

Your discovery of the character, talent and effort your clients marshaled to obtain their hard-earned wealth will enable you to truly connect with them—by seeing money as they do. **BY MITCH ANTHONY**

# How We Measure Money

I knew the phone call from my mother was going to be a tough one when she opened with, “I don’t think Grandpa would be too proud.”

“What’s this about Mom?” I asked.

“It’s been one year and one week since Daddy died,” she said. “And, I feel so bad about what I’ve done with the money.”

“What’s happened with the money, Mom?” I inquired.

“Well, first of all, I invested a big chunk of it with a ‘friend’ (she placed the word friend in noticeable tonal asterisks), “and it has lost a lot of value, and now my ‘friend’ no longer returns my phone calls. When I finally did get through to someone in his office, he informed me that if I were to move the money, I would be penalized on top of my already substantial losses.”

“How much money have you lost, Mom?” I asked, fearing the answer I would receive. Her answer forever changed how I would view money. It was an epiphany revealing why there is such a wide chasm of understanding and trust between advisor and client in American financial services.

“I have lost five years of Daddy’s hard work.” She could barely choke out the words and began to weep.

Her father — my grandfather — Sylvester Aloyicious Babinski was a second-generation Polish immigrant farmer in the state of “Nort” Dakota (Sylvester’s pronunciation). He started farming in the middle of the Great Depression and retired in the late ’70s. He was a bit of a cult hero in his grandchildren’s eyes because when we were young, he would take us up on his knee and tell us that he was the man that grew the crops that made beer possible.

He was a regular hero to my mother and her siblings. No one ever heard him speak a foul word about anyone. He was the consummate neighbor and community man — treating every neighboring farmer’s problems and harvest as if it were his own. He was gentle in spirit but as strong as a North Dakotan blizzard breeze.

Sylvester worked through floods, tornadoes, depressions, recessions and crises of every sort. He worked long hours and months and lived modestly. He saved what he could and sold his farm to move to town at age 67. When he died, he left a sizeable inheritance to his four children — one of which was my mother.

“When I think of how hard he worked and how quickly I lost what he worked so hard to get, it just shames me,” my Mom continued. “Some of those years were so difficult. I remember the flood and Daddy losing the entire crop. I sit and think about which years I just lost. Was it 1938 to 1943? Was it 1955 to 1960? I feel so bad about it.”

My Mom’s intention in calling me that day was to ask my help and guidance in selecting a new financial advisor. She needed someone she could trust and was clueless where to turn after the experience with her “friend.” I knew that, at the very least, Mom needed an advisor who measured money the same way she did.

## HOW THE INDUSTRY MEASURES MONEY

An advisor friend called me after exiting a sales meeting with his branch manager. He was distraught. Dave believes in putting the interests of his clients first. He’s the kind of guy who measures money the way my mother does.

“Mitch, I can’t believe that some people still want to



## YOUR CLIENTS FOR LIFE

try to do business this way. Haven't we learned anything as a company?" Dave lamented.

Dave went on to describe that Monday morning pep talk from his manager. "We need to get these numbers moving," he said. "Here's just the product to do it." He went on to deliver a piquant pitch on the product-of-the-week that had a payout for the advisor at 5.85 percent. "Now you ought to be able to stir some business with that," he charged them.

"I walked out of that meeting thinking, 'What does me getting 585 basis points have to do with the well-being of my client?' Sure, that product might fit somebody in my book but that is not the proper premise for me to be calling my clients so that I can stick a little more money in my pocket — whether the shoe fits them or not."

When I juxtapose these two phone calls I can see clearly what is missing in financial services at large, and in advisors individually, and it can be summed up in one word — empathy.

See the world from the client's point of view. View the proposition from the client's perspective. Examine the options from the client's vantage point. Measure money the way your client measures money — not in digits that end in zeros, but in the price that was paid to obtain it.

Do you appreciate the price I paid to get this \$200,000, or this \$2,000 that I hold before you? If you did, it wouldn't really matter to you whether it was \$200,000 or \$2,000. You would have respected the price I paid to get it. We trade our lives for money. We trade our talents, energies, aptitudes, potential, and, most significantly, we trade our time, which comes from a limited and non-replenishable account. Some people trade their marriages and children and dreams and the essence of who they are to get that material wealth in their hands. Everyone pays a price of one sort or another.

We need to get that story of how that wealth was formed before we can experience the empathy I am advocating. I would have sympathized with my mother's loss had it been described in digits. But empathy was formed when I heard her loss described in blood, sweat, toil and tears.

There is a very simple conversation starter we can use to experience this quality of empathy with each client: "Tell me the story of how this wealth was formed."

Unless the client sitting across from you is a cast member of a real-life Soprano's type family, he or she will thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to share with you the price that was paid to earn the money in question. People love to tell such stories but are rarely offered the opportunity. They certainly remember, with affection, the people who ask such questions.

You will hear stories of opportunities lost and gained. You'll hear stories of sacrifice and risk and of ventures and dreams. You'll hear stories of parents and children, and hardship and pain. You'll hear stories of entrepreneurial windfalls and of safe and steady gains. Three things will happen as you hear these stories:

You will gain empathy for your client.

Your client will gain appreciation and trust in you.

You will develop a bridge of understanding between the two of you.


How do we build that bridge of understanding and trust between the client who has been burned, and the advisor who needs more business? We build that bridge with empathy. Empathy alone can cure what ails the industry at large and the individual relationships it is comprised of. We hear our client's story — and I mean we really hear his or her story. As a result, empathy is formed, respect is established, and we are no longer tempted to

do anything that puts our own interests ahead of the client we now know and understand.

### A NEW MEASURE

The way we measure money will change when the way we measure people changes. I know many in this industry who measure people in digits ("That guy's worth a lot"). But I submit that the value of each man and woman can be measured above all by his or her character.

By hearing the story of how they gained the wealth, you gain a more accurate measure of who they are, the price they have paid, and the kind of character, talent, and effort it took to create that wealth. Their stories may impress you in a way that motivates you to serve them the very best you can, or it may dissuade you from wanting to serve them at all. But the story you hear will undoubtedly change your point of reference with that client.

I want an advisor for my mother that appreciates the toil, the years, the discipline, the love of family, and the love of the land that created the wealth inherited from her father the farmer. Come to think of it, that's the kind of advisor I want for my family and myself. The kind that, rather than telling me a story of what he will do with the money I bring, first wants the story of how the money came into our hands, and the price we paid to get it. That is the truest measure of money. 



**Mitch Anthony** is the president of Advisor Insights, a training firm focused on building lasting client relationships. He is the author of "Your Clients For Life," "The New Retirementality," "Selling With Emotional Intelligence" and co-author of "StorySelling For Financial Advisors." He can be reached at [mitch@mitchanthony.com](mailto:mitch@mitchanthony.com).