

Free Checkup Meetings Generate Lots of Revenue!

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In our [last article](#), we discussed the “free service package” alternative to an annual maintenance fee program. The package included a free attorney checkup meeting every three years.

You may be wondering, “How do you get your existing clients to come back in for these checkup meetings and actually generate additional revenue from them?”

(Before I address these questions, let me first note that, even if you do have and decide to keep your current maintenance plan, periodic checkup meetings present opportunities for your clients to purchase additional items not covered by your plan or, at the least, this will get them to come in and take advantage of an important service component of your plan so that they will see the value of continuing to pay the annual fee!)

Okay, now let's get to the issue of how to get more of your clients to actually come in for their free three-year checkup meetings. The first step is to prepare your clients in advance. I call this “Creating the Client's Expectation”. Like any other process or procedure that takes place in your office and practice, it is good strategy and policy to inform your clients in advance so they know exactly what to expect. Then, when you deliver exactly their expectation, they will invariably be very happy with you.

With respect to the three-year checkup meeting, we program the client's expectations beginning at our [Living Trust Seminar](#). We indicate that one of the things that sets us apart is our “Free Service Package” that attendees are entitled to when they become clients (see our [July newsletter article](#)). One of the components of the Free Service Package is the free three-year checkup. We explain to our clients that you pay for this upfront as part of your initial plan fee, so you'll want to take advantage of it! We also explain the reasons why they want to come in for a periodic checkup. We utilize a doctor analogy, so they can understand why, even if they don't feel there's anything they need or want to change in their plan, they will want to come in and be sure



that everything is okay. We emphasize why stale or out-of-date plans wind up becoming horror stories. We emphasize the myriad number of changes that can occur over time, including changes in their relationships with people that they named as trustees and beneficiaries, changes in the abilities, needs and circumstances of beneficiaries, changes in the client's wishes relating to their beneficiaries, changes in the client's health or wealth, changes in the law and changes in planning technology. (By the way, there's no magic to the selection of three years for the checkup meetings versus every one or two years; I've just found three years to be enough of a time lag that some law or planning change probably warrants a plan revision.)

We not only spend a good deal of time at the seminar emphasizing the importance of coming in for this three-year checkup, but we also re-emphasize it when the seminar attendee/prospective client comes into the office and becomes a client. At the point we are engaged and again when we sign their documents, we reiterate the importance of this three-year checkup meeting and that we will be contacting them in three years to set up that appointment with them. We continue to solidify the client's expectation of the three-year checkup meeting through follow-up letters, newsletters, seminar mailers and other frequent contacts. Finally, we send out a reminder postcard a few weeks before their three-year anniversary.

The next step is telemarketing. No, I'm not talking about hiring some telemarketing company to cold call your clients. We're talking about "warm" calls that follow-up the reminder postcard. These are done in-house, by trained staff at minimal cost to you and under your close supervision. You can use existing staff a few hours a day or even hire a part-time person to do these calls at minimum wage. We typically provide a "script". The script includes how to handle common client objections to coming in for the review, such as, "I'm too busy." or "Why do I need to come in?" or "How much will it cost?" or "Will I be obligated to buy something?", etc. One of the important managerial tips is to closely hold your callers accountable. I get a weekly report which details how many calls were made, how many people were reached and, of those reached, how many were successfully placed on the calendar for a review appointment. Accountability also comes with rewards. I typically give bonuses to the callers based on the number of clients that not only make the appointment, but actually show up for their meeting.

It's important to note that even if a client says, "No, I'm not interested.", this call is an opportunity to improve your database, as well as your overall customer service. The call can be used to update postal addresses and get e-mail addresses so that you can save money when sending hard-mailed newsletters and other notices. And, you can even get the client's mobile number to make it easier to reach him or her and even confirm appointments with a text messaging service. Your caller can find out information that will be pertinent for you in terms of developing additional work. For example, sometimes callers learn that the person's spouse has passed away and they need to come in for their estate administration work. Or, they find out that the client has moved and has bought a new home, but that new home has never had title placed into his or her Living Trust.

Our callers are trained not to give up and just hang up once a client indicates they are not interested in coming in for their free checkup meeting. Not only do they look to get updated information as we indicated, the next alternative to the appointment itself is inviting the client to an [in-house Review Seminar](#). This is a brief form of our [Living Trust Seminar](#) that emphasizes where there have been changes to the law and estate planning technology over the past few years. It also alerts the clients to other reasons why they will want to book their review appointment before they leave the seminar. An invitation to this [Review Seminar](#) can also be hard-mailed to those clients who cannot be reached by phone. Furthermore, we list our [Review Seminar](#) date and time in our monthly e-mail newsletter. We hold the seminar once a month in our conference room to keep the costs down to virtually zero. It doesn't matter whether we only have four or five people there, because our success rate in booking appointments at that seminar is typically 100% and, as I will share in a moment, a high percentage of these appointments

result in additional work and fees. When inviting clients to this [Review Seminar](#), we also encourage them to bring any friends or family members who may have a Living Trust that needs to be reviewed or updated. ("Friends and family should be kept up with the latest estate planning information, too!")

When making the calls and presenting the [Review Seminar](#), we use a special technique to get more people to book their appointments (and actually come in for them). We offer a free document that will be delivered and signed at the meeting. For example, we renew their General Assignment of assets to their Trust, which needs to be recent in time in order to be valid under our state's law. You may offer some other small document item (and, if you already have a maintenance plan, this might be a good time to deliver a document or other service that is already part of your plan so clients see real value). Really, this inducement can be anything of value -- a free book, report, DVD or store card or discount coupon for a local merchant (we've found people love \$10 Starbucks cards!). The point I'm making here is that offering something of value for coming in to the appointment results in fewer cancellations and no-shows.

You're probably now wondering, "What can I sell to my existing clients when they come into their periodic check-up meetings?" Many times, clients have only done very basic planning and may need other, more advanced planning. We have found many people like to build their plan in pieces, first doing a Living Trust, then an [IRA Inheritance Trust](#)®, [Irrevocable Gifting Trust](#), LLC, [QPRT](#), and even [Pet Trusts](#). If many of your clients do not require advanced planning and your concern is that their basic plans are relatively up-to-date, you can add new "products" to your practice to sell! We talked about some of these in our previous article and one that comes to mind that is very easy to implement and has a high perceived value is the [Successor Trustee Manual](#). Other valuable items that you can "sell" include a Health Document Emergency Card and electronic "Safe" for storing their important documents in an encrypted online location (for more information, visit [Docubank.com](#) and be sure to request The Ultimate Estate Planner discount). You can give the client a Family Discount Certificate to pass along to other family members. You can emphasize the need for children and grandchildren to have estate planning too and offer a very simple, low-cost Will-centered package.

We find that a high percentage of clients will purchase something during their three-year checkup meeting. On

average, we will sell something that more than covers our time (a Manual, a transfer deed, a small amendment, etc.). But even if you can't or don't "sell" anything to your clients during the checkup meeting, you still will benefit in a number of ways that will drive additional revenue to your firm. By having clients consistently coming back in for meetings every so many years, you maintain a long-term client relationship that will result in future estate planning upgrades or estate administration. You stay "top of mind" with your clients so that they give you more referrals (we even ask when clients do not purchase anything at a checkup meeting, "Did you find this time together to be worthwhile? Do you know of anyone else that has a Trust that would benefit from a free review meeting like this?"). This also is an opportunity to give referrals to other professionals that you work with (and open a two-way street referral system), such as financial advisors, insurance agents, CPAs, mortgage brokers, etc. And remember, this is an opportunity to improve your database with not only your clients' pertinent address and contact information, but information on their key advisors (you can ask the client, "Is it okay if I talk with your advisor about your being a client and to offer my services to his or her other clients?").

Another, often overlooked, benefit to spending the time and effort to continue to stay in contact with your clients and reach out to them to update their estate plans is that it provides you added "CYA" protection. By having documentation of several attempts to call, mail, e-mail and notify your clients of the need to come in for a free review meeting to go over their estate plans, you will provide yourself with added liability protection should a client (or, more likely, the beneficiary of a client) try to come after you later for what may happen when an estate plan is left out-of-date.

The bottom line is this - - try it, you'll like it - - and, most importantly, your clients will too!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Attorney Philip J. Kavesh is the principal of one of the largest estate planning firms in California - - Kavesh, Minor and Otis - - now in its 43rd year of business. He is also the President of The Ultimate Estate Planner, Inc., which provides a variety of training, marketing and practice-building products and services for estate planning professionals. If you would like more information or have a question for him, he can be reached at phil@ultimateestateplanner.com or by phone at 1-866-754-6477.