

Title: Align by Embracing the Joining Technique

Welcome. I'm David Richman with the Eaton Vance Advisor Institute. Simply because someone is a client doesn't necessarily mean that person is open to listening to your ideas, does it? As you know likely all too well, there are times when a client's preconceived thoughts get in the way. Often, this can be an even far more common challenge with prospective clients. How might you consciously collaborate deploying approaches that will open them up to an alternative way to see things? One approach we'd like to share today is the joining technique.

Now, think of the joining technique as a two-step process. First, you identify and acknowledge one or perhaps two priorities, perhaps principles that you share in common with a client or prospective client. Second, you explore alternative ways to achieve these priorities or principles moving forward. Acknowledging shared priorities and principles is an important opportunity. Why? Because it can help the other person feel like you are both on the same page. It puts you on a path to generating consensus.

So, when should you apply the joining technique? The most impactful situation for deployment is when the other person signals through words or perhaps their actions that they're really not that interested in hearing what you have to say. Think about it. How many times have you engaged with someone who, for whatever reason, seemed fixated on a particular path that you didn't believe was in that person's best interest? What could you do in these situations? Did you focus on the tactical merits of your approach? If so, how'd that work out?

Next time, try the joining technique. This approach prepares the other person to hear what you're about to say so that you can begin to collaborate on alternative potential next steps. Successful joining relies on communicating empathically and collaborating consciously. Let's take a classic example of what this means and how to put joining into action. Suppose you are introduced to a married couple, Peter and Emily, in their early 60s. Both recently retired, their investment portfolio valued around \$8 million of which \$6 million is concentrated in the company stock of Peter's former employer.

Let's listen in on a conversation. Advisor says, "As you know, I work with many active and retired executives, and like you, I believe that protecting the financial independence you worked so hard to achieve is a key priority so that you can enjoy life on your terms and leave behind your desired legacy. May I ask each of you, do you believe your primary priority of long-term financial independence may be at risk given how much exposure you currently have to Peter's former company stock?" Peter says, "Are you suggesting that I sell my holdings in a company that I believe in? That's not my intent at all for our investments."

Advisor says, “Peter, I’m recommending that you and Emily come to a shared agreement about what you hope to accomplish with your money over the course of your lifetime as well as the legacy you’d like to leave behind to your children and community. Based on those aspirations, we can explore the various options to reduce the amount of risk in your overall portfolio so that you can comfortably achieve what matters most to you.” “In my experience,” continues the advisor, “Neglecting to manage risk properly is one of the biggest disruptors of family wealth. We should talk more about this since it’s evident that all of us share the primary priority of protecting financial independence which I don’t want you and Emily to jeopardize in any way.” Now Emily weighs in, “So it’s important that we use a portion of our wealth to make a meaningful impact in our local community. There are so many areas where we can make a positive difference. I don’t want to lose that ability to help those truly in need.”

Now advisor weighs in, “Emily, giving back to the community is a common theme that I discuss with so many of my clients in similar fortunate financial circumstances. For me personally, such conversations are particularly heartwarming since I share the principle of giving back. Looking at the big picture, there are many ways to diversify tax efficiently to increase the probability of achieving long-term financial independence, give back to the community that you cherish, and maintain some of the stock. Before exploring potential alternative paths, it might be wise to spend some time further discussing with both of you all of the priorities of your life and legacy. This conversation can then help me fine tune some recommendations that would most closely align with those priorities.”

Let’s think about what you just heard. The advisor is communicating empathically, isn’t he? To join with Peter and Emily around the common priority of protecting financial independence and the common principle of giving back to one’s community. Our hypothetical advisor here is doing this to prepare and set the stage for conscious collaboration. Let’s dissect some of the conversation that just took place to highlight some of the things that the advisor did particularly well. For starters, the advisor used some very powerful words to demonstrate empathy and support collaboration in order to join with Peter and Emily. The first word is “and.” The advisor says, “And like you, I believe protecting the financial independence you worked hard to achieve is a priority so that you can enjoy life on your terms and leave behind your desired legacy.” The advisor is starting right from the get-go with the joining technique, “and like you.”

Next, to open the door even further, the advisor prefaces a question with the words, “May I ask each of you.” He said, “May I ask each of you, do you believe your primary priority of long-term financial independence may be at risk given your current exposure to Peter’s former company stock?” The words “may I ask each of you” helps Peter become less defensive about maintaining his initial thoughts. What’s more, addressing the question to the couple, not just Peter, provides Emily with voice in the conversation. Now, the advisor continues to join with Peter and Emily to foster collaboration by using the word “we.” The advisor says, “We should talk more about this since it is evident that we all share the primary priority of protecting your financial independence, which I don’t want you and Emily to jeopardize in any way.”

Lastly, by giving Emily voice, the advisor joins with her on the topic of giving back to the community. Recall how the advisor said, “Emily, giving back to the community is a common theme that I discuss with many of my clients in similar fortunate financial circumstances. For me personally, such conversations are particularly heartwarming as I share the principle of giving back.” So hopefully, we see how the joining technique, which leverages empathy and collaboration, might in this case help Peter and Emily begin to consider alternative approaches to protect their financial independence and their capacity to give back.

While we don’t know how Peter and Emily ultimately will diversify their portfolio, the advisor’s intentional use of the joining technique has likely increased the probability that this couple will be open to further conversation. Moving forward, consider how you can be applying the joining technique in your conversations. It can be an extremely effective approach in situations where you’re concerned a client is likely to resist. Ask yourself, is the other person prepared to hear about some alternative approaches? If not, apply the joining technique to prepare them.

To learn more about growing your business, perhaps even transforming how you engage with others, we invite you to explore all of the resources available at eatonvance.com/ChasingPositivity. We at Eaton Vance are committed to helping you build stronger, deeper relationships with your clients, with your prospective clients, and with your team members as well.

Until next time, wishing you all the best.

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