

GENERATIONAL SELLING TACTICS

Cam Marston



Don't sugarcoat it for late boomers

Second stage of the generation will respond to straight talk and customized service

We have all heard of the baby boomers, the massive generation born between 1946 and 1964.

First they were the hippies, then they were the yuppies, and then they became the leaders of business and industry.

Now, as most financial planners know, early boomers (those born by 1954) are reaching or approaching retirement age. They are turning 65 at a rate of 10,000 a day.

But what do you know about the late boomers (those born between 1955 and 1964), the ones who were too young to fight in Vietnam or attend Woodstock? The ones who are still in their 40s and 50s?

The baby boom generation is actually two generations in one, and the second half is different and larger than the first.

Knowing these differences will help the savvy planner develop a rapport with prospects and clients from this overlooked demographic, sometimes called "Generation Jones."

Late boomers (45 million) are a larger demographic than early boomers (35 million), but the most important differences are in outlook. The late boomers are more educated and ethnically diverse, and not as idealistic as the early boomers.

More of them are divorced or single. Many of them are still spending money on their children, who range in age from K-12 to young adults.

FROZEN OR ELIMINATED

If they ever had a defined-benefit retirement plan, it likely has been frozen or eliminated by now.

They felt misled by so-called experts through experiences such as Vietnam, Watergate and Iran-contra. Consequently, they are more wary of experts than older boomers.

Engaging them requires tactics about which financial advisers (i.e., experts) may not be aware:

Tell the truth and show the pain. The Great Recession may be ebbing, but its effects will linger with the late boomers for some time. They have been hit harder than older boomers. Be upfront with these clients and show them very clearly where they have been hurt, often through no fault of their own. Use concise and unemotional language — not hopeless or pessimistic language — to explain their situation. Don't sugarcoat it.

Mention upfront anything that jeopardizes their retirement plans. The late boomers are a more pragmatic group than their idealistic older peers and want straight talk from you.

Show your plan for easing the pain. At this point, your late-boomer client should appreciate your candor but may exhibit more fear, resentment and anger than gratitude. Ease his or her fear by showing your plan. Say to them, "Here is the plan that I have created to get you back on your way. It isn't too late to get you to the finish line, but we must adhere to a well-thought-out, customized plan." Break your plan down into manageable steps, some of which begin immediately.

Make room for the kids. Boomer

parents and their children are more akin to friends today than in previous generations. Parents and children rely on one another for advice today more than ever before. The late boomers, in particular, are close with their children and may include them in consultations with you. Don't act surprised.

Welcome clients' children, include them in the conversation and make a note that they will be a part of your client's decision-making team indefinitely.

Late boomers value their children's endorsements, and if you score a client, you may also earn a future one.

Sell your history. A trait that boomers share is that they value history and tenure. Talk about your firm, its past performance, your client list and the tenure of the fund manager. Mention brand names and their corporate histories. List specific securities that your client will recognize as stable companies.

Get personal. The boomers began

the shift away from "we" and toward "me." They embrace customization, so emphasize that your plan is designed specifically for their goals, and not just pulled off the shelf. Say to them, "I have considered where you have come from and where you are today. I have given lots of thought to your goals, and I have a plan to get you there." Then articulate what you have done and explain the decisions you have made.

If you take this approach, your late-boomer clients may not leap to

hug you, but they will feel more confident in you. Learning what makes late boomers tick will give you a head start on connecting with the larger segment of the most significant generation in American history.

Cam Marston, president of Generational Insights, is an expert on the effects of generational differences on the workplace and marketplace. His latest book is "Generational Selling Tactics That Work" (John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

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