

SMART BUSINESS

INSIGHT. ADVICE. STRATEGY. Atlanta

As a retirement and estate planning specialist who spends a lot of time talking to my clients about being savvy investors — and as someone who has relied heavily on a long-term commitment to personal, attentive and committed customer service to grow my own business — I've come to realize more and more over the years that smart investing and great customer service have the same professional DNA.



The bottom line is this: Building a portfolio is like building a relationship. Both take hard work, insight and understanding. Both grow stronger if you are flexible, thoughtful and committed, and both benefit from the ability to listen closely and communicate clearly.

Guiding principles and helpful reminders are all the more important during transitional periods on Wall Street. Nearly two years after a bull market began on Wall Street, there is plenty of concern out there regarding volatile events overseas. The tenuous nature of the economic recovery, in conjunction with natural disasters, political turmoil and economic uncertainties abroad leads plenty of investors to wonder if this positive trend can continue. It is during times like these when it is helpful for even the most confident investors to get a little clarity by getting back to basics.

Treat challenges as opportunities

As a growing business, tough times in the marketplace can be unsettling, but for those who can take advantage and stand out from the crowd, a challenge can be leveraged into a valuable opportunity. There is no better way to distinguish yourself from the competition than by taking the initiative with proactive customer service. In essence, it is a “strike while the iron is *not*” approach, the same basic “buy low, sell high” strategy that reminds us of the potential rewards out there for those with the confidence and vision to make bold moves. It's a great way to build a business and a great way to build a portfolio, as well.

Take the time to listen

Perhaps the single most important thing you can do to improve customer service is simple: listen. And don't just go through the motions; listen to what your clients are saying. Clear, consistent and timely communication is key, not only to improving client relationships but to helping provide the kind of solutions that will pay dividends for you and your clients over time. That same level of open-minded accessibility and willingness to absorb new information that makes a great leader is an important characteristic of a great investor, as well.

Don't be in a rush

Building a rapport with a client is about much more than just getting them to sign on the dotted line. Asking the right questions and avoiding artificial timelines is a great way to establish trust and confidence. Similarly, savvy investors will adopt a balanced, unhurried investment approach, with an emphasis on proper asset allocation. Avoid making hurried decisions and taking unnecessary gambles. The right asset — like the right client relationship — will pay long-term dividends.

Stick to your strategy

While every client is different, a strategic, disciplined approach is the best way to ensure that you can be an effective listener and provide them with sound counsel. By the same token, as an investor, avoiding a temptation to time the market, staying away from bubbles and buying high, often requires a similar level of discipline and strategic planning. Investing is like being on a diet: discipline is essential. The best investors invest academically and not emotionally. As with customer service, the details of the strategy may vary — but the underlying fundamentals remain the same. If you stay true to your principles — both in your investments and your commitment to your business providing great customer service — your professional relationships and your portfolio will both reap the benefits.

Mark Lloyd founded The Lloyd Group Inc. in 1994. The company serves the distinctive financial needs of those nearing retirement and those already retired. To learn more about The Lloyd Group Inc. visit www.thelloydgroupinc.com.