

Are You Creating Safety for Your Clients?

Would you go to a car mechanic who was very experienced but who discounted your concern about a noise from your brakes? Would you hire a cabinet maker who insisted that your cabinet doors open the opposite way from what you wanted? How about a personal trainer who ignored your complaints of pain and pushed you to do more?

My guess is that you are wondering what's wrong with these professionals that they aren't paying attention to their clients. Well, the sad state of affairs is that most professionals feel they understand their client's situation better than those same clients feel they do.

I recently helped one of my clients practice telling his financial advisor that he didn't feel adequately listened to and that his portfolio didn't feel comfortable. When my client actually went and explained this to his advisor, the advisor kept explaining that the diversification ratio the client wanted wasn't appropriate for a person his age – it had risks by being too conservative. When my client finally said, "I want the safest portfolio you can configure." The advisor agreed with obvious discouragement that the client understood so little about finances and the market.

Shortly afterwards my client switched to another advisor within the firm. This one said, "What will make you feel comfortable?" "Here are the risks to that style of portfolio. Are you more comfortable with those risks?" "Let's try it and see how you feel a year or so from now."

When the original advisor heard what had happened, he said, "I understood that he wanted that kind of portfolio and I agreed to set it up. Why did he feel he had to switch?"

To have a real dialogue with someone – client, colleague, partner, or spouse – you have to be certain you create enough safety that the other person feels free to speak openly. And as this story illustrates, even if you do what they want, but leave them feeling not understood, they may not feel the safety to trust you with their life plans, legal affairs, health, etc.

Safety is diminished when you are too aggressive with your opinions (what you feel is assertive may be experienced as aggressive by your clients) or when you abandon the dialogue by capitulating rather than working to understand the emotional message the client is trying to send.

If your clients don't feel safe talking with you, they aren't likely to expand their business dealings, refer friends or stay with you when they meet someone who feels safer.

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If you're one of the unusual professionals who understands that you may need help assessing the safety your clients feel, give me a call or email to discuss next steps you can take.