win or lose. Name the mechanism, never the man.*

Figure 7. *Same average return, opposite order, opposite outcome.*

The one loss that is different from all the others

Now the second cost, and this one is the quiet killer of retirement plans. It is called sequence-of-returns risk, and it sounds like a mouthful until you draw it. So draw it. Two people, same money, same average return over thirty years, same everything. The only difference is the order the returns show up in. One of them gets a couple of rough years right at the start of retirement, while they are pulling income out. The other gets those same rough years near the end. Same average. Wildly different life. The first one can run out of money. The second one dies with plenty. The order did that. Not the average, the order.

Here is why it matters so much in retirement and did not matter at all while they were working. When you are still saving, a down market is a sale. You are putting money in, so a drop lets you buy cheap, and you thank it later. The day you retire, the whole thing flips upside down. Now you are taking money out. When you sell shares in a down year to pay yourself, those shares are gone, and they were the very shares that would have carried you back up when the market recovered. A big loss right before or right after you retire is the dangerous one. It is a wound that does not heal, because you are bleeding it out through your monthly income at the same time.

> **SAY THIS** *"Can I show you the difference between a loss at fifty and a loss at sixty five?"*
> *"At fifty, still working, a thirty percent drop is scary but it is a sale. You keep putting money in, the market comes back, and five years later you barely remember it."*
> *"At sixty five, drawing income, that same thirty percent drop is a different animal. You are selling to eat, so you are locking the loss in every month. The market comes back for the money you left in. It does not come back for the money you already spent. That is the loss we build your plan to survive."*

That is the honest version of urgency. You are not saying the market will crash. You have no idea, and neither does anybody selling you a newsletter. You are saying something much simpler and much truer. A big loss is going to happen sometime in a thirty-year retirement, because they always do, and the only thing that decides whether it is survivable is where it lands and whether the income they live on was exposed to it. That is not a prediction. That is arithmetic and arithmetic does not have moods.

The clock in the Financial REDZONE®

Every retirement has a clock on it, and most people cannot hear it ticking. The ten years leading up to the day someone stops working is what I call the Financial REDZONE®. The name is not mine, really. It came from Rocky Bleier, the four-time Super Bowl champion running back, who told me on my own radio show that when you drive the ball all the way down to the goal line, the single worst thing you can do is fumble. You worked your whole life to get down there. A fumble at the twenty-yard line is a bad play. A fumble at the goal line loses the game. Those last ten years are the goal line of a working life.

Why ten years? Because a loss inside that window does not have time to heal. Lose thirty percent at forty five and you have twenty years to earn it back. Lose thirty percent at fifty eight, with retirement penciled in for sixty two, and you have handed yourself a choice nobody wants. Work longer, spend less, or hope. That is the whole reason the REDZONE® matters. It is the stretch where you have the most money you will ever have and the least time to recover if it drops. Protect first, grow second. Not because growth is bad. Because a fumble here is the one you do not get back.

> *Age fifty two is not a birthday. It is a whistle. You just entered the ten years where a big loss costs the most and heals the least.*

And here is where you make waiting itself cost something, because it does. A year of waiting inside the REDZONE® is not a free year. It is a year of the termite eating. It is a year closer to the goal line with the ball still exposed. It is one more year that the big down market, whenever it comes, can land while they are unprotected. People treat next year like it is identical to this year. It is not. In the REDZONE®, every year you wait, you are betting that the loss holds off one more season. Sometimes you win that bet. You only have to lose it once.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me ask you something plainly. If we knew for certain the market would have one ugly year in the next five, would you rather that ugly year find your income protected, or find it still out there in the open?"*
> *"I cannot tell you when it comes. Nobody can. But I can tell you that waiting does not make you safer. Every year you wait is a year you are hoping it holds off. Hope is a lovely thing. It is a terrible plan."*

Four percent, and the one in twelve

You have heard of the four percent rule. Pull out four percent of your nest egg the first year, adjust it a little for inflation each year after, and the studies say you probably do not run out over thirty years. Advisors love to quote the success rate on that. I will not, and here is why. The four percent rule is a probability, not a promise, and it fails often enough that I will only ever describe it by the failure. Run the history honestly and about one retirement in twelve runs out of money. One in twelve. Look around a room of your clients and count them off. That is a real family, not a rounding error.

Three things break it, and you should be able to name all three at the table. A bad market early, which is the sequence problem we just drew. An unfavorable order of returns across the whole run. And a retirement that lasts longer than the thirty years the original study ever actually tested, which, thank goodness, more and more of them do. Live to ninety five and you have blown right past the window the rule was built for. So when somebody tells your prospect their plan has a ninety-something percent chance of working, you say the honest thing back.

> **SAY THIS** *"Ninety-something percent sounds wonderful until you remember you do not get to live your retirement a hundred times and keep the good runs."*
> *"You get to live it once. One time through. And if you are the one family in twelve where the numbers do not hold, there is no do-over and no apology big enough. I am not willing to leave your groceries riding on a coin that lands wrong one time in twelve."*

> *You do not get to live your retirement most of the time. You get to live it once. Build it for the once.*

Honest urgency, not fear

Let me draw the line clean for you, because it matters more than any script in this chapter. Fear-mongering is telling a person the sky is falling to rush them into a signature. It is a lie with a deadline attached, and it is beneath you. Honest urgency is different. It is showing a person a cost that is already running, that they could not see, and letting them decide what to do about it with clear eyes. The termite is real. The sequence is real. The clock is real. You did not invent any of them to close a sale. You just refused to let a good family pay them blind.

So the whole diagnose step comes down to one gentle, devastating question, and you ask it and then you go quiet. Do not fill the silence. This is the moment the prospect adds it all up for themselves, and no line you say will land as hard as the one they say in their own head.

> **SAY THIS** *"So here is the only question that really matters. If you keep doing exactly what you are doing today, and one of these three things goes against you, the fee, the timing of a loss, or just living a good long time, who fixes it? And with what?"*
> *"Take your time. I have got all afternoon."*

Then you stop talking. You let it sit. Nine times out of ten the prospect will answer that question themselves, out loud, and the answer is usually some version of nobody, and nothing. That is not you scaring them. That is them seeing the chair for what it costs. And once a person sees the price of the seat they are in, standing up stops feeling risky and starts feeling like the only sensible thing to do. That is where the next chapter begins, because now you get to show them somewhere better to sit.

One more word before we build the plan. Diagnosing the cost of doing nothing is a kindness, but only if you are willing to walk away when the plan is already sound. If a couple comes in and their core is covered, their fees are fair, and their income is protected, you tell them so and you sell them nothing. That honesty is what makes the termite talk land for the next family. You are only allowed to make the cost of waiting real because you are the same person who will tell somebody there is no cost at all. Earn the right to warn by being willing to bless.

CHAPTER 10

Prescribe the Plan

A good plan is not the one that impresses them. It is the one they can repeat to their neighbor over the fence.

The doctor does not show off the diploma

In the last chapter you made the cost of doing nothing real. Now you prescribe. And here is the whole secret of prescribing well. The right plan should feel obvious the second you lay it out, so obvious the prospect wonders why nobody drew it for them before. That is the goal. Not to dazzle. A doctor who has diagnosed you does not read you the textbook and show off the diploma. She says here is what is wrong, here is what fixes it, here is what to expect. Plain. Certain. Kind. You are the doctor now. The prescription is the easy, obvious path, and your job is to make it look as simple as it truly is.

Most advisors do the opposite. They confuse the prospect on purpose, because a confused person feels dumb and a person who feels dumb defers to the expert. That is a cheap trick and it does not build a client for life. I want the couple across the table to understand their own plan well enough to explain it to their son-in-law. When they can teach it, they believe it, and when they believe it, they keep it. So we prescribe in pictures a fifth grader could follow. Colors, a gas pump, a percent sign after your age, and buckets you buy one at a time.

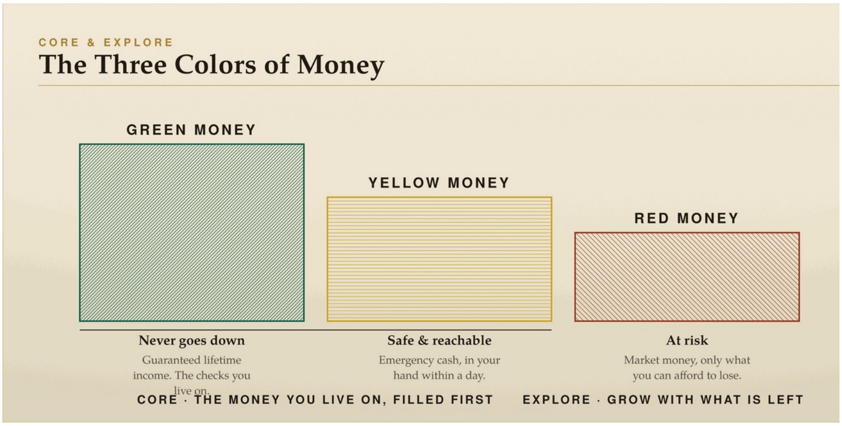

Figure 8. *Every dollar gets a color and a job.*

The three colors of money

Start with Core and Explore, and start with color, because color is how people already think about money without knowing it. There are three colors, and every dollar a person owns is one of them. Green money never goes down. It is guaranteed lifetime income, the checks they actually live on, the money that cannot be lost no matter what the market does. Yellow money is safe and reachable. It is emergency cash, the money for a new roof or a bad surprise, money you can get your hands on tomorrow morning. Red money is money at risk in the market. It can grow, it can drop, and the only red money a person should ever hold is money they can genuinely afford to lose.

Now put them together, because this is the move. Green plus yellow is the Core. That is the protected part, the foundation, the money that pays the bills and covers the surprises. Red is the Explore. That is the money you get to be brave with, once, and only once, the Core is full. You fill the Core first. Always. Then you have earned the right to go exploring. I do not use now-money and later-money and soon-money. I do not talk about three generic buckets. Green, yellow, red. A person can hold three colors in their head for the rest of their life. That is the point.

SAY THIS *"Let's sort your money into three colors, and you tell me if I get it right."*

"Green never goes down. That is your paycheck money, the checks you live on, guaranteed. Yellow is safe and you can reach it fast, that is your emergency money. Red is in the market, it can go up and it can go down, and it should only ever be money you could lose without changing how you live."

"Green and yellow together, that is your Core. That is the part we protect first. The red is your Explore, and here is the good news. Once the Core is full, I want you to be brave with the red. That is the fun money. You just do not get to play with it until the foundation is poured."

> *Fill the Core first. Then, and only then, you have earned the right to be brave.*

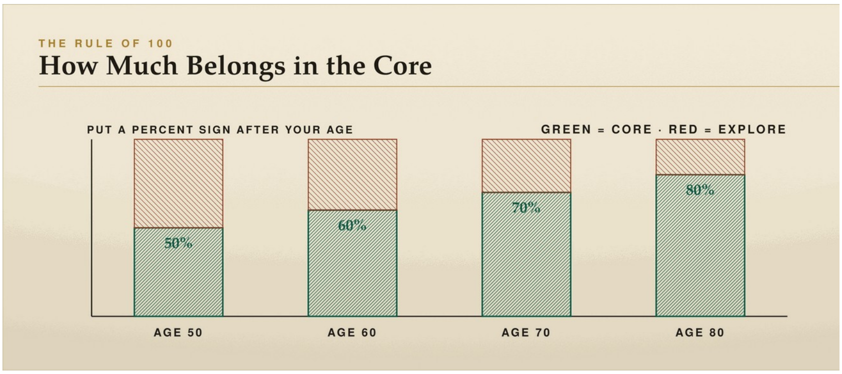

Figure 9. *Put a percent sign after the age.*

The Rule of 100

How much belongs in the Core? People expect a complicated answer and there is a simple one that has held up for a hundred years. The Rule of 100. Take your age and put a percent sign after it. That is roughly the least you want protected. A seventy-year-old wants at least seventy percent of their money in the Core, in green and yellow, safe. A sixty-year-old, at least sixty. The older you get, the more of your money should be off the table, because you have less time to recover a loss and more need for the income. It is not a law. It is a floor. Plenty of my folks want more than the rule says, and almost nobody should want less.

The reason the rule works is that it matches the truth of the REDZONE® we drew a chapter ago. As you get closer to the goal line and then cross it, protection matters more and growth matters less, so the protected share climbs with your age. When a prospect pushes back that they want to stay aggressive, you do not argue. You just show them the rule and let it do the work.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is the oldest rule of thumb in my business, and it still holds. Put a percent sign after your age. You are sixty eight, so at least sixty eight percent of your money should be in the Core, protected, off the table."*
> *"That does not mean the rest sits in a mattress. It means we pour the foundation before we build the second story. Fill the Core to your number first. After that, if you want to be aggressive with what is left, I am right there with you. You will have earned it."*

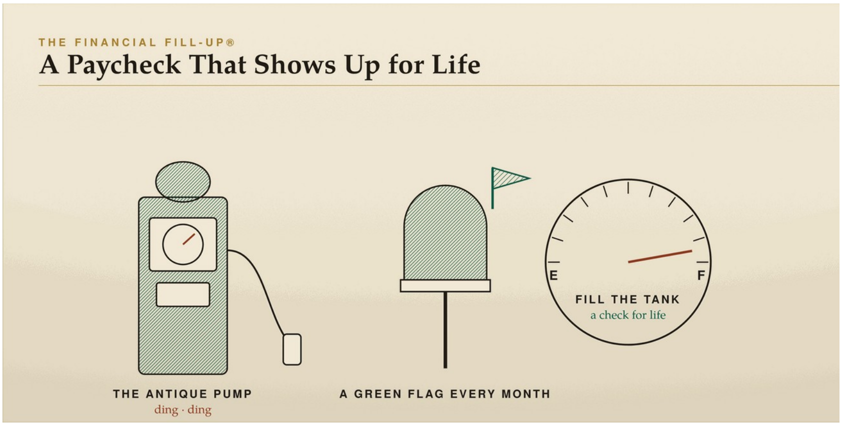

Figure 10. *The picture, the sound, and the name of green money.*

The gas pump on the mailbox

Now the income engine, and this is the picture that outlives every spreadsheet I have ever handed anybody. The Financial Fill-Up® Strategy. Picture an old antique gas pump, the kind with the glass globe on top and the bell inside. You fill your car up and it goes ding, ding, ding, a little bell for every gallon, until the tank is full and the pump clicks off. We are going to fill a person up the same way, except what we are filling is not a gas tank. It is their monthly income. And when it is set up right, here is what happens. Every single month, a green flag goes up on the mailbox. The check has arrived. It arrives whether the market is up or down. It arrives whether they are ninety or a hundred and five. It arrives for life. And when one spouse is gone, the survivor keeps the check, so nobody has to sell the house or change ZIP codes.

That green flag is the whole promise made visible, and I ask every prospect the same diagnostic question, because the answer tells me everything about the work ahead.

> **SAY THIS** *"How many green flags go up on your mailbox every month? How many checks show up no matter what, guaranteed, that you cannot outlive?"*
> *"Most folks think about it and say one. Social Security. That is one green flag. My job is to raise a few more flags on that mailbox for you, so the whole retirement does not lean on a single check from the government."*

That is the Financial Fill-Up®. You are not investing this money. You are buying a check. You control your retirement instead of your retirement controlling you. And you name the trade-offs right there, in the same breath, because a promise with the fine print hidden is a promise you will have to apologize for later.

> **SAY THIS** *"Now let me be square with you about what you give up to get that check, because there is always a trade and I will not hide it."*
> *"This money is not for tomorrow morning. It is for the rest of your life, so it gives up some quick access. There is a schedule, early years, where getting large amounts out costs you. There can be a cost for the income feature. And these guarantees rest on the strength of the insurance company standing behind them, so we only ever use the strongest, and I will show you their ratings myself. That is the honest deal. A check you cannot outlive, in exchange for patience and picking the right house to keep it in."*

> *You do not retire on a pile of money. You retire on a paycheck. So we go buy some paychecks.*

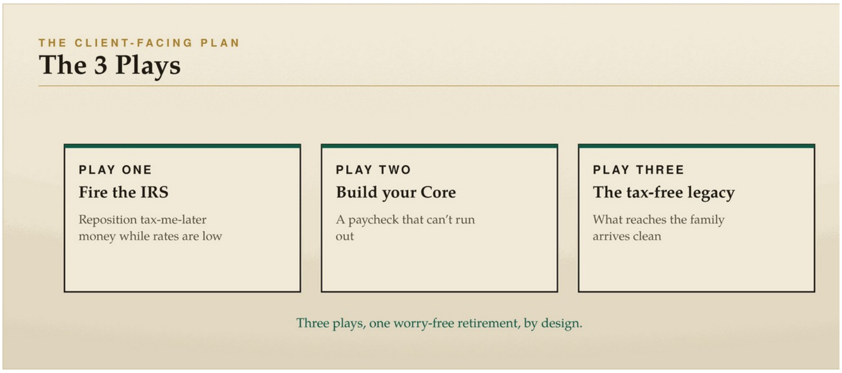

Figure 11. *How the whole plan is presented at the table.*

What the Core money does while it waits: GPI

Inside that Core, the green money does not just sit there dead. It works, and the way it works is the GPI Plan. Three letters. Growth, Protection, Income for life. Growth means the money gets to share in the gains of a market index, so it can climb in the good years. Protection means every year's gain gets locked in and kept, and a down year credits you a zero. You share in the gain and you never share in the loss. Zero is your hero. A zero year feels like a nothing year, and a nothing year is a wonderful thing when the market dropped twenty percent and your neighbor took the whole ride down. And Income for life is the third leg, the check that turns on and never turns off.

GPI describes the Core. It is not the whole plan and I never pretend it is. The Explore money, the red, is out in the market taking real risk for real growth, and that is right and good for money a person can afford to lose. GPI is what the protected money does so that safe does not have to mean stagnant. Share in the gain, never share in the loss, and collect a check for life. That is the engine under the green flag.

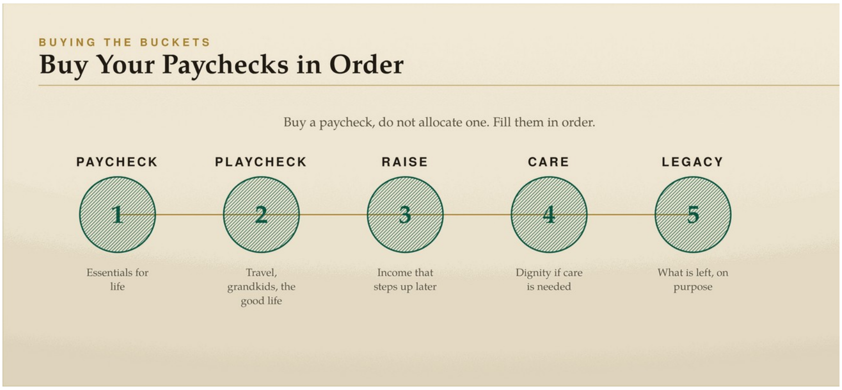

Figure 12. *Buy your paychecks, in order.*

The three plays and the buckets, bought in order

Now zoom out and give the prospect the whole game plan in three plays, because people remember a game plan. Play One, Fire the IRS. We look hard at moving money out of the tax trap, a Roth strategy where it fits, so the government is not your silent partner for the next thirty years. Play Two, Build your Core. That is the paycheck that cannot run out, the Financial Fill-Up®, the green flags on the mailbox. Play Three, the tax-free legacy, so what is left passes to the kids as a gift and not a tax bill. Three plays. Fire the IRS, build the Core, leave a legacy. A person can hold that.

And Play Two, building the Core, gets built the way you buy anything worth having. One piece at a time, in order. I call it Buying the Buckets, and the word matters. You do not allocate a paycheck. You buy one. A purchase has a job, it happens once, and you can do it one bucket at a time so nobody has to leap. There are five, and the order is the strategy, because each one retires a specific worry and the worries come in a sequence.

- Paycheck, the essentials for life, which retires the worry what if I run out

- Playcheck, the travel and the grandkids and the boat, because fun is protected money too, not leftover money
- Raise, a bucket bought now and switched on later so the income steps up when everything costs more
- Care, the dignity bucket for if help is ever needed, decided on purpose instead of left to chance
- Legacy, ring-fenced so it passes on a gift and not a tax bill

Nobody buys the second bucket before the first one is full. You fill the Paycheck bucket, the must-pay number, counting what they already own, because Social Security and a pension are green buckets they bought years ago. Then the Playcheck, and I mean it about fun being protected, because a retirement that covers the light bill and nothing else is not the retirement anybody dreamed about. Then the Raise, then Care, then Legacy. And for a married couple, joint life is the default, not the option, so the survivor keeps the very same check. The word Individual is right there in IRA. A joint income election is the one move in all of finance that turns a one-person account into income for two lives, forever.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is your whole plan on one napkin. Three plays. Fire the IRS where we can, build your Core so a paycheck shows up for life, and set up a legacy that passes as a gift, not a tax bill."*
>
> *"And we build that Core one bucket at a time, in order. First a bucket that covers your must-pay bills for life. Then a bucket for the fun, because the travel is not optional to me. Then a raise for down the road, a bucket for care if you ever need it, and a bucket for the kids. You do not have to do all five today. We fill one, you live with it, and we talk about the next when you are ready."*

Name the trade-offs, then let it be easy

Everything I just prescribed has a trade-off, and you say every one of them out loud before the prospect finds it, because the plan that hides its costs is the plan that loses trust the day the cost shows up. The income riders can carry a fee. The growth in the Core is limited by caps or participation, the price of never sharing in the loss. The surrender schedule means the money is committed for a stretch and getting large amounts out early costs you. The account value can even reach zero while the lifetime check keeps coming, which sounds strange until you remember that the check was the whole point, not the balance. And the guarantees lean on the insurance company's strength, so you show the ratings and you use the strongest houses. Say all of it. Plainly. It is what earns you the yes.

> *Name the trade-off before they find it. The plan that hides its costs is the plan that loses the client the day a cost shows up.*

Then, once every trade is on the table, you make it easy, because the honest plan is also the simple one. Three colors. A percent sign after your age. A gas pump that puts flags on the mailbox. Three plays and five buckets, bought in order, one at a time. You do not have to convince a person to want a check they cannot outlive. They already want it. Your whole job is to show them it exists, show them what it costs, and show them it is the plain, obvious path it truly is. Prescribe it like a doctor who is certain. Then get quiet, and let them see how simple safe can be.

PART FOUR

The Nine Worries

Answer every worry before it is ever spoken.

CHAPTER 11

Pre-Handle Every Objection

A worry is just a fair question nobody answered in time.

Start here, because this is the whole chapter

Let me give you the one idea that runs under this entire section of the book, and then we will spend the rest of it proving it out. A worry is a fair question that has not been answered yet. That is all it is. It is not resistance. It is not the prospect being difficult. It is a real question sitting in a real person's chest, and it got there because nobody put the answer next to it in time. So it grew.

Here is what most advisors do. They present the whole plan, they feel good about it, they ask for the business, and then the worry stands up in the room. Now they are arguing. Now it is you against the objection, and the prospect gets to watch the two of you fight it out. That is a bad spot, and you put yourself there.

There is a better way, and it is the plain, honest thing. You answer the question before the person says it out loud. You raise it yourself. You settle it while it is small. And when you do that, folks, the worry has nowhere left to stand. It cannot rise up in the room, because it already came and went, and you were the one holding the microphone when it did.

> *Answer the question before it is asked, and it never gets to become an objection.*

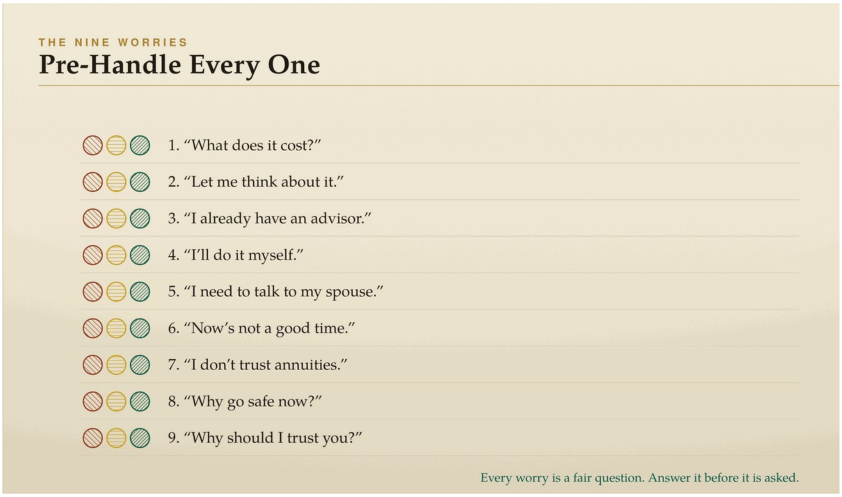

Figure 13. *Turn every worry into an answered question.*

Where worries actually come from

Write this down. The prospect is almost never arguing with the words they are using. The words are the coat. Underneath the coat is one of two things, and usually both. Fear, and inertia.

Fear is the feeling that they are about to make a mistake they cannot take back. They are sixty-four years old. They cannot go earn this money again. So every part of them is scanning for the trapdoor, and when they say "let me think about it," what they mean is "I am scared and I do not yet know why." That is not a stall to beat. That is a fear to name.

Inertia is the other one, and it is quieter. Inertia is the couch. Doing nothing feels safe because doing nothing feels like no decision at all. It is not. Leaving your money exactly where it is, all in the market, in the ten years before you retire, is a decision. It is the biggest one on the table. But it does not feel like one, because nobody had to sign anything. Your job is to make the do-nothing choice visible, so the person sees they are choosing it.

So when a worry comes out of a prospect's mouth, do not reach for a clever comeback. Reach past the words. Ask yourself which one is talking, the fear or the couch. Then you speak to that, and not to the coat.

> *The objection is the coat. Fear and inertia are the body underneath it.*

The move: raise it and answer it first

Here is the move, and it is simple to say and hard to do, which is why so few advisors do it. You bring up the worry yourself. You say the thing the prospect is afraid to say, out loud, in a friendly voice, before they get there. Then you answer it while it is still your sentence and not theirs.

Watch what this does. It tells the prospect you are not afraid of the question. It tells them you have heard it a hundred times, which means you are not new, which means you are safe. And it takes the loaded gun off the table and unloads it in front of them. A worry you name for a person is a worry you own. A worry they have to drag out of themselves, past the fear that you might get defensive, is a worry that festers.

> **SAY THIS** *"Now, before we go one inch further, I want to bring something up myself, because if I were sitting in your chair I would be thinking it."*
> *"You are probably wondering what all this costs you. Fair question. It is the first thing I would want to know."*
> *"So let me just tell you flat out, and then you never have to wonder about it in the back of your mind while we talk."*

See how that works. You did not wait for the fee question. You went and got it. And you got it while it was small, before it had a chance to sit in the person's stomach for forty minutes and turn into the reason they leave without doing anything.

One warning, because I have watched young advisors get this wrong. Pre-handling is not the same as bracing for a fight. You do not raise the worry with your fists up. You raise it the way you would tell a friend about a pothole on the road to your house, casual and helpful, so they do not hit it. The tone is everything. If you name the fee worry like you are ready to defend yourself, you just taught the prospect that the fee is something to be defended, and now they are worried about a thing they were not worried about a minute ago. Name it light. Answer it plain. Move on like it was nothing, because to you it is nothing.

And do not machine-gun all nine at once. That is the other rookie mistake. You do not sit down and say, "now, you might be thinking nine different things, let me handle them one through nine." That is not reassuring, that is alarming. You place the answers where they belong, one at a time, at the moment in the conversation where that particular worry would naturally start to grow. The fee worry goes up front. The spouse worry goes near the close. You are a gardener pulling small weeds as they sprout, not a man with a flamethrower.

Plant the answer long before the appointment

Here is where the great advisors separate from the good ones. The best pre-handling does not happen at the kitchen table. It happens weeks earlier, on the air, in the mail, in the seminar room, before you and the prospect are ever in the same building. By the time a good prospect sits down across from you, the big worries should already be half answered, because you planted the answers everywhere they looked.

On the radio, I answer the nine worries every single week, and I never wait for a caller to raise them. I bring them up. I say, "A lot of folks wonder whether it is too late to fix this. Let me tell you about a couple who thought the same thing." I am pre-handling "now is not a good time" for a listener who will not call me for six months. When they finally do, that worry is already dead, and they do not even remember when it died.

In the mail, the same thing. A letter that says "you may be thinking you already have someone who handles this" does more work than a letter that only brags. In the seminar, you stand up in front of forty people and you name every worry in the room, out loud, before dessert. You say the fee thing. You say the "I want to talk to my spouse" thing, and half the couples in the room laugh, because you just described their car ride home. Every worry you name from the front of the room is a worry that will not ambush you in the follow-up appointment.

> *The best objection handling happens on the air, in the mail, and in the seminar, weeks before the prospect ever sits down.*

And early in the appointment, before you present a single number, you clear the deck. You set the ground rules. You tell them it is fine to say no, that you would rather hear a good clean no today than a soft maybe that wastes both your lives. That one move, giving them permission to say no, quietly takes the pressure out of the room and disarms three of the nine worries at once, because most of those worries are just different ways of saying "I feel cornered and I want out."

> **SAY THIS** *"Before I show you anything, let me tell you how I work, because it is a little different."*
> *"At the end of this, one of two things is going to happen. Either this makes sense for you and we take the next step, or it does not, and you tell me so, and we shake hands as friends. Both of those are good outcomes to me. The only bad one is you feeling pushed. So if at any point you want to say no, you just say it, and I will respect it. Deal?"*

The nine worries, and how they cluster

There are nine worries. In thirty years I have not met a tenth. Every objection you will ever hear at the table is one of these nine wearing a different hat, and once you know them cold, you stop being surprised, and a salesman who is never surprised is a calm salesman, and calm sells.

They fall into four families, and it helps to hold them that way, because the family tells you what the person is really feeling.

- The cost worry: what does this cost me
- The clock worries: let me think about it, and now is not a good time
- The someone-else worries: I need to talk to my spouse, I already have an advisor, and I will just do it myself
- The belief worries: I do not trust annuities, why would I go safe now, and why should I trust you

The cost worry stands by itself, because it is the gate. Until a person knows what your help costs them, they cannot hear anything else you say, because part of their brain is still doing the math. So you settle it early and you settle it plainly. We handle it head-on in the next chapter.

The clock worries are the fear and the couch showing up together. "Let me think about it" and "now is not a good time" are almost always one unspoken question in disguise. The person is not asking for a calendar. They are asking to not decide, because deciding is scary. Name the real question and the clock stops mattering.

The someone-else worries are about loyalty and identity. Talk to my spouse. I already have a guy. I can do this myself. These are not really about the spouse or the other advisor or the do-it-yourself book on the shelf. They are about a person protecting who they think they are. You do not win these by attacking the other party. The gracious move, always, is the second opinion, never the insult.

The belief worries are the deep ones. I do not trust annuities. Why go safe now when the market is up. Why should I trust you, of all the people who have called me this year. These are answered with proof and with honesty, and with you naming your own downsides before they do, because the advisor who volunteers the trade-off is the one who gets believed.

Why this order matters

I am giving you these nine worries in the order we will work them, and the order is not an accident. Cost first, because it is the gate. Then the clock. Then the people in the prospect's life. Then belief. That is the order a real worry grows in a real person's mind, from the front of the store to the back.

And here is the thing to hold onto as we go. You are not learning nine tricks. You are learning to hear the fair question inside the complaint, and to answer it a beat before it is spoken. Do that, and you will notice something strange and wonderful start to happen. Your closing rate goes up while your closing gets softer. You stop pushing. The worries stop arriving. The room gets quiet and calm, and the prospect says yes, not because you overcame them, but because you never gave the objection a place to stand.

> **SAY THIS** *"I am going to guess at a few things you might be wondering, and I am going to answer them before you even have to ask. If I miss one, you stop me. Sound fair?"*

That one line, said with a smile at the right moment, is worth more than any rebuttal in this book. Because the prospect who feels understood does not fight you. They lean in. Now let us take the worries one at a time, starting with the one every single person is thinking and most are too polite to say. What does this cost me.

CHAPTER 12

What Does It Cost, and Let Me Think About It

Two worries stop more good plans than every market crash combined.

The gate worry: what does this cost me

Every prospect who ever sat across from you wanted to ask this and most were too polite to do it. What is this going to cost me. Until you answer it, plainly, in the first few minutes, the person cannot really hear another word you say, because a corner of their mind is running a meter. So do not make them ask. Walk over and open the gate yourself.

Here is how I answer it, because my answer is a little different from the fellow down the street, and the difference is the whole point. The client pays me nothing. Not a fee off the top. Not a slice every quarter. Nothing out of their pocket, ever. I am paid by the institutions, the same way a lot of professionals are paid by the house and not by the guest. When a hundred thousand dollars goes to work in a fixed plan, a hundred thousand dollars goes to work. Not ninety-nine. Not ninety-eight and a half after somebody skimmed the cream. The whole thing.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me answer the question you are too polite to ask. What does this cost you. The answer is nothing."*
> *"You do not write me a check. There is no fee that comes out of your account every quarter, good market or bad. I get paid by the institution, not by you."*
> *"So if a hundred thousand of your dollars goes in, a hundred thousand goes to work for you on day one. Every dollar. That is the difference, and I wanted you to hear it before we go one step further."*

> *The client pays me nothing. A hundred thousand goes in, a hundred thousand goes to work.*

The fee you can see, and the one you cannot

Now, I am not against anybody getting paid. I get paid. You should get paid. A good advisor earns every dollar and then some. The question is never whether there is a cost. The question is where the cost lives, and whether you can see it.

There are two kinds of fees in this business. There is the fee you can see, and there is the fee that is buried. The fee you can see is honest, because you can look at it, weigh it, and decide if it is worth it. The buried fee is the dangerous one, because it does its work in the dark, year after year, and nobody ever holds it up to the light and asks the only question that matters. What did this buy me.

So I tell folks to do one thing, on one quiet afternoon. Get every fee, every expense, every commission on your money, and get it in dollars, not percentages. Percentages are how they keep you from feeling it. One percent sounds like a rounding error. On five hundred thousand dollars it is five thousand of your dollars, every year, gone whether the market went up or down. Reconcile it against the actual statement, not against what somebody told you on the phone. Then hold each one up and ask, what did this buy me. The ones with no good answer, those are the termites.

The financial termite

I call these buried costs financial termites, and I have called them that for years, because the picture is exactly right. A termite does not knock your house down in an afternoon. If it did, you would see it, and you would deal with it. That is not how it works. The termite works slow and quiet, behind the wall, for years, and one day you lean on the porch rail and it gives way, and only then do you find out what has been eating your house the whole time.

A fee is the same animal. A wrap fee sitting on top of fund expenses. A share class that costs more than the identical one right next to it on the shelf. A rider nobody uses and everybody pays for.

Trading costs inside a fund that never once show up on the statement you actually read. A product that stopped doing any work years ago but still gets paid every quarter like it is showing up for the job. None of these bring the house down today. That is what makes them dangerous. They eat quietly, and the eating compounds, and thirty years of it is a different retirement.

> *A termite never brings the house down in a day. That is exactly what makes it dangerous.*

And here is the part I will say with force, because it deserves force. An advisor who puts a seventy-year-old's whole life savings at risk in the market and debits a fee off it every single quarter, good year and bad, is doing two things I cannot square with the word fiduciary. In my mind, a fee coming out of your pocket and into somebody else's, every quarter, no matter what your money did, is not the plain honest thing. I have believed that my whole career, and I am not going to soften it now.

> **SAY THIS** *"Look at your statement. Not what your advisor told you. The statement."*
> *"Find every fee in dollars, add them up for one year, and then ask yourself one question about each one. What did this buy me."*
> *"The ones you cannot answer, those are termites. And termites do not stop on their own."*

Value over price, always

Now let me tell you the trap on the other side, because it exists too. The prospect who only ever asks the price, and never asks the value, will buy the cheapest thing in the room and be broke at eighty-five. Cheap is not the goal. Right is the goal.

So when a person pushes hard on cost and cost alone, I move the conversation from price to value, gently, with a question. Because the real question is never "what does it cost." The real question is "what does it do for me, and is that worth it." A guaranteed check that shows up every month for the rest of your life and your spouse's life, that you cannot outlive no matter how long you are lucky enough to live, is worth something. Put a price on running out of money at eighty-eight and being a burden to your kids. There is no price on that. That is the thing we are actually buying.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me ask you something. If this plan does exactly what I say it will do, and a check shows up every month for as long as you live, and your spouse keeps that check after you are gone, is that worth having."*
>
> *"Because that is the real question. Not what it costs. What it does. And what it saves you from."*

The second worry: let me think about it

Now to the one that has killed more good plans than any crash. The prospect nods along, everything makes sense, and then at the end they fold their hands and say the five words. Let me think about it.

Here is the first thing to understand, and it will change how you hear those words forever. "Let me think about it" is almost never about thinking. It is a polite door. Behind that door is one unspoken question the person did not feel safe asking, and until you find that question and answer it, no amount of thinking is going to happen. They are going to go home, the worry is going to sit there unanswered, life is going to get loud, and in three weeks the whole thing evaporates. Not because it was a bad plan. Because one small question never got named.

So your job is not to push. Your job is to find the door and open it kindly. You say, in effect, tell me what you would be thinking about. And you go quiet. Nine times out of ten, when you ask it warm and then say nothing, the real question walks right out.

> **SAY THIS** *"I understand, and I would never rush you on something this size. Let me ask you one thing, though, so I do not send you home to wrestle with it alone."*

> *"When you say you want to think about it, usually that means there is one thing that is not quite settled yet. What is it. Is it the money, is it the timing, is it your spouse, or is it me. Just tell me straight and we will look at it together right now."*

That question does two kind things at once. It gives them permission to name the fear, and it puts the four most common doors right in front of them so they only have to point. Most people will point. And once they point, you are no longer fighting a fog called "thinking." You are answering a real question, which is the thing you are good at.

> *Let me think about it is a door, not a wall. Behind it is one question nobody named.*

Decide on purpose, not by accident

Here is a truth I put in front of every prospect who reaches for the stall, and I say it gently, because it is a gift and not a jab. Not deciding is a decision. It is just a decision made by accident instead of on purpose.

When you leave your money exactly where it is, all in the market, in the ten years before you retire, and you tell yourself you are just waiting to think it over, you have not paused the game. You have chosen to keep every dollar exposed for another month, and another, and however many months the thinking takes. That is a real choice with real consequences. It just does not feel like one, because you did not have to sign anything to make it. I would rather you decide this on purpose, with your eyes open, either way. Yes or no, on purpose, beats maybe by accident every time.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me say something, and I mean it as a friend. Doing nothing is not staying safe. Doing nothing is choosing to leave every dollar right where it is, at risk, for however long the thinking takes."*
> *"That is a decision too. It is just one people make by accident. I would rather you make this one on purpose. So let us decide it, yes or no, today, with your eyes open."*

The cost of waiting

And there is a cost to the waiting itself, a real one, and the prospect deserves to see it. This is the Financial REDZONE®, the ten years before you retire, and it got that name from Rocky Bleier, four-time Super Bowl champion, who told me on my own show that down at the goal line the worst thing you can possibly do is fumble the ball. The waiting is where the fumble happens.

Every month a person sits in the market unprotected, in that red zone, waiting to think it over, is a month a big drop can land at the worst possible time, when there are no working years left to earn it back. The thinking feels free. It is not free. If a bad quarter shows up during the thinking, the price of that stall is not zero, it is a piece of the retirement, and that piece does not come back. I do not say this to scare anybody. I say it because it is true, and because a person has a right to weigh the cost of waiting against the cost of acting, and most advisors only ever show them one side of that scale.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is the only thing I would ask you to weigh while you think. There is a cost to acting, and we have looked at it honestly. But there is also a cost to waiting, and nobody ever puts that one on the table."*
>
> *"You are in the ten years where a big loss hurts the most and there is the least time to recover it. Every month unprotected is a month exposed. So weigh both sides. What it costs to act, and what it might cost to wait."*

Settle these two worries, the cost and the stall, and you have cleared the two biggest boulders off the road. Everything after this is lighter. Because once a person knows it costs them nothing out of pocket, and once they see that thinking about it is really just one small question wearing a big coat, the reasons to say no start falling away, one by one, until the only honest thing left to say is yes.

CHAPTER 13

I Already Have an Advisor, and I'll Do It Myself

A second opinion never cost anybody their retirement. Going without one has.

Two Doors That Sound Like They Are Closing

These two worries arrive in the same tone of voice. Polite, final, and a little apologetic. "I already have an advisor." "I think I'll just do it myself." A green agent hears the door closing and starts backing toward it. A coach hears something else. He hears a person who has not been asked the one question that matters, and who is about to walk out still not knowing the answer. Your job in the next few minutes is not to pry the door open. It is to hand them a better question than the one they walked in with.

Both of these worries are really the same worry wearing two coats. The person is telling you they already have this handled. And most of the time they believe it. So you are not going to argue them out of a belief. You are going to help them look at their own retirement the way you would look at it, and then get out of the way while they decide. Lead with questions. Listen more than you talk. If the Core is already covered, you tell them so and you sell nothing. That is the whole posture. Now let me give you the words.

"I Already Have an Advisor"

First rule, and it is not negotiable. You never knock the other advisor. Not by name, not with a raised eyebrow, not with a little sigh that says you poor thing. The moment you attack the person's advisor, you have attacked the person's judgment, because they picked him. Now they have to defend a decision instead of examine one, and you have handed them a reason to protect the old plan instead of question it. Say one bad word about the other guy and you just became his best salesman.

> *Attack the advisor and you attack the client's judgment. Now they defend the plan instead of examining it.*

So you go the other way entirely. You get gracious. You treat the fact that they have an advisor as a good thing, because it is a good thing. It means they take this seriously. It means they are a planner by nature, which is exactly the kind of person your work fits.

> **SAY THIS** *"Good. I am glad you have somebody. That tells me you take this seriously, and honestly, most people don't. So let me be clear about what I am and am not offering here."*
>
> *"I am not asking you to fire anybody. I am not trying to move your accounts. I am offering you a second set of eyes, no cost, no obligation, on one specific thing. And if your fellow already has that thing handled, I will tell you so and shake your hand."*

Now you draw the distinction that opens the whole conversation. The growth-versus-income line. Most advisors are terrific at one job, which is growing a pile of money. That is accumulation, and a good accumulation advisor is worth having. But growing a pile and turning that pile into a paycheck that cannot run out are two different jobs. They take two different tool bags. And the person across from you has almost always hired for the first job and never once asked who is doing the second.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me ask you something, and take your time. Your advisor, is he growing your money, or is he guarding the money you actually live on? Because those are two different jobs."*
>
> *"Growing it, that is the market. Ups and downs, and over the years it has built real wealth for people who had time. Guarding your income is a different thing. It is making sure the check that pays your mortgage and your groceries shows up every month no matter what the market did that week. Who at your current shop is responsible for that check? Not the growth. The check."*

Then you stop talking. This is the accusation audit's cousin. You have named the gap and you let it sit. Nine times out of ten the honest answer is nobody. Nobody is responsible for the check. The whole plan is a pile that goes up and down, and the assumption is they will sell pieces of it as they go. That is not an income plan. That is a hope with a withdrawal schedule stapled to it. You do not have to say that out loud. You just have to let them arrive there.

When they get quiet, you offer the friendly second opinion, and you make it small and safe. You are not asking for the moon. You are asking for one meeting and one honest look.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is all I am suggesting. Bring in your statements. We will spend an hour. I will show you exactly which of your dollars are guarding your income and which ones are still out on the field taking hits. If you walk out and everything is already covered, wonderful, you got a free checkup and peace of mind. If we find a hole, you will be glad you looked before you needed it. Either way you win."*

The Fiduciary in Writing

Now I am going to give you the sharpest tool in this whole chapter, and I want you to use it gently. When somebody tells me their advisor is a fiduciary, and half of them say it like a password, I do not argue. I hand them a piece of paper. Because here is my belief, and I have held it my whole career. To be a true fiduciary you have to be able to offer both proper risk and safety, and your pay must not come out of the client's pocket. If money is coming out of their account every quarter and going into yours, good years and bad, I do not understand how that is acting in their best interest. That is my opinion and I will own it in the first person all day long.

But you do not deliver that as a speech. You deliver it as a request, and you let the paper do the work.

> **SAY THIS** *"Ask your advisor to do one thing for you. Ask him to put it in writing. One page. Have him write down that he is a fiduciary on everything he manages for you, and have him write down how he is paid, in dollars, for the year. Not a percentage. Dollars. If he is happy to sign that, you have got yourself a good one and I mean that. If he gets squirmy about the pen, that told you something too."*

> *A fiduciary who means it will sign the page. Watch what happens when you ask for the pen.*

That is the whole move. You did not knock anybody. You raised the standard and let the client hold the ruler. Most people have never once seen their fees in dollars, only in a percentage that sounds like nothing. One percent sounds like a rounding error. Five thousand of your dollars, every year, out of a five hundred thousand dollar account, in good markets and in crashes, sounds like what it is. I call those unnecessary costs financial termites. They do not knock the house down in a day. That is exactly what makes them dangerous.

"I'll Do It Myself"

This one you have to respect, and I mean genuinely respect, or the rest will not land. The do-it-yourselfer is usually your smartest prospect. They read. They have a spreadsheet. They know their expense ratios and they have opinions about them. They have probably done a better job than a lot of people who paid for help. So you do not talk down to them. You start by agreeing with them, because they are mostly right.

> **SAY THIS** *"You know what, good for you. Most of what is out there you absolutely can do yourself, and cheaper. Picking funds, keeping your costs down, staying disciplined when everybody's panicking. If you have been doing that, you are ahead of most folks who hired somebody. I am not going to insult you by pretending otherwise."*

Now, having agreed with them, you surface the one thing the do-it-yourself approach cannot cover. Not fund selection. Not fees.

Those they have handled. The one risk a spreadsheet cannot solve is the risk of living. It is running out of income before you run out of life. And here is why it is different from every other risk they have mastered. Every other risk, you get to try again. You buy the wrong fund, you sell it and buy another. Run out of income at eighty-four with the house already sold, there is no second try. It happens once. It does not come back.

> *Every other money mistake, you get another try. Running out of income at eighty-four is the one you only get to make once.*

Then you take them to the thing most of them are quietly relying on and you show them the crack in it. The four percent rule. They know it. They have read Bengen, or read about him. It is the load-bearing wall under most do-it-yourself retirement plans. And it has a fence around it that almost nobody repeats.

> **SAY THIS** *"Can I show you the one thing about the four percent rule that never makes it into the articles? They tested it on thirty years. That is it. Thirty years. Retire at fifty-eight, live to ninety-eight, and you have just asked that number to do forty years of work nobody ever tested it for."*
> *"And over forty years, in this country's own market history, it fails about one in twelve times. Picture a room. Twelve couples in it, just like you. Same plan, same withdrawals. Eleven are fine. One of them is out of money at eighty-four with the house already sold. That is what one in twelve actually looks like. Would you get on a plane with those odds?"*

Let it land. Then give them the honest follow-through, because the point is not fear, it is structure.

> **SAY THIS** *"It works most of the time in a backtest. But you do not get to live your retirement most of the time. You get to live it once."*

Now you explain the thing the do-it-yourselfer's spreadsheet cannot see, because a spreadsheet averages and life does not. Sequence of returns. This is the piece that separates the people who study money from the people who have lived off of money. An average is a summary of a journey nobody actually takes. What you live is the order the years arrive in.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is the part the average hides. While you were saving, a crash was almost a gift. Your paycheck kept buying shares on sale. But the day you retire, you flip. Now you are selling shares, not buying them. And if the market drops early, in your first few years, you are selling at the bottom to buy groceries. Those shares are gone. They are not there to bounce back with the rest."*
>
> *"Two people can retire one year apart, live the exact same decade, take the exact same withdrawal, and end up in two completely different places. Not because the average was different. Because the order was. Your spreadsheet cannot pick which order you get. Nobody can. That is the one risk you cannot do yourself."*

What You Are Actually Offering the Do-It-Yourselfer

You are not offering to take the wheel. That would insult them and they would be right to be insulted. You are offering to build one floor under the part that cannot fail, so everything above it can stay brave. That is the reframe. You do not want their whole retirement. You want enough of it protected that the bills that cannot wait are covered by income that cannot stop. Then the do-it-yourself money, the part they enjoy managing, is free to go be brave, because it is no longer the money the lights depend on.

> **SAY THIS** *"Keep doing what you love. I am not touching the money you like to manage. All I want to do is carve out enough to cover your must-pays, the bills that come whether the market cooperates or not, and turn that piece into a check that shows up every month for as long as you live and then for as long as your spouse lives. That is the one job the spreadsheet cannot do. Everything else stays yours."*

That is the flip. The do-it-yourselfer thinks you are asking them to hand over control. You are actually offering them more control, because a person whose grocery money cannot be voted on by the stock market is more free, not less. You control your retirement instead of it controlling you.

The Coach's Read

Both of these worries are a person telling you they are already handled. Do not argue with that. Agree with it, then find the one gap the current plan does not fill and let them look at it with their own eyes. For the advisor worry, you never knock the other fellow, you separate growing money from guarding income, you offer a friendly second set of eyes, and you hand them the page to get the fiduciary promise in writing. For the do-it-yourself worry, you respect the instinct, you honor everything they have gotten right, and then you name the single risk no spreadsheet can carry, which is running out of income, driven by a bad sequence early and a rule that was only ever tested for thirty years.

You are not there to win the argument. You are there to make sure that when they walk out, they walk out knowing whether the check is guarded or not. If it is, tell them so and shake their hand. If it is not, you may be the only person who ever showed them. Either way, you did the plain, honest thing. That is the whole job. No cost, no obligation, Plan Once, Plan for Life®.

CHAPTER 14

Talk to My Spouse, and Now's Not a Good Time

The market does not check your calendar before it decides to have a bad year.

Two Worries You Should Be Glad to Hear

Here is a thing that took me years to understand. "I need to talk to my spouse" and "now's not a good time" are not rejections. They are the two most reasonable sentences a careful person can say, and if you treat them like brush-offs you deserve to lose the case. A person who wants to talk to their spouse before they make a lifetime decision is exactly the person you want to work with. A person who is careful about timing is a person who thinks. Your job is not to steamroll either instinct. It is to honor it, and then to gently show them the one thing their good instinct is missing.

The mistake the green agent makes is he hears these and pushes harder. He gets a little desperate. And desperation is the tell that ends every close. You are a coach, not a salesman. A coach is confident, never desperate. So you slow down, you agree, and then you reframe. Let me give you both.

"I Need to Talk to My Spouse"

The correct response to this one is not to overcome it. It is to celebrate it. Somebody who will not make a retirement decision without their husband or their wife just told you they take marriage and money seriously. That is a green flag, not a stall. So the very first words out of your mouth agree with them completely.

> **SAY THIS** *"Good. You should. I would think less of you if you didn't. This is a decision the two of you make together, or you don't make it at all. So let's not have you carry a bunch of numbers home and try to remember them at the kitchen table."*

> *Somebody who won't decide without their spouse just told you they take money and marriage seriously. That is a green flag, not a stall.*

Now, having welcomed the spouse, you fix the real problem, which is that you let the meeting happen with only half the household in the room in the first place. That is on you, and it is a scheduling mistake more than a selling one. The whole way I work, both spouses are at the table from the start. Not one spouse who reports back to the other. Both. Because retirement income is not one person's decision and it is definitely not one person's risk.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here's what I've learned the hard way. When one of you takes this home and explains it to the other, the best case is you get half of it right, and the part you forget is usually the part that matters most. It's not your fault. You didn't sit through the whole thing. So instead of you being my messenger, let's get the two of you here together and I'll walk you both through it once, at the same time. When's good for both of you?"*

You did not push. You moved the meeting. That is the difference. You are not trying to close a person who wants to consult their spouse. You are trying to get the spouse in the chair, because the spouse in the chair is not an obstacle, the spouse in the chair is half your plan.

The Survivor Keeps the Check

Now here is the reason the spouse belongs at the table that goes deeper than good manners. In most couples, one person handles the money and the other one does not. And the one who does not is very often the one who is going to live longer. Think about that. The person most likely to be alone at the end is frequently the person least involved in the decision that determines whether they are okay when they are alone. That is the thing I will not let happen on my watch, and it is why joint life is my default on the income.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me tell you what keeps me up at night in this business. It's the surviving spouse. One of you is very likely going to be here after the other one is gone. And the check we set up, if we set it up right, does not stop the day one of you passes. It keeps coming, for the survivor, for as long as they live. That is called joint life, and it is how I do it unless you tell me otherwise."*
>
> *"So this is not a conversation you want to have without the person who might be the one living on that check. It is the most important chair at the table. Let's fill it."*

> *The spouse least involved in the decision is often the one who lives longest on its outcome. Get them in the chair.*

Do you feel how that turns the whole thing around? "Talk to my spouse" stops being a reason to delay and becomes the reason to schedule the real meeting, the two-person meeting, the one where you build a plan that guards the survivor. You made it a two-person plan out loud. That is what a family plan is. Not a product one person bought and the other one inherited a mystery.

"Now's Not a Good Time"

This one has a clock inside it, and the clock is the whole argument. When somebody tells me now is not a good time, they usually mean life is busy, the market feels uncertain, they want to wait and see. All understandable. And here is the gentle, hard truth I bring them. The one thing you cannot do with retirement is wait for a good time to protect it, because the risk you are protecting against does not wait for you.

> **SAY THIS** *"I hear you, and I want to say something back to you as a friend, not a salesman. The market does not check your calendar. It does not wait until you're ready to have a bad year. And the closer you are to retirement, the more a bad year at the wrong moment costs you."*

This is where you bring them into the Financial REDZONE®, and you tell it with the story, because the story is what they will repeat at dinner. The Financial REDZONE® is the ten-year period leading up to retirement. That is the definition and I want you to say it that way.

> **SAY THIS** *"Let me tell you where that name comes from. I did a radio show years back with Rocky Bleier, four-time Super Bowl champion, ran the ball for the Steelers. And he told me, Coach, when we got down to the goal line, the worst thing you can do is fumble the ball. That stuck with me. The last ten years before you retire, that is your goal line. That is your Financial REDZONE®. It is not the time to fumble."*

Then you make the football man's point in money terms, because that is exactly the sequence-of-returns argument told by an athlete in one sentence. A fumble at midfield, you punt and you get the ball back. A fumble on the goal line, you lose the game. Same fumble, completely different cost, and the only thing that changed was where you were standing when it happened.

> **SAY THIS** *"A big loss when you're forty, you've got twenty years to make it back and your paycheck's still buying in. A big loss in your Financial REDZONE®, in these last ten years, hits at the worst possible moment, right when you're about to start pulling money out instead of putting it in. That is the fumble that loses the game. So inside this window, the rule changes. Protect first, grow second. We don't stop growing. We just stop leaving the grocery money out on the field."*

> *A fumble at midfield, you punt. A fumble on the goal line, you lose the game. Same fumble. Where you're standing is everything.*

Buy the Umbrella Before It Rains

Now you give them the picture that makes waiting feel like what it is. You cannot buy the umbrella once it is already pouring. Insurance of every kind works one way. You put it in place while the sky is clear, because the day you need it is the day you can no longer get it. Protection is not something you go shopping for during the storm. It is the thing you were supposed to have bought before the storm showed up.

> **SAY THIS** *"Think about your homeowner's policy. You didn't wait until the kitchen was on fire to go buy it. You couldn't. Nobody sells you fire insurance while the house is burning. Retirement income protection is the same. The good time to lock in your floor is while things are calm and you have choices. Once the market's already fallen and you're already retired, a lot of those choices are gone."*

Then, gently, the cost of waiting. And you do not make it a scare tactic. You make it arithmetic, because arithmetic is honest and fear is not. Every year they wait is a year of protection they did not have and a year of guaranteed income they will never get back. With most of these income vehicles, waiting a year is not neutral. The clock that grows your future paycheck did not start. And if the bad year lands during the year they chose to wait, the wait did not cost them a year. It cost them the plan.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here's the honest cost of waiting a year. It's not zero. It's a year your income base didn't grow, a year of a check you'll never collect on the back end, and a year of your Financial REDZONE® spent unprotected. If nothing bad happens in that year, you got lucky. But you don't build a retirement on getting lucky. Hope is not a strategy."*

> *Waiting a year isn't neutral. If the bad year lands in the year you chose to wait, the wait didn't cost you a year. It cost you the plan.*

When Now Really Isn't the Time

Here is the honest part, and it is the part that makes you trustworthy on all the rest. Sometimes now genuinely is not the time, and you have to be the one man in the business willing to say so. If they are in the middle of a family crisis, if a parent is dying, if they truly cannot give this the attention it deserves this week, you do not push. You schedule the real conversation and you mean it.

SAY THIS *"And listen, if now truly isn't the time because you've got something heavy going on in your life, I understand that and I respect it. Let's not do this halfway. Let's put a real date on the calendar, three weeks out, both of you here, and we'll do it right. I'd rather you do this when your head is clear than rush it. This is a Plan Once, Plan for Life® decision. It deserves your full attention."*

That willingness to walk away from a bad moment is what makes you believable when you say the moment is now. A person who will never take no cannot be trusted when he says yes. But a person who honors a real reason to wait has earned the right to push back on a fake one. Most "now's not a good time" is a fake one, a soft way of saying I'm nervous. A little of it is real. Your job is to tell the difference and treat each honestly.

The Coach's Read

These two worries are gifts if you handle them like a coach instead of a salesman. "Talk to my spouse" is your cue to build a two-person plan, welcome the spouse into the most important chair at the table, and set the income up joint life so the survivor keeps the check. You do not overcome it. You schedule around it and you are glad you did. "Now's not a good time" is your cue to bring in the Financial REDZONE®, tell the Bleier goal-line story, remind them you buy the umbrella before it rains, and lay out the plain cost of waiting a year, all while staying honest enough to walk away from a moment that truly is wrong.

The market does not check your calendar. The survivor does not get to choose when they become the survivor. And the ten years before retirement only come around once. You are not there to pressure anybody. You are there to make sure two people, together, protect the check they are both going to live on, while there is still time and sky enough to do it. That is the plain, honest thing. No cost, no obligation. Get both of them at the table, and do it before it rains.

CHAPTER 15

Annuities, Going Safe, and Trusting You

The last three worries are the deep ones. Answer them like a coach, not a closer.

The Worries That Sit Underneath

We are down to the last three worries, and these are the ones that matter most. The first six are about money and timing. These last three are about belief. Does he believe the tool. Does he believe now is the time. Does he believe you. A fellow can nod along to your whole plan and still hold one of these three back, quiet, in his chest, and if you do not bring it into the light he will smile, shake your hand, and never call. So we bring all three out on purpose, before he has to work up the nerve to say them.

Here is the rhythm for all three. You name the worry first, plainer and kinder than the prospect would have. Then you answer it with something he can see and check for himself, not something he has to take on faith. Faith is what got him burned somewhere before. We are going to give him arithmetic instead.

Worry Seven, I Don't Trust Annuities

When a person says he does not trust annuities, nine times out of ten he is thinking of one thing he heard about one product, and he has hung that reputation on a whole family of tools that have almost nothing to do with each other. The word annuity is doing a lot of unfair work. It covers two different animals. Your first job is to pull them apart, out loud, so he sees you are not defending the thing he is afraid of.

The black sheep is the variable annuity. It is genuinely invested in market subaccounts, which means it can lose value, and it can stack fees on fees, mortality charges and administrative charges and subaccount charges and rider charges, running as high as four percent a year. That is the product with the bad name, and it earned the bad name honestly. I am not going to stand here and defend it to you, and I am not going to defend it to a client either. When somebody comes in burned by one of those, I tell them they have a right to be sore.

> *The word annuity covers two different animals, and the only thing they share is the word.*

The fixed annuity and the fixed indexed annuity are a different creature entirely. There is no market subaccount to lose. In a fixed indexed contract you share in the gain of an index and you never share in the loss. A good year credits you interest and that interest locks in. A down year credits zero, and the account simply sits flat and waits. That is not a loss. That is the design. Zero is your hero. And because a good year cannot be handed back by a bad one, you always recover from where you are standing instead of climbing out of a hole first.

Now here is the part that turns the whole worry around. The prospect already owns annuities. He already loves them. Social Security is an annuity, a check that shows up every month for as long as he lives and does not care what the market did. A pension is an annuity, the same deal. If he came up in an era with a real pension, that pension is the reason he sleeps at night. So he does not hate annuities. He hates one annuity he heard a story about. What he actually loves, a paycheck that cannot run out, is the exact thing we are talking about building more of.

> **SAY THIS** *"I hear you, and you are right to be careful. Let me ask you something. Do you get a Social Security check."*
> *"You do. Good. That is an annuity. A check for life that does not care what the stock market did last week. Do you like getting it."*

> *"Of course you do. So it is not annuities you do not trust. It is one kind, the kind that is really just the stock market wearing a costume. That one, I do not trust either. What we are talking about is the other kind, the kind that works like your Social Security check, only this one you build and this one you control."*

Then you answer the honest question sitting under all of it, which is, how do I know the company will actually pay. You do not answer that with a slogan. You answer it with the machinery, because the machinery is real and it has worked for over a century. Insurers cannot predict when any one person passes, but across a huge pool the timing is remarkably steady, and actuaries price the promises off mortality tables refined for generations. The companies are required to hold legal reserves, real money set aside against every promise made, before the promise comes due. They are examined and regulated. And you do not have to take the company's word or mine, because independent agencies grade each carrier's ability to pay claims, and we look those grades up together.

> *It is not a promise on a handshake. It is reserves, regulation, a century of math, and a grade from an outsider.*

Say the plain facts too, level, never as a warning. These are insurance products and they are not FDIC insured. The guarantees rest on the claims-paying ability of the carrier issuing them, which is exactly why we look at the ratings side by side and pick strength. If the prospect wants a survivor to keep the check, that gets elected up front and in writing. And when he asks what the catch is, you answer the mechanism instead of reciting a list. The reason you share the gain but never the loss is that the index credit has a limit, and that limit is how the carrier gets paid instead of debiting a fee out of the account every quarter. The reason the money can grow for life is that there is a surrender schedule that lets the company invest for the long haul, and that schedule slides down to nothing over time while at least ten percent stays reachable every single year. Those are not fine-print apologies. That is how the promise is even possible.

> **SAY THIS** *"I do not want you to trust this company because I said so. I want you to look at how the independent agencies grade it, right here, and decide for yourself. Judge the backing with your own eyes. That is the only kind of trust that holds up at two in the morning."*

Worry Eight, The Market Has Been Great, Why Go Safe Now

This one comes dressed up as confidence, but underneath it is the fear of being the sucker who cashed out one hand too early. The prospect has watched his account climb and it feels wonderful, and here you come talking about safety. To him it can sound like you are asking him to quit while he is winning. So do not fight the feeling. Agree with it. He has been winning. That is the whole point.

I put it to a fellow this way. Say you sat down at the table with a hundred thousand dollars and you have run it up to two. You have already won the game. The question in front of you is not how do I win, you did that. The question is how do I keep it. And nobody keeps a pile of winnings by leaving every last chip out on the felt for the next hand, and the next, and the next, until the one hand that goes bad takes it all. The wise player slides a stack off the table and into his pocket where the game cannot reach it. That is not fear. That is a winner protecting a win.

> *You have already won the game. The job now is not to win it again. It is to keep it.*

Then you give him the reason the timing is not a coincidence, and it has a name. This is the Financial REDZONE®, the ten years leading up to retirement, the window where a big loss does the most damage because there is no paycheck coming in behind it to make the money back. I got the name from Rocky Bleier, the four-time Super Bowl champion, who told me on my own show that when you get down close to the goal line, the worst thing in the world you can do is fumble. A fumble on your own thirty, you have time to recover. A fumble on the one-yard line loses the game. Retirement is the one-yard line, and the market does not care that you are close.

Give him the arithmetic too, because he respects arithmetic. The old four percent rule is not a promise, it is a probability, and one in twelve of those plans runs out of money before the person runs out of life. It works most of the time in a backtest. But you do not get to live your retirement most of the time. You get to live it once. If a bad market shows up early, in a bad order, over a long enough life, the person becomes the one in twelve, and there is no do-over on the only try you get. The way you make sure you are never that one is the Rule of 100. Put a percent sign after your age. If he is seventy, at least seventy percent of the money belongs in the safe part, the part that cannot go backward.

And here is the balance, because this worry is really asking whether you are a fear peddler. You are not. Tell him so straight. You are not saying sell everything and hide under the mattress. You are saying fill the safe core first, cover the income you have to have no matter what, and then you have earned the right to be brave with the rest. Money you can genuinely afford to lose can stay adventurous. That is not caution talking. That is a plan that lets him enjoy the winning streak precisely because the mortgage no longer depends on it.

> **SAY THIS** *"The market being great is not a reason to stay all in. It is the reason you can finally afford to take some off the table. You made the money. Now let's make sure you get to keep it."*
>
> *"I am not asking you to get scared and sell everything. I would never tell you that. I am asking you to move enough into the safe lane that your income is handled no matter what the market does next. Once that is locked, the rest can stay in the game. Now you are playing with the house's money, and you sleep fine either way."*

Worry Nine, Why Should I Trust You

This is my favorite worry in the whole book, and when a prospect finally asks it to your face you should be glad, because he just told you he is serious. A tire-kicker does not vet you. Only a person about to hand you something real bothers to ask who you are. So reward the question. Do not get defensive and do not get charming. Answer it with a standard he can measure you against.

Here is the standard I hold myself to, and I will say it the same way to a client that I say it to you. A true fiduciary has to be able to offer both proper risk and proper safety, because that is the only way the advice can be shaped to the person instead of to the product. An advisor who can only sell market risk is going to recommend market risk to a seventy-eight-year-old widow, because it is the only thing in his bag. And the second half, the half most people skip, is that the advisor's pay must not come out of the client's pocket. A fee pulled off the account every quarter, good years and bad, is money leaving the client's dollars. I call those financial termites. They do not knock the house down in a day. That is what makes them dangerous.

> *How are you paid, and does it come out of my money. If a person cannot answer both in a minute, you have learned something.*

So hand him the two questions and tell him to use them on everybody, including you. How are you paid. And does it come out of my money. On the plan we build, the client pays me no fee out of his account. The institutions compensate me, the premium goes to work in full on day one, nothing gets debited every quarter. If a person you are interviewing cannot answer those two questions in plain English, in a minute, without reaching for a brochure, that silence has told you more than any average they were about to quote.

Then give him the rule that protects him from every smooth talker in the business, me included. Do not trust the smile. Trust the math on the paper. A warm handshake and a good golf game are not a plan. Anybody can be likable for an hour. Ask to see it in writing, the income, the terms, the ratings, the numbers, and make the paper earn your trust, not the person's manner. If it only works when the guy is in the room being charming, it does not work. A real plan holds up cold, on the kitchen table, after he has gone home.

> **SAY THIS** *"You should not trust me because I seem like a nice guy. Nice guys have lost people their retirements. Trust the math on the paper. Ask me the two questions you should ask everybody. How am I paid, and does it come out of your money. Then make me show you the plan in writing and let the numbers, not my smile, earn the yes."*
>
> *"Never hand your life savings to anybody on a handshake, including me. Take the paper home. Read it cold, without me sitting there. If it holds up on your own kitchen table on a Tuesday night, we are in business. If it does not, you owe me nothing and I mean that."*

When You Have Answered All Three

Notice what all three answers share. Not one of them asks the prospect to believe you harder. Each hands him something he can check with his own eyes. The ratings he looks up. The chips he slides off the table. The two questions he asks everybody. You take worry, which lives on faith, and you trade it for evidence, which lives on paper. A person who has seen the evidence does not need to be closed. He needs a pen, which is the whole subject of the next chapter.

PART FIVE

The Close

Ask boldly, deliver well, and keep them for life.

CHAPTER 16

Ask Boldly, Then Be Quiet

The close is not where you get brave. It is where you get quiet.

You Have Either Earned It or You Have Not

Most of what people call closing is really just repair work for a conversation that was run badly up front. If you attracted the right person, connected like a human being, discovered what actually keeps him up at night, made the cost of doing nothing vivid, and prescribed a plan that fits, then the close is not a battle. It is the natural end of a good talk. The decision is already made in his gut. All that is left is for somebody to say it out loud, and your job is to make that easy and safe, never to push.

So before you ever ask for anything, you tie the plan back to the thing he told you mattered. Not your features. His worry. You wanted Barbara taken care of for life and your essentials covered no matter what the market does. This is the plan that does exactly that, and here it is on one page. When the summary is in his own words, he is not evaluating a product anymore. He is looking at a picture of the thing he asked you to build. That is the ground you close from.

> *A close is not something you do to a person. It is something you do with a person who is already most of the way there.*

The Trial Close, Take the Temperature First

Do not ask for the decision until you know it is ripe. The trial close is a small, low-stakes question that tells you the temperature in the room without putting anybody on the spot. You are not asking him to sign. You are asking him how he feels about what he is seeing. If the answer is warm, you move to the real ask. If the answer wobbles, you just found the missing piece before it could sink you, and you go back and handle it instead of plowing ahead into a no.

SAY THIS *"Before we go any further, let me just check. Does this feel like it truly solves what you came in here worried about." "On a scale of your own gut, does this feel right, or is there a piece that still feels unsettled."*

Listen to the whole answer, not just the first word. A man who says yes but drops his eyes has told you two different things, and the eyes are the true one. If he hesitates, you do not talk him out of the hesitation. You walk toward it. What part still feels unsettled, the number, the company, or something I have not answered yet. Then you fix that one thing and take the temperature again. You never ask for the sale over the top of a doubt you can see on his face.

Ask One Specific Question, and Ask It Boldly

Here is where advisors get shy, and shyness at the close costs more sales than any objection ever will. When it is time, you ask for the decision plainly, calmly, and out loud. One question. A specific one. Not a vague drift toward maybe, and not five questions stacked up so he can duck the hard one. You have earned the right to ask, so ask like you have earned it. The boldness is not in your volume. It is in your willingness to put the real question in the room and let it stand there.

The best ask is an assumptive next step, and I want to be careful about that word assumptive, because it does not mean a trick. It does not mean acting like he already agreed to something he did not. It means you assume the plan is good, because you built it to be, and you point at the simple, concrete thing that happens next. You are not asking whether. You are asking about the how, the when, the small mechanical step that turns a good decision into a done one. A specific next step is easy to say yes to. A big fuzzy commitment is easy to postpone.

> *Ask one specific question. The boldness is not the volume. It is being willing to let the real question stand there.*

SAY THIS *"If this is right, the next step is simple. I would get the paperwork started today and have your income plan set up this week. Do you want to go ahead and get it handled."*

"We would fund the Core first so your paycheck is locked, then map out the rest. Should we get that set up."

"I think this is the plan. Are you ready to put it to work."

Then Be Quiet

Now comes the hardest skill in the entire craft, and it is the one nobody practices. After you ask, you shut your mouth. You stop talking. You let the question hang in the air and you do not rescue it, not with another feature, not with a nervous joke, not with a little discount you were not asked for. You wait. The pause is going to feel like an hour and it will really be four or five seconds, and in those seconds the prospect is doing the most important work of the whole meeting, which is deciding. Do not interrupt a man while he is buying.

> *The one who speaks first after the ask usually loses. Let it be him.*

I have watched sharp young advisors do everything right for an hour and then blow it in the last ten seconds because they could not stand the silence. They asked a beautiful, specific question, and then the quiet got heavy, and they panicked and filled it. Well, if now is not a good time we could always. And just like that they handed the prospect an exit he was not even reaching for. When you keep talking after the ask, you are not helping him decide. You are helping him not decide. The silence is uncomfortable for exactly one reason, because it is working. Let it work.

So train yourself. Ask the question, then physically stop. Some old hands take a slow sip of coffee to keep their own mouth busy. Whatever it takes. You asked, the ball is in his court, and the rule is simple. The next voice in the room is his. Whatever he says next, even if it is another question, is him engaging with the decision, and that is exactly where you want him. But he cannot get there if you are standing on top of the silence.

Practice the silence at home until it stops scaring you, because your comfort with it is the whole game. Ask a friend a simple question and then hold still for a slow ten count and feel how long it seems. That is the muscle. In the meeting you are not being rude and you are not playing chicken. You are giving a grown man the room to make a grown man's decision without you nagging him through it. Respect the quiet. It is the most respectful thing you will do all day, and it is the one that closes.

Reading a Yes

A yes does not always sound like the word yes. More often it shows up as a man leaning in and starting to ask about the mechanics. How soon does the first check come. Does my wife keep it if something happens to me. What do you need from me to get started. Those are not objections. Those are a person who has already decided and is now stepping into the plan and looking around. When you hear a how or a when question after your ask, you are not being stalled. You are being invited to start the paperwork. Answer the question plainly and roll straight into the next simple step.

> **SAY THIS** *"Great question, and I love that you are already thinking about it. The first check would start the month after we fund it. Let's get the application going right now so we do not lose any time."*
> *"Yes, your wife keeps every dollar of that check for as long as she lives, and we will write that in today. All I need to get rolling is a little information and a signature. Shall we."*

Read the body too, not just the words. Shoulders come down. He looks at his spouse and something passes between them. He reaches for his reading glasses to look at the page closer. Those are green lights. When you see them, do not re-sell what is already sold. Just walk him gently onto the glide path to a safe landing and hand him the pen. Over-explaining a yes is how you talk a person back out of it. Once he is in, get quiet again and let him get in.

When the Pause Is Really a Question

Sometimes the silence breaks with an objection instead of a yes, and that is fine, because an objection is not a wall. It is a request for one more piece of information or one more ounce of reassurance. Too expensive means show me the value again. Let me think about it means I am not quite sure of one thing. So you do not argue and you do not push. You treat it as the fair question it is, you answer that one question, and then you re-confirm conviction and ask again, calmly, the same specific ask as before.

> **SAY THIS** *"Of course. What part still feels unsettled, the number, the company, or something I have not answered."*
> *"That is a fair question, and here is the honest answer. Now, does that put it to rest for you. Good. Then let's get it set up."*

What you never do is close past an objection you can feel but he has not said. If you sense a doubt, name it for him and clear it, then return to the ask. A sale made over the top of an unspoken worry does not last anyway. It comes back as a cancellation two weeks later when the worry finally speaks up at the kitchen table with nobody there to answer it. Handle it now, in the room, while you can.

Never Pressure, Not Once

Everything in this chapter works, and because it works you have to be careful how you hold it. We use this to help a good person make a good decision, never to manufacture a feeling or run over somebody's judgment. With retirees the ethical bar is higher, not lower. So there are no false deadlines. No this rate disappears Friday when it does not. No guilt, no cornering, no assumptive trick that treats a maybe like a yes. You are selling certainty, and you cannot sell certainty with pressure, because pressure is what a person uses when he is not certain himself.

> *A clean no is a fine outcome. If the plan is not right for the person, the honest close is to say so and sell nothing.*

And here is the part that will make you money for thirty years, so hear it. A clear no is a perfectly good result. If you sit down and find out the person's Core is already covered, that his income is safe and his family is handled, then the honest close is to tell him so and sell him nothing. Shake his hand, mean it, and let him walk out with his wallet shut. That man will send you his brother, his neighbor, and his golf foursome, because you are the one advisor who told him the truth when there was money in lying. Plan Once, Plan for Life® is not a slogan. It is what you are actually selling, and you cannot sell it with a fast one.

Knowing When to Stop Talking

If you boil this whole chapter down, it comes to one discipline. Know when to stop talking. Stop when the plan is summarized in his own words. Stop after the trial close, and listen. Stop the instant you have asked the specific question, and do not start again until he does. Stop selling the moment he has said yes, and just hand him the pen. The amateur thinks the close is about the perfect thing to say. The professional knows the close is mostly about the right moment to say nothing at all. Ask boldly. Then be quiet. The quiet is where the yes lives.

CHAPTER 17

Plan Once, Plan for Life®

The first appointment is where they decide to trust you. The second is where you hand them the peace of mind and let them keep it.

The second appointment is a delivery, not another sale

Here is a mistake I watched good advisors make for years, and I made it myself early on. They treat the second appointment like a second sales pitch. They come in hot, they re-argue everything, they pile on more charts, more reasons, more urgency. And they lose people who were already sold. Understand what the second appointment actually is. It is delivery day. The selling happened at the first table, when you listened, when you diagnosed, when they told you what scared them and you drew the plain path out of it. If they came back, they already believe. Your job now is not to convince. It is to deliver, calmly, the exact thing you promised, so simply that they relax the moment they sit down.

So change how you walk in. No new pitch. No new numbers to digest. You are a doctor handing a patient the treatment plan you already agreed on, not re-diagnosing them in the waiting room. The energy in the room is quiet and sure. You are not nervous, because nervous is contagious and so is calm. Everything about the second appointment says the hard thinking is done, the decision is small, and today we simply put it in place. That posture does more for your close rate than any clever line, because a retiree can smell a second sales job from the parking lot, and it undoes the trust the first meeting built.

> *The first appointment earns the trust. The second appointment must not spend it re-selling what they already bought.*

One page they can hold

Here is the discipline that separates a professional from an amateur on delivery day. The whole plan, the thing you spent hours building behind the scenes, all twenty-two steps of the Power Plan, comes to the table as one page. Not a binder. Not a forty-slide deck. One page a person can hold in one hand at the kitchen table and read to their spouse out loud. The binder can exist. It can sit in the bag as the backup. But what you hand them, what you put in the middle of the table and point to, is a single sheet that says two things a frightened human being actually wants to know. Here is the money. Here is who to call.

Think about what a spouse who does not handle the finances is really afraid of. Not caps. Not participation rates. They are afraid that if something happens to the one who runs the money, they will be handed a shoebox of statements they cannot read and a phone number that rings a stranger. Your one page answers that fear before it is ever spoken. On the left, in plain words, here is where every dollar sits and what job it does. Green money, the checks you live on. Yellow money, safe and reachable. Red money, the part out exploring. On the right, here is who to call and how to reach them, meaning you, a name and a number and a face they already trust. That is the whole document. A fifth grader could read it. That is the point.

> **SAY THIS** *"Before we sign a thing, I want to hand you the whole plan on one page. Not the fat binder. This."*
>
> *"Left side is your money, sorted by color. Green is the checks you live on, the money that cannot go down. Yellow is your safe, reachable cash for a surprise. Red is the part we let explore in the market, only the money you could afford to lose."*
>
> *"Right side is even simpler. If anything ever happens, if you are confused, if you are scared, if Barbara is ever sitting here without you, this is the name and the number you call. It is me. One page. Here is the money, here is who to call. That is your whole retirement, and you can put it on the refrigerator."*

Make the paperwork the calmest hour of their week

Paperwork is where more good decisions die than anywhere else, and it dies for a silly reason. Forms are scary. A thick stack of documents with small print and signature flags feels like a trap, even when it is not, and a scared retiree reaches for the one move that always feels safe, which is to wait. So your job on paperwork day is to make signing feel like the smallest, easiest, most ordinary thing in the world. You do that by controlling the whole experience so nothing surprises them.

Prepare everything before they arrive. Every form filled out except the signatures, flagged, in order, so all they do is read and sign where you point. You narrate every page in one plain sentence before they sign it, because a person who understands the page they are signing is a person who never cancels. Never let them face a form cold. Never let a piece of paper say something you have not already explained at the first table. If a number on a form does not match what they expect, you stop and fix it right there, out loud, because a small confusion left alone on paperwork day becomes a canceled plan by Friday. Calm, slow, narrated, no surprises. That is the whole method.

> **SAY THIS** *"These are already filled out. Your only job today is to read each one with me and sign where the little flag is. Nothing on any of these pages is going to be new to you, because we talked through all of it last time."*
>
> *"This page just says the money is moving from where it sits now into the plan we drew. This one names Barbara so the check keeps coming to her if you are gone first. This one is your free-look window, and I want to talk about that one, because it matters to me that you use it."*

> *A retiree does not cancel a plan they understand. They cancel a form that surprised them.*

Make the decision small

The biggest thing you can do for a nervous couple is shrink the decision. A person who thinks they are deciding their entire financial future in one afternoon will freeze, because that is too big a thing to be sure about. But that is not actually what they are deciding today, and you tell them so. Remember Buying the Buckets. You do not have to build the whole thing at once. You fill the first bucket, the Paycheck bucket, the one that covers the must-pay bills for life, and you live with it. That is the decision on the table today. One bucket. The rest we talk about when you are ready, next quarter, next year, when this first piece has already proven itself.

That reframe is not a trick to get a foot in the door. It is the truth, and it is kinder. A person can be certain about a small, obvious step even when they would freeze at a giant one. So you make today's yes as small as it honestly is. Fill the Core first, the plain and obvious foundation, and let everything else wait for its own day. When the decision is small, the fear is small, and a small fear does not send anybody home to think about it for six months.

> **SAY THIS** *"I do not want you to feel like you are deciding your whole life this afternoon, because you are not. Today we are just filling the first bucket, the one that puts a check in your mailbox that you cannot outlive."*
> *"That is the only decision on this table today. Everything else, the legacy piece, the raise for down the road, we talk about later, once this first check is already showing up and you have seen it work. One step. Does that feel like something you can be sure about today?"*

Built once, and never re-decided

Now say the thing that is the whole promise of the second appointment, because it is the reason the structure you are building beats the alternative every retiree fears. What you are handing this family is a plan they build one time and then never have to re-decide. That is what the mark means. Plan Once. Plan for Life®.

The work is front-loaded. We do the hard thinking now, we build it right, and then it is done. There is no annual meeting where we panic about the market and wonder if we should move to cash. There is no spreadsheet to re-run when they turn seventy-eight. There is no should-we-should-we-not conversation every time the news gets loud. It is decided. It stays decided.

Hold that up against the alternative, because the contrast is the sale. A withdrawal plan, the four-percent kind, is a plan you re-litigate every single year for thirty years. Every year you look at the balance and wonder if you took too much. Every downturn you wonder if this is the year the math breaks and you become the one in twelve whose money does not last. That is not a plan. That is a thirty-year worry with a decimal point on it. What you are delivering today is the opposite of that. You decide once. The check shows up on its own, every month, for life, and then for the survivor's life when joint life is elected. Nothing to time, nothing to sell at the bottom, nothing to re-decide. That is why the worry actually goes away, and the worry going away is the product.

> **SAY THIS** *"Here is what I love most about what we just built. You are done. This is not a thing you have to keep deciding."*
> *"The folks down the street with everything in the market, they get to wonder every single year if they took out too much, and every bad year they wonder if this is the one that breaks them. You do not have to live that way. We planned it once, and it runs for life. Plan Once. Plan for Life®. That is the whole idea, and now it is yours."*

Lock it so it holds

The sale is not safe the moment they sign. A nervous night, a brother-in-law with an opinion, a phone call from the advisor they are leaving, any of those can unwind a good decision in the free-look window. So you protect it on purpose, honestly, before they walk out the door. First, you surface the wobble yourself. You ask them, right there, if any doubt is likely to creep in tonight, and you handle it now in the room instead of on the phone Thursday. Second, you get them to say their own reasons back to you, because a person who has rehearsed their own why does not get rattled by a stray comment at the dinner table. Third, you point them at the free-look window and you tell them to use it. Not because you are worried, but because a person who reviews and stays is a person who never cancels.

> **SAY THIS** *"Sometimes after a decision like this, a little doubt creeps in that night, or somebody raises an eyebrow at the next family dinner. If that happens for you, what do you think it would be?"*
>
> *"Good. Let's settle that right now while I am sitting here, not next week on the phone. And do me a favor. If your son asks why you did this, what are you going to tell him?"*
>
> *"That is exactly right. You just said it better than I could. One more thing. The packet will arrive in the mail. Call me and we will read the important parts together. I want you certain, not just signed."*

> *A retiree who feels supported after the yes keeps the plan. One left alone with a thick packet and a nervous relative cancels it.*

The relief on the other side

I want you to watch their faces on delivery day, because there is a moment you will see again and again once you do this right, and it is the reason to be in this business at all. It is the moment the decision is made and the shoulders come down. You can see it. A couple who walked in carrying a low hum of worry they have carried for years, the will-we-be-okay worry, the who-goes-first worry, the what-if-the-market-crashes worry, and it lifts, right there at the table, because the thing that was vague and scary is now one page on the refrigerator with a check attached to it. That relief is what they actually came for. Not a rate. Not a product. Permission to stop worrying about the money and go live.

So do not rush past it. When you see the shoulders come down, get quiet and let them feel it. You have just handed a family the one thing money is really for, which is peace of mind. They will never worry about spending again, not because they are suddenly rich, but because there is another check coming next month, and the month after, for the rest of their lives. That is the glide path to a safe landing. You built it once, and it will run for the rest of their days and their spouse's days after that. Plan Once. Plan for Life®. Then you shake their hands, you tell them you are proud of them, and you mean it, because deciding to protect the people you love is a brave and good thing, and you got to be the one who made it plain and easy.

CHAPTER 18

Keep and Multiply

You do not chase referrals. You earn them, and then you have the dignity to ask.

The paperwork is the beginning, not the end

Most advisors think the work ends when the ink dries. That is exactly backward, and it is the single most expensive mistake in this business. The signature is not the finish line. It is the starting line of a relationship that, done right, lasts the rest of that family's life and brings you their children and their friends besides. The money in this practice is not in the sale. It is in what comes after the sale, in the years of showing up, in the trust that compounds, in the families they send you because you did what you said you would do. A transaction earns you one commission. A relationship earns you a career. So the day the plan is in place, you do not close a file. You open a relationship, and you tend it like the valuable thing it is.

Here is the plain truth of it, borrowed from a hard-nosed deal-maker but true for a fiduciary-minded advisor most of all. You cannot con people, at least not for long. Eventually you have to deliver what you promised. The marketing gets you in the door. The service is what keeps you together for twenty years. So the whole strategy of keeping and multiplying rests on one thing you control completely, which is whether you actually deliver the goods after the yes. Do that, and referrals stop being something you have to squeeze out of people. They become the natural overflow of a job well done.

> *A transaction earns you one commission. A relationship earns you a career.*

Deliver so well that referrals become natural

The best referral system in the world is not a script. It is a client so well cared for that they cannot help talking about you. Set that up on purpose. Under-promise and over-deliver, every time. Set honest expectations at the table, name the trade-offs plainly, never let your promise outrun what the plan actually guarantees, and then beat your own word on service. A skeptic who was braced to be oversold becomes your loudest fan the day he realizes it all came in better than the pitch. That is the whole game. You do not want a satisfied client. Satisfied is forgettable. You want a client who is a little amazed at how easy you made it and how present you have stayed.

So be reachable. Answer the phone. Call them before they have to call you. When something goes sideways, and in a long relationship something always will, you own it fast and you make it right, because reputation compounds on how you handle the bad day, not the good one. The retiree who feels genuinely looked after does two things for your practice without being asked. They keep their plan through every scary headline, because they trust the person who built it, and they tell their friends about the advisor who actually picks up the phone. Service is not the thing you do after the sale. Service is the marketing.

> **SAY THIS** *"I want to set the bar honestly with you, because I would rather you be pleasantly surprised than oversold. Here is exactly what this plan will do and what it will not."*
> *"And here is my promise on top of it. You will never wonder if I forgot about you. I will call you before you have to call me, and when you do call, you get me, not a menu."*

The annual review that reassures

Once a year, you sit down with every family and you review. Not to sell them something new, though sometimes a new bucket is right and you will get to it. The main job of the annual review is reassurance. A retiree lives through a lot of scary headlines in twelve months, and every one of them plants a small seed of doubt. The annual review is where you pull those seeds before they grow. You walk them back through the one page. You show them the green flags still going up on the mailbox exactly as promised. You remind them what job each color of money is doing. You let them feel, all over again, that the decision they made is holding.

Run it in a fixed rhythm so it is a habit and not a scramble. Start with their life, not their money, because their life is what the money is for. Ask what changed this year, a new grandchild, a health scare, a move, a wish. Then tie the plan back to it. Confirm the Core is still doing its job. Look honestly at whether anything needs adjusting, and if nothing does, say so plainly, because telling a client to change nothing is the most trust-building thing you can do. An advisor who only ever recommends action teaches people to distrust the recommendation. An advisor who sometimes says leave it exactly as it is has earned the right to be believed when he does say move.

> **SAY THIS** *"Before we look at a single number, tell me about your year. What changed for you and the family? Any new grandbabies, any health scares, any big trips you have been dreaming about?"*
> *"Good. Now here is your one page, same as the day we built it. The green flags are going up on your mailbox every month, right on schedule, exactly like we planned. Your Core is doing its job. The market had a rough stretch this year and it did not touch a dollar of the money you live on."*
> *"Here is my honest read. Everything is working the way we designed it, and my advice is to change nothing. We leave it right where it is. I only ever move a thing when moving it helps you, and today it does not."*

> *The advisor who sometimes says change nothing has earned the right to be believed when he says move.*

Become the whole family's advisor

A single client is a good thing. A whole family is a practice that never has to prospect from cold again. So think in generations from the very first meeting. The couple across the table has adult children who are staring down their own retirements, aging parents who need long-term care thought through, and grandchildren whose education somebody worries about at night. You are not being greedy to care about all of them. You are being the kind of advisor a family actually needs, the one who knows the whole picture and can catch the thing that falls between the generations.

You earn the family the same way you earned the couple, by being useful without being asked. When your client mentions their daughter just changed jobs and does not know what to do with the old retirement account, you offer to help the daughter, no strings, as a gift to a family you care about. When their aging mother is confused about her options, you make yourself available. You become the person the family calls when anything with a dollar sign on it comes up, and slowly, naturally, the children become clients, and their children after them. That is a practice you build once and harvest for thirty years. It is Plan Once. Plan for Life®, applied to your own business.

> **SAY THIS** *"You mentioned your daughter just started a new job and has an old account sitting at her last employer. If it would help, I am happy to spend thirty minutes with her, no cost and no pressure, just so she does not make a rookie mistake with it."*
> *"I mean that as a favor to your family, not a pitch. You are my client. Looking after the people you love is part of looking after you."*

The referral ask, done with dignity

Now the part that makes good advisors squirm, and it should not. You have to ask for referrals, and you can do it with complete dignity if you understand one thing. You are not begging for a favor. You are offering to do for someone they love the same good thing you did for them. Framed that way, the ask is a gift, not a grab. The advisor who begs, who guilts, who slips a stack of cards across the table and asks them to hand them out, that advisor sounds needy, and needy is the opposite of the calm authority that earned the trust in the first place. You never beg. You invite.

So ask at the right moment, which is when they are feeling the relief, right after a delivery or a good annual review, when the plan just proved itself. Ask specifically, because who do you know is too big a question and nobody can answer it, while who do you know that is a few years from retirement and worrying about the market gives their mind something to grab. And ask honestly, naming that you have room for a few good families and you would rather they come from people you already trust than from a stranger who saw your name somewhere. Then you get quiet and let them think. Do not fill the silence. The ask, done clean, does not need rescuing.

> **SAY THIS** *"Can I ask you something, and feel completely free to say no. Do you know a couple, maybe a few years from retirement, who worries about the market the way you used to before we built this?"*
> *"Here is why I ask. I have room for a few good families, and I would a hundred times rather help someone you care about than a stranger who found my name somewhere. What I did for you, the plain, honest plan, I would be glad to do for them, no cost and no pressure, just a conversation."*
> *"If someone comes to mind, all I would ask is that you tell them I am the fellow who takes the worry out of it. And if nobody comes to mind, that is completely fine, and it changes nothing between us."*

> *You are not begging for a favor. You are offering to do for someone they love the same good thing you did for them.*

Reputation is the only marketing that compounds

Everything in this chapter comes down to one asset that grows quietly for your whole career, and that asset is your reputation. Every plan you deliver honestly, every phone call you return, every annual review where you told the truth, every time you said change nothing when a lesser advisor would have churned the account, all of it deposits into the same account, and that account compounds. A reputation for being the straight shooter who actually delivers is worth more than any amount of marketing money, because it is the one thing a competitor cannot buy, copy, or outspend. The families you serve become a sales force you never have to manage, telling your story at church, at the coffee shop, over the back fence, in exactly the plain words you taught them to use about their own plan.

So keep and multiply is not a tactic you bolt on at the end. It is the natural result of doing the whole job right, from the first honest word at the first appointment to the tenth annual review a decade later. Deliver the goods. Stay reachable. Reassure them every year. Take care of the whole family. Ask for referrals with your head up, as a gift and never as a plea. Do that, and you will not spend your career chasing clients. You will spend it serving the ones you have and welcoming the ones they send. That is a practice built once and enjoyed for life, which is only fitting, because it is exactly what you built for them. Plan Once. Plan for Life®, for the family across the table and for the one who serves them.

PART SIX

Build the Practice

The numbers that turn honest work into a living.

CHAPTER 19

The Pipeline and the Numbers

Hope is not a plan, and a full heart does not fill a calendar. The numbers do that.

Selling is a sequence, not a spark

Somewhere along the way a young advisor gets told that selling is magic. That the great ones have a gift, a silver tongue, and either you are born with it or you go find another line of work. That is a comforting lie, because it lets the person who believes it off the hook. If it is magic, then a slow month is just the magic not showing up, and there is nothing to fix but your mood. Throw that idea out the window today. Selling is not a spark. It is a sequence. It is a series of steps that starts with a stranger who has never heard your name and ends with a family at your table saying yes to a plan that will feed them for life. Every one of those steps can be counted. And anything you can count, you can improve.

Here is the whole thing in one breath. You gather an audience. Some of that audience raises a hand. Some of the hands turn into appointments. Some of the appointments turn into plans. That is the pipeline, top to bottom, and it never changes. The names change, the market changes, the products get better, but the shape of the thing is a hundred years old and it will bury all of us. Your job is not to be brilliant at the bottom of it, closing hard on the one person who happened to wander in. Your job is to keep the top of it full, so that closing is just the natural end of an honest sequence you ran on purpose.

> *Selling is a sequence, not a spark. Anything you can count, you can improve.*

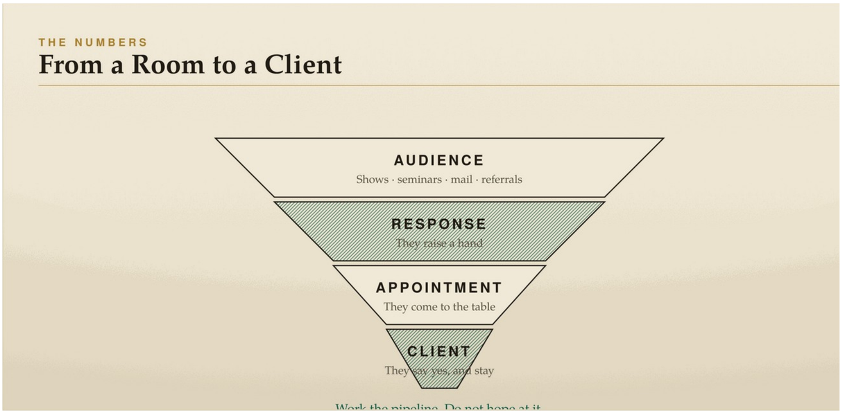

Figure 14. *Work the pipeline instead of hoping at it.*

The funnel, top to bottom

Picture a funnel, wide at the top and narrow at the bottom, and picture your whole practice pouring through it. At the very top is your audience. That is everybody who hears you or reads you or gets your mail in a given month. Below that is the response, the folks who raise a hand, call the number, reserve a seat, ask for the guide. Below that is the appointment, the ones who actually sit down across from you. And at the bottom, the narrow end, is the client, the family who says yes and walks out with a plan. Audience, response, appointment, client. Four levels. That is the whole machine.

Now here is what most advisors never do. They never look at the funnel as a funnel. They stand at the bottom and stare at how many clients came out this month, and if the number is low they feel bad and if it is high they feel good, and either way they have learned nothing, because the bottom number is the last thing to move and the last thing you control. The pro looks up the funnel, not down. She looks at how many appointments she has next week, because that number tells her what the client number will be in a month. And she looks at how many hands went up this week, because that tells her what the appointment number will be. You read the funnel from the top down, because the top is the part you can still do something about.

The activity that feeds the top

A funnel is empty until you pour something in, and the something is activity. In this practice there are four faucets that fill the top, and a healthy pipeline usually runs more than one of them at a time so that no single one going dry can starve you. The first is the shows, the radio and the airtime, where you teach for an hour and a few good people decide they want to meet the person behind the voice. The second is the seminars, the live rooms where you make it a night out and give real value from the stage and let the back of the room fill up the calendar. The third is the mail, the invitations that land in the right mailbox in the right ZIP code and bring in the folks who would never call a radio show but will mail back a card. And the fourth, the best one of all, is referrals, the families you already serve sending you the people they love.

Notice that three of those four are things you do, not things that happen to you. You choose to be on the air. You choose to book the room and fill it. You choose to send the mail. The pipeline is not weather. It is a garden, and it grows what you plant. When a month comes in thin, ninety times out of a hundred you can walk it back to a week eight or ten weeks earlier when you got busy and stopped planting. The harvest is always lagging the planting, and that lag is exactly why you cannot wait until the funnel runs dry to start filling it. You fill it while it is full. That is the discipline the whole practice rests on.

> *The harvest lags the planting. So you fill the funnel while it is still full, not after it runs dry.*

Know your numbers

Now we do the math, and I promise you it is fifth-grade math, because I do not do any other kind. Every step of that funnel has a conversion, which is just a fancy word for what fraction moves down to the next level. Out of the hands that go up, how many become appointments. Out of the appointments you book, how many actually sit down. Out of the folks who sit down, how many become clients. Three fractions. Learn your three fractions and you have taken the mystery out of your own business for the rest of your career.

I will give you illustrative numbers, made-up for teaching, not a promise about your practice or mine. Say that out of every three families who sit down for a real first appointment, one becomes a client. That is a close rate of one in three. And say that when you book an appointment, three out of four people actually show up, because life happens and a quarter of them cancel or fade. That is your show rate. And say that of the hands that go up, the reservations and the calls, about half turn into a booked appointment once your team works the phones. Three fractions. One in three closes, three in four show, one in two hands become a booking. Yours will be different from mine, but you must know them, because without them you are flying a plane with the instruments taped over.

From the family, counting backward

Here is where the numbers become a plan instead of a diary, and this is the move that changes a career. You do not start at the top and hope. You start at the bottom, at the number of families you want to help this year, and you count backward up the funnel until you land on what you have to do this week. Let me walk it, illustrative all the way, so you see the machine turn.

Say your goal is to help fifty families this year. Fifty plans, fifty households whose retirement you fixed. Start there. At a close rate of one in three, fifty clients means you need one hundred and fifty first appointments to actually sit down over the year. That is your appointment number, and it is the real one, the one that predicts everything else. One hundred and fifty appointments across fifty working weeks is three kept appointments a week. Three. That is the whole job, said as a weekly target you can look at on a Monday.

But people cancel, so to keep three you have to book four, because only three in four show. Four booked appointments a week, times fifty weeks, is two hundred booked. And since only half of the raised hands become a booking, you need four hundred hands in the air over the year to book those two hundred. Four hundred responses a year is eight good hands a week. Now look at what just happened. Fifty families, a number that felt like a wish, turned into eight hands a week and four bookings a week, numbers you can actually chase on a Tuesday afternoon. That is the gift of knowing your numbers. The mountain becomes a staircase.

And you can push it one level higher, into the activity. If a radio hour and a mailer and a seminar night together throw off, say, forty hands in a month, then eight a week is right on track and you keep doing exactly what you are doing. If they throw off twenty, then you are running at half the pace your goal needs, and you know it in February instead of finding out in December. You do not need more willpower. You need one more seminar on the calendar, or a second mailer in the drop. The numbers do not judge you. They just tell you the truth early enough to do something about it.

> *Fifty families a year is eight hands a week. Count backward from the family and the mountain becomes a staircase.*

The scoreboard

A number you do not write down is a number you do not have. So you keep a scoreboard, and it can be a whiteboard on the office wall or a single sheet in a binder, and I have used both and I do not care which you choose as long as it is where you can see it every day. The columns are just the funnel laid on its side. Activity out this week, hands raised, appointments booked, appointments kept, plans started. Five columns, filled in every Friday before you go home. That is fifteen minutes, and it is the most valuable fifteen minutes in your week, because at the end of a month you can look down the sheet and the weak step jumps off the page.

That is the real power of the scoreboard. It does not just tell you that you are behind. It tells you where. If the hands are there but the bookings are low, your phone follow-up is the leak and that is this month's project. If the bookings are there but the shows are low, your confirmation is weak and people are forgetting they said yes. If they show but they do not become clients, then the work is in the room, in your discovery and your prescribing, and you go sharpen that. You fix one leak at a time, and you change one thing at a time so you actually know what moved the number. A practice run this way does not have good years and bad years by luck. It has a set of dials, and you know which one to turn.

Work the pipeline, do not hope

Now let me tie the scoreboard to your feet, to what you actually do all day, because a chart on the wall changes nothing until it changes your calendar. Working the pipeline means the eight hands a week and the four bookings a week are on the calendar as appointments with yourself, blocked and protected, before anything else gets to fill that time. It means Monday you are not asking how you feel about the week, you are asking whether the funnel has what it needs, and if it is thin at the top you do the top-of-funnel work first, the calls and the invites and the asks, before you touch anything comfortable.

And the very best faucet you own, the referral, does not turn itself. You have to ask, and you ask every satisfied family, out loud, plainly, at the moment they are happiest with the work. Here is the language.

> **SAY THIS** *"Can I ask you something. You know how I do things now, the plain honest way we did your plan. Who else in your life is close to retirement and is not getting straight answers."*

> *"I am not asking you to sell anybody. Just give me a name and a nod, and I will treat them exactly the way I treated you. No cost, no pressure, and if their house is already in order I will tell them so and send them home."*

That ask, made a hundred times a year instead of never, will do more for your top of funnel than any mailer you will ever send, because a referred family arrives already trusting you. Work the pipeline. Do not sit at the bottom and hope.

Leads over ego, consistency over intensity

Two last things, and they are the ones I would tattoo on a young advisor's arm if he would let me. The first is leads over ego. Your feelings are not a forecast. The month you feel like a king may be the month the funnel goes empty behind you because you got proud and stopped planting, and the month you feel like a fraud may be your best month because you kept the activity up when your mood said quit. Do not manage your mood. Manage your funnel. The scoreboard does not care how you feel, and that is exactly why it will save you.

The second is consistency beats intensity, and this is the whole game in four words. The advisor who does a heroic week once a quarter and coasts the rest loses every time to the one who does eight hands and four bookings every single week without fail. A pipeline is a fire. A little fuel every day keeps it hot, and a huge pile once a season lets it go cold in between and you spend half your energy just relighting it. Steady wins. The families you are meant to serve are out there right now, and the only question is whether your funnel is full enough this week to reach the ones who need you next month. Keep it full. Count backward from the family. Read the scoreboard on Friday, fix the weak step, and run the sequence again. That is not the boring part of the craft. That is the craft.

> *Do not manage your mood, manage your funnel. Consistency beats intensity, every week, every time.*

CHAPTER 20

Say the Plain, Honest Thing

The whole craft, in the end, comes down to one thing. Sit down, look them in the eye, and say the plain, honest thing.

One sentence under all of it

We have covered a lot of ground together in this book. The three colors of money and the Rule of 100. The gas pump and the green flags on the mailbox. The three plays, the five buckets bought in order, the REDZONE® and the four-percent trap. The discovery questions, the nine worries, the pipeline and the numbers. That is a lot of machinery, and I taught it to you piece by piece on purpose, because a craft is built one tool at a time. But I would be doing you wrong if I let you close this book thinking the craft is the machinery. It is not. Underneath every tool in here is a single sentence, and if you forget everything else, keep this. The whole job is to sit down with a family, understand their real situation, and say the plain, honest thing about it.

That is it. That is the through-line of the entire system. Every technique in this book is just a better way to get to that sentence and to say it well. The questions are so you actually know the truth before you speak. The pictures are so the truth lands in a form they can hold. The honesty about trade-offs is so the truth stays whole and does not come back to bite you. Strip all of it down and what is left is a person who found out what was really going on and told the truth about it, kindly, to someone who needed to hear it. Master everything else in these pages, and if you cannot do that one thing, you have mastered nothing. Learn to do that one thing, and everything else is just polish.

> *Underneath every tool in this book is one sentence: say the plain, honest thing.*

Certainty, not probability

Here is the first stone in the foundation, and it is the one that separates this practice from most of the industry. We deal in certainty, not probability. The market-only world sells a probability. They run the software and it tells your family they have an eighty-something percent chance of not running out of money, and they say it with a straight face as if that were comfort. But a retiree does not get to live his retirement most of the time. He gets to live it once. You cannot spend a probability at the grocery store. And the four-percent rule that all of it rests on is not a promise, it is a backtest, and roughly one family in twelve who trusted it runs out anyway, undone by a bad market early or a long life or both.

That is why the Core is built on green money, the money that never goes down, the check that shows up whether the market soared or crashed. Not because growth is bad, growth is wonderful, and that is what the Explore money is for. But the money a family eats on cannot be a maybe. It has to be a yes. When you build the Core on guarantees, backed by the strongest insurers whose ratings you show them yourself, you are handing a family something the probability crowd cannot, which is the ability to sleep. You still name the trade-offs plainly, the surrender schedule, the caps, the rider costs, the fact that the account value can reach zero while the lifetime check keeps arriving. But when the honest accounting is done, what they own is a certainty, and a certainty is worth more than a rosy chart every single day of a long retirement.

> **SAY THIS** *"I am not going to hand you a number that says you probably will not run out. You do not get to retire probably. You get to retire once, and I want you certain."*
> *"So we build the part you live on out of money that cannot go backward, and then we go be brave with what is left over. Safety first, and once safety is handled, growth all day long."*

Coach, not salesman

The second stone is the one that decides what kind of person you are going to be in this business. Coach, not salesman. A salesman needs the deal. His interest and the family's interest sit on opposite sides of the table, and everybody in the room can feel it even if nobody says it. A coach needs the player to win. His whole reason for being there is that the family across the table crosses their goal line safely, and if that means telling them to do less, or nothing, or to go home and keep what they already have, then that is the winning call and he makes it without a flinch. The two look similar for the first ten minutes. Over thirty years they could not be more different, because one is building deals and the other is building a life's worth of families who trust him.

This is where suitability stops being a rule and becomes who you are. If a family sits down and their Core is already covered, their income already safe, you tell them so and you sell them nothing, and you send them home lighter than they came in. It will cost you a sale that day. It will make you a fortune over a career, because that family will tell everyone they know that they finally met an advisor who told them the truth even when the truth paid him nothing. A coach can walk away clean from a bad fit and sleep like a baby. That freedom, the freedom to not need the deal, is the most persuasive thing you will ever carry into a room, and the funny part is that you cannot fake it. You either need the sale or you need them to win. Decide now, once, which one you are.

> **SAY THIS** *"Can I be honest with you. Your income is already covered. You do not need what I sell, and I am not going to invent a problem so I can fix it."*
> *"Keep your money where it is. If anything ever changes, you call me. That is the whole appointment, and there is no bill."*

> *A salesman needs the deal. A coach needs the family to win. Decide, once, which one you are.*

The kitchen table

The third stone is a place, and I want you to picture it, because everything we do points here. It is a kitchen table. Not a boardroom with a glass wall and a city view. A kitchen table, with a napkin and two cups of coffee and a couple who have worked forty years and are scared, though they will not use that word, that they are going to do something dumb with the only nest egg they will ever get. That is the room. That is who you serve. And at that table, all the jargon and the ticker symbols and the industry vocabulary are worse than useless, because they are a fog, and a scared person in a fog reaches for whoever sounds certain even if that person is wrong.

So you bring the plain, honest thing to the kitchen table and you say it in words the whole family can repeat. Three colors of money. A percent sign after your age. A green flag on the mailbox and a check that keeps coming for the one who is left behind. You draw it on the napkin, because a plan a person can draw is a plan a person can keep, and a plan they can teach to their son-in-law is a plan they will never leave. That is the whole art. Take something the industry made complicated on purpose and make it simple on purpose, so that a frightened couple stops being frightened, not because you dazzled them, but because for the first time somebody made it make sense.

Why this lasts, and why it compounds

Now let me tell you why this way of working feels good and wins, and wins bigger every year you do it. It is because trust compounds, exactly the way money does, and almost nobody in this business is patient enough to let it. The advisor who chases the deal gets the deal and then has to go find a whole new stranger to chase, over and over, running on a treadmill his entire career. The advisor who tells the plain honest truth gets the family, and the family gets the truth, and then the family sends their sister and their neighbor and the couple from church, and those families send more, until one day the practice runs mostly on the goodwill you planted years ago and you can barely remember the last time you had to chase anybody.

That is the quiet miracle of doing it right. Early on it looks slower, because honesty costs you the sale you should not have made and patience costs you the shortcut. But integrity has a compounding rate that no market can touch, and it pays in a currency the salesman never accumulates, which is a name that means something in your town. Twenty years in, a family walks into your office already sold, because their parents were your clients and nothing bad ever happened. You cannot buy that. You can only earn it, one honest table at a time, and once you have earned it, it feeds you and it feeds the families who find you because of it. The method lasts because trust lasts, and trust lasts because you told the truth when it was expensive to.

> *Integrity compounds. It looks slow early and then it feeds you for the rest of your life.*

A practice that outlives you

Here is the last and largest reason to do this, bigger than your income, bigger than your name. Done right, this work outlives you. When you build a family's Core on a check that cannot run out, with joint life so the survivor keeps every dollar, and a legacy set up to pass as a gift and not a tax bill, you have reached past this couple and into their children and, if you did the legacy right, their grandchildren. You have put a floor under three generations you may never meet. A stock tip is forgotten by Friday. A plan that pays a widow her full check for the twenty years she outlives her husband is remembered at the graveside and blessed at every Thanksgiving after. That is not selling. That is building something that stands after you are gone.

So build a practice worthy of that. Serve the right families and turn the wrong fits away with a blessing. Keep the pipeline full so you can reach the ones who need you. Say the plain, honest thing every single time, especially the times it costs you. Do that for thirty years and you will not just have a business, you will have a body of work, a whole community of families who retire without fear because your name showed up in their lives at the right moment. Few people get to say their work mattered that much. You are choosing a craft where it can.

The charge

If you are an advisor holding this book and wondering whether this path is for you, let me make it simple, coach to coach. The industry has plenty of salesmen. It is starving for the other kind. It needs advisors who will sit at the kitchen table, learn the family's real situation, deal in certainty instead of probability, and say the plain honest thing even when the honest thing pays them nothing. That lane is wide open, because it asks something most people will not give, which is the willingness to lose a sale to keep your word. If you have that in you, there is a whole career waiting, and a whole town's worth of families who need exactly what you would become.

So here is the charge, and then I will get out of your way. Learn the craft in this book until it is second nature, and then forget you ever studied it, so that all a family ever feels across the table is a person who understands them and tells them the truth. Fill the Core before you get brave. Fill the funnel before it runs dry. Ask for the referral, name the trade-off, walk away from the bad fit, and never once talk a family into something you would not put your own mother in. Go build a practice that serves families and outlives them. The glide path to a safe landing runs right through your office, and there are folks circling out there, low on fuel and scared, looking for somebody honest to bring them down. Go be that somebody. Say the plain, honest thing, and say it for the rest of your life.

SAY THIS *"Here is what I know how to do. I sit down with families like yours, I find out what is really going on, and I tell you the truth about it."*

"No pressure, no cost, and no obligation. If I can help, I will show you exactly how. And if you are already in good shape, I will be the first to tell you so and send you home. Either way, you leave knowing where you stand."

The industry has plenty of salesmen. It is starving for the other kind. Go be that somebody.

THE ADVISOR'S TOOLKIT

Ten Worksheets to Use Today

Photocopy these and take them to work. Every one came out of a real appointment or a real week in the business.

WORKSHEET 1

The Green-Flag Count

How many green flags go up on this family's mailbox each month? Green means a check that shows up for life and cannot be outlived. List what is there today, then what it will take to add another flag.

INCOME THEY HAVE TODAY

#	SOURCE	MONTHLY AMOUNT	FOR LIFE? (Y/N)	SURVIVOR KEEPS IT?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

THE GAP

Monthly income they need for the essentials: ____________________

Green income they have today: ____________________

The monthly gap to fill: ____________________

THE NEXT FLAG

What green bucket, bought in what order, raises this family's flag count? Write it in plain words.

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

WORKSHEET 2

Core & Explore Allocation

Put a percent sign after the age. Size the Core first, then see how much is truly free to explore. Green plus yellow is the Core. Red is Explore.

THE RULE OF 100

Client age (or the age of the one likely to be alone longest): ______

Target Core, at least this percent (put the age here): ______

WHERE THE MONEY SITS TODAY

#	ACCOUNT	AMOUNT	COLOR TODAY (G/Y/R)	WHERE IT BELONGS
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

THE MATH

Total nest egg: ______ Core today: ______

Target Core dollars: ______ Move to the Core: ______

Fill the Core first. Then they have earned the right to be brave with the rest.

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

Worksheet 3 · The Up-Front Contract

WORKSHEET 3

The Up-Front Contract

Set the frame before the first appointment starts. Agree on the time, both agendas, and how the meeting can end, including a clean no. Write your words so they are ready.

TIME

We have set aside: ______________________________

THEIR AGENDA

What do they most want answered by the time they leave?

YOUR AGENDA

What do you need to learn to know whether you can help?

THE THREE HONEST OUTCOMES

- ☐ Yes, this looks like a fit and we book the next step.
- ☐ No, this is not a fit and we shake hands as friends.
- ☐ Not yet, here is exactly what we would need to know first.

THE PERMISSION LINE (WRITE IT WORD FOR WORD)

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CachPete.com · 800-661-7383

WORKSHEET 4

The Discovery Sheet

Ask more than you tell. Lead with What and How, then be quiet. Capture their words, not your summary. The truth usually arrives late, so leave room.

CALIBRATED OPENERS

What would you want to be different about your money a year from now?

How do you want retirement to feel?

What is the worry that shows up at three in the morning?

THE GREEN-FLAG COUNT

How many green flags go up on your mailbox each month?

THE PAIN FUNNEL (SURFACE TO CENTER)

#	WHAT I ASKED	WHAT THEY SAID
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

THE REAL WORRY, IN THEIR WORDS

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

Worksheet 5 · The Nine-Worry Pre-Handle Planner

WORKSHEET 5

The Nine-Worry Pre-Handle Planner

A worry answered before it is spoken has nowhere left to stand. For each worry, write the one line you will use and where you will plant it, on air, in the mail, from the stage, or early at the table.

#	THE WORRY	MY PRE-HANDLE LINE	WHERE I PLANT IT
1	What does it cost?		
2	Let me think about it.		
3	I already have an advisor.		
4	I'll do it myself.		
5	Talk to my spouse.		
6	Now's not a good time.		
7	I don't trust annuities.		
8	Why go safe now?		
9	Why should I trust you?		

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

WORKSHEET 6

The Seminar Run-of-Show

Fun is how the truth gets in the door. Plan the beats, keep it moving, and end with one specific ask. Fill in your minutes so the room never sags.

#	SEGMENT	MINUTES	MY NOTE
1	Cold open (a picture, not a hello)		
2	The cautionary story		
3	The teaching moment		
4	The game show / Financial Fill-Up®		
5	The happy ending		
6	The honest trade-off paragraph		
7	The one specific ask		

THE SINGLE ASK (WRITE IT WORD FOR WORD)

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

WORKSHEET 7

The Pipeline Scoreboard

Selling is a numbers game run with integrity. Keep the score every week. When a number is low, you will know which step to fix instead of guessing.

WEEK	SHOWS / SEMINARS	HANDS RAISED	APPTS SET	APPTS HELD	PLANS WRITTEN
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					

MY CONVERSION FRACTIONS

Hands to appointments:

Plans I want this year:

Appointments to plans:

Weekly activity that gets me there:

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

WORKSHEET 8

The Referral Ask

Deliver so well that a referral is a gift, not a favor. Name the families you would be glad to help, write the words, and set the follow-up so it actually happens.

FAMILIES I WOULD BE GLAD TO HELP

#	NAME	HOW THEY KNOW MY CLIENT	FOLLOW-UP DATE
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

THE ASK, WORD FOR WORD

Specific, warm, and easy to say yes to. Not "send me anyone."

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

Worksheet 9 · The First-Appointment Checklist

WORKSHEET 9

The First-Appointment Checklist

The goal of the first meeting is not to close. It is to earn the truth and the second appointment. Run the list every time so nothing important gets skipped.

- ☐ Both spouses at the table.
- ☐ Up-front contract set: time, agendas, a clean no allowed.
- ☐ Led with What and How, listened more than I talked.
- ☐ Counted the green flags on the mailbox.
- ☐ Found the real worry, in their words.
- ☐ Named at least one honest trade-off out loud.
- ☐ Confirmed suitability, and was willing to say “change nothing.”
- ☐ Booked the second appointment, or shook hands as friends.

WHAT I STILL NEED BEFORE THE NEXT MEETING

Coach Pete D’Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

Worksheet 10 · The Plan-Delivery Day

WORKSHEET 10

The Plan-Delivery Day

The second appointment is a delivery, not a re-sell. Make it calm, make the decision small, and let the relief show up. Plan Once, Plan for Life®.

- [ ] One page they can hold: here is the money, here is who to call.
- [ ] Walked the paperwork slowly and out loud.
- [ ] Shrunk the decision to the first bucket.
- [ ] Named the trade-offs again, plainly.
- [ ] Explained the free-look window.
- [ ] Asked one specific question, then went quiet.
- [ ] Confirmed the decision was theirs, made on purpose.
- [ ] Set the first annual review before they left.

NOTES FOR THE FILE

Coach Pete D'Arruda · Plan Once, Plan for Life® · CoachPete.com · 800-661-7383

QUICK REFERENCE

The Nine Worries at a Glance

Every prospect carries some of these into the room. A worry is a fair question that has not been answered yet. Answer it before it is spoken and it has nowhere left to stand. Keep this page where you can see it.

Figure 15. *The nine worries, turned from red into answered questions.*

"What does it cost?" We are paid by the institutions, not out of your account. Show the fee you can see and hunt the one you cannot.

"Let me think about it." There is one unspoken question behind the polite door. Name it and settle it. Decide on purpose, not by accident.

"I already have an advisor." Never knock him. Offer a friendly second set of eyes. Is he growing your money, or guarding the money you live on?

"I'll do it myself." Honor it, then name the one risk it cannot cover: running out of income if the bad years come first.

"Talk to my spouse." Good. Bring them. It is a two-person plan, and joint life is how the survivor keeps the check.

“Now’s not a good time.” The market does not check your calendar. Buy the umbrella before it rains, especially in the REDZONE®.

“I don’t trust annuities.” Separate the good from the black sheep. Share in the gain, never in the loss. Social Security is an annuity they already love.

“Why go safe now?” You have already won the game. Take some chips off the table. Balance, not fear.

“Why should I trust you?” Do not trust me on a handshake. Trust the math on the paper. Both risk and safety, and my pay never comes out of your account.

ON THE METHOD

Source Notes

The selling flow in this book adapts a body of persuasion work to the honest, high-conviction sale of safe retirement income. The discovery questions draw on the calibrated-question and no-pressure schools of selling. The income and allocation ideas, Core & Explore, the three colors of money, the Rule of 100, the Financial Fill-Up® Strategy, GPI, Buying the Buckets, and the Financial REDZONE®, are Coach Pete's own named frameworks, taught on The Financial Safari® for many years.

All names and family situations in this book are illustrations, not real clients. Every dollar figure is illustrative and is not a projection or a guarantee. Fixed and fixed indexed annuities are insurance products, are not FDIC insured, and their guarantees rest on the claims-paying ability of the issuing insurance company. Trade-offs, caps and participation limits, rider costs, surrender schedules, and the fact that an account value can reach zero while lifetime income continues, are real and are named plainly throughout.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Coach Pete D'Arruda

FINANCIAL SAFARI PRESS · APEX, NORTH CAROLINA

Coach Pete D'Arruda is a retirement educator who has spent well over three decades helping families turn their savings into income they can't outlive, with straight answers and no pressure. His message is simple: certainty, not probability. Take the worry out of living in retirement.

He hosts The Financial Safari® radio and television program, has written over 30 books, and has trained hundreds of advisors to say the plain, honest thing at the kitchen table, which is the whole subject of this one.

If you would like to make sure your retirement is one of freedom and enjoyment, let Coach Pete write your plan. Go to www.PlanOncePlan4Life.com or click the QR code below for your no-cost Coach Pete Power Plan today.

SCAN FOR COACHPETE.COM

800-661-7383 · Text "PETE" to 600700 · Pete@CoachPete.com

PLAN ONCE, PLAN FOR LIFE®

Send Us the Family You Would Trust Us With

If this book helped you, put it to work. Bring a family in for a no-cost, no-obligation look at their plan, and let them feel what a straight answer sounds like.

Call 800-661-7383, or text PETE to 600700, or visit CoachPete.com.

SCAN FOR COACHPETE.COM