

IIAT Mentor's Guide

Part Five

In Part Five your new employee will learn the value of providing a service as a trusted advisor, rather than simply selling a policy. The term “trusted advisor” is used to help the new employee understand that their responsibilities to their clients are far greater than being a mere order-taker.

Part Five emphasizes the importance of offering the coverage the customer needs, not necessarily only what they want. It discusses the relationships that can be forged with customers who understand their agent's genuine interest in being their trusted insurance advisor.

Preach patience!

The content in this module may make your new employee nervous. Much is made of the importance of identifying the customer's complete protection needs, even if it means probing for far more information than the customer initially planned to provide. The new employee may become flustered at first at the thought of having to ask so many questions to uncover the seemingly endless amount of information needed to truly provide an effective insurance program.

First, remind them why this endeavor is important. Second, assure them that by the end of this Part, they will know why their efforts will not be in vain. Finally, let them know that uncovering the needs of the client is a process; one in which there are a tremendous amount of resources they can use beyond “grilling” the customer. The more they practice, the better they will get, and the more reward they will see.

The introduction reminds the new employee of an important concept that is more detailed in the Part Seven: Errors and Omissions: the rule of never making the final decisions on coverage for the customer. Reaffirm the wisdom of this advice at every opportunity.

First Exercise

In the first of a series of exercises, your employee was asked to follow the InfoCentral path below:



InfoCentral Path

Agency Management
Sales and Marketing
Personal Lines Coverage Checklist

The purpose of this exercise is for your new employee to see how much your agency has to offer the typical customer. (While the exercise uses the personal lines checklist, the same points can be made with the commercial lines checklist found in the same InfoCentral location, if you feel this would better suit the employee's responsibilities.) This will help them know which arrows they have in the quiver, so to speak. Prepare to discuss with them the lines of coverage offered through your agency and how many the typical agency customer has purchased. Discuss why knowing this information is important.

Second Exercise

The purpose of the second exercise is to help the new employee understand the "total agency" concept as well as the "total account" concept. Discuss this concept with the new employee. Remind them that in their endeavor to determine the needs of the customer, they may have to use the expertise of others, even if that person is not with your agency. Examples may include allowing a personal lines agent to assist with the personal needs of an agency commercial lines customer, or bringing in a life insurance specialist from another agent or company whom your agency trusts. The new employee will need to know who these people are and any agency guidelines or arrangements that govern those relationships.

Seeing the big picture

The purpose of this section is to lead the new employee to begin seeing each customer's protection needs as a whole – determining all of their needs rather than just selling a single policy and moving on. This section also begins introduces the new employee to the process of obtaining the information necessary to write the total account.

A key part of this process is the importance of asking questions. We begin with the basics, and several examples of basic questions are listed in the Guide. Before discussing this section with the new hire, review the provided list and add any additional examples you want the employee to learn. Your final list will come in handy later.

Third Exercise - The “Ed Smith” story

This exercise is intended to illustrate the vast needs a customer may have beneath the surface. Learning to ask the right questions can reveal those needs, even if the customer appears to have no interest in insurance. Discuss this scenario with the employee. Together, formulate basic questions that could help the agent uncover Ed's needs. As an additional service to the customer, help the employee learn to do this in the fewest number of questions possible. Practicing with you or another person in the agency until the employee is comfortable with this process is highly recommended.

Where does the customer need coverage?

This section of Part Five is to help the new employee remember that where is just as important as what when determining a customer's needs. This is a reminder that the most expensive insurance policy in the world may be no good if coverage does not apply to where the claim took place. The point for the employee to remember is that it is not their responsibility to serve as travel planner for the customer – rather, make sure the customer understands that where they are and where they go with themselves AND property may determine whether or not coverage under their policy applies.

Assignment

You will need to have copies of a homeowners, commercial property, commercial liability, and inland marine policy, if possible. Be prepared to discuss “where” issues such as insured premises and coverage territory under these policies, pointing out differences in each.

Who does the customer need coverage for?

Similar to the question of where coverage needs to apply is who needs to apply to. The point the employee should take away from this portion is the fact that the insurance policy specifically defines who coverage is for, not the customer. The customer must know that different types of policies cover different people differently.

Assignment

Add a copy of personal auto policy to your current arrangement of sample policies. Discuss with the new employee the differences between all of the sample policies you have assembled concerning who is covered under each.

Other sources of customer information

In this section we reassure the employee that, while collecting information may at first seem intrusive or even intimidating, with experience they'll get better at both the process and the ease at which they'll translate the data into better meeting customer needs. Even better, a great deal of valuable information is available without the need to test a customer's patience with yet another series of questions. Here we identify several additional valuable information resources the employee should learn to tap regularly.

Assignment

Discuss how you recommend the new employee utilize the different resources we identify, along with others your agency utilizes.

Help the new employee create a checklist of questions for each line of coverage available in your agency. They will highlight questions on each list which they feel are not relevant or that they do not understand. Prepare to discuss these questions with them, pointing out why the answer to the question makes it important enough to appear on the checklist.

Putting the pieces together

This Part is longer than most of the others in the Guide, and covers a great deal of information, while asking the employee to complete a number of detailed exercises and assignments. So at the end, we offer three suggestions as to how to begin tying all this together into a repeatable process.

Make sure the customer understands your intentions.

Discuss with the new employee why making their intentions to create a comprehensive program for the customer is important. Discuss how they will handle a customer that appears to have no interest in a comprehensive program.

Using their answers to the basic questions, present the customer with a broad overview of the plan you wish to discuss with them.

Talk with the employee how they will present this “total account” approach to a customer who to this point was only interested in “buying a policy.” Keep in mind this typically takes place while the employee only has in their possession basic information provided by the customer - not the extensive detail that will later be used to prepare a comprehensive customer proposal.

Deliver the goods!

This section is a broad review of the key steps needed to move beyond the talk and actually implement the process of delivering comprehensive “total account” products and services to a customer. Review the steps we offer, and feel free to add, revise or rename them to fit the system and terms preferred by your agency. As long as the employee leaves this section knowing doing this right requires a repeatable process, in which every step is as important as the others, the lesson will have been learned.

Why it all matters

This is the section where you get to remind the employee of the exceptional rewards for their efforts. Four major reasons are provided. Some of these are covered in greater detail in other Parts of the Guide. Discuss with the employee these benefits of providing the right coverage, paying particular attention to the section on “total account development.” Hopefully, this section will help them grasp the financial reward for their efforts. This section should garner excitement from the employee – they should start to feel the magnitude of what they’re doing.

Fourth Exercise

A final exercise calls for the employee to take action in developing customer accounts. Help the employee locate or draft a letter intended for all of the mono-line customers of the agency. Set a schedule for them to send the letters. Discuss with the employee what they expect as far as results and how they feel about the mono-line customers who do not bother to respond.