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Increasing Your DI Sales - All You Have to Do Is Ask

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People learn throughout life that they have to ask for many things. As children, they have to ask their mothers to go out with friends; as teenagers, they have to ask their fathers to borrow the car; and as adults, they probably have to ask their spouses these same questions. Some things never change. It's ironic how such a simple life lesson — one can get what he or she wants, if he only asks — can be carried into our daily routines as insurance producers.

When it comes to selling disability insurance (DI), asking simply means helping prospects recognize the need for DI by approaching them about it. In a recent DI Lead Generation Survey conducted by Illinois Mutual Life Insurance Company, producers said "ask" was the most popular suggestion on how to improve DI sales leads. This survey also showed that to sell at least five DI policies, two-thirds of the producers needed to talk to at least 20 clients. The bottom line is that making DI sales is not a selling problem but an asking problem.

In using this simple approach, the best place to start is the middle market. Of the United States households that fall into this market — about 50 million people — almost all are underinsured. These prospects understand that they need to protect their salaries; it's simply up to producers to see them. These people have the need and are interested in protecting their incomes, which means they need to learn about disability insurance. Simply put, they are willing to buy if the producer is willing to ask.

Who to Ask

It's simple: when someone asks questions, he gets results. So who do producers ask about DI? The answer is even simpler: everyone. Producers should ask nearly everyone to whom they talk about what they've done to protect their incomes; that is, how they would pay bills and maintain their lifestyles if they became disabled.

Producers can ask a single working mom what would happen to her children if she missed work for even a month. They can ask business clients what would happen to their businesses if they took a two-year vacation. They should ask newlywed homeowners if they still could pay their mortgages if something were to happen to one of them.

The producer may be surprised at what he or she hears, and the prospects may be surprised at what the producer can offer them: a way to protect their most valuable asset and the ability to earn an income.

At the same time, it's important to strive for high quality prospects, not only high quantity. The producer will find that the best way to build his client base is to keep high quality clients who will bring other high quality clients. About half of my business each year is from repeat business from my current clientele, while the other half is from client referrals. If the producer keeps a core group of clients happy, they will tell others. He can start with people he knows and work from there.

Likewise, the quality of client relationships matters. My commitment to give the best service possible is a reason I have kept my relationships intact through the years. Life is like a game of tennis; the player who serves well seldom loses. The producer needs to give his clients the best service possible because if he doesn't, someone else will. That someone else also will get the sale.

What to Ask

When I meet with prospects, my approach is simple. I simply ask, "What portion of your income is protected?" After the prospects tell me, I design a plan around their needs. They have needs, and it's up to me to find a way to protect them. My DI carrier offers a line of DI products that meet a variety of needs and occupations in the middle market, so I have no problem fitting a plan to meet almost any budget.

During our meetings, I always try to remind prospects that their lifestyles are determined by the amount of income they earn. Whether they are making \$20,000 or \$200,000, they have become accustomed to that lifestyle. Their health can change instantly, and if the money stops coming in, they have a serious problem. If they don't believe me, I tell them to take off work for two months and see how their lives will change. That question immediately makes them think and wonder what they would do.

A disability of any kind — and any timeframe of prolonged unemployment from one month to many years — seriously can affect one's life, not only personally but also financially. No matter how healthy or careful prospects are, a disability can happen at any time and change life abruptly, even if only for a short time.

The producer also can use this approach with clients who have group DI coverage. He needs only to ask them three questions: How much in disability benefits do you receive? How soon do they start? and How long do they last? Most of the time, my clients aren't sure at first and eventually are surprised at the answers when they do their research. If my clients say their employers protect 50% of their incomes, I explain that it won't cost much to "fill in the gap." This shows them that by spending a little, they can save a lot.

When to Ask

With such a saturated market, it takes more than high quality life insurance products to stand out from the crowd. The producer needs a different way to meet with someone before he can begin his sale. A proven way to integrate DI into a sale is to ask about DI at the same time as life insurance, emphasizing the importance of protecting both life and income. In fact, instead of approaching prospects with life insurance products first, the producer could start with disability insurance.

This will differentiate him and enable his prospects to understand the importance of insurance products in a whole new light. He must sell himself as an expert in DI and introduce them to a different product about which they may not know much. After the DI sale is made, the producer can build the relationship and approach them about meeting their other insurance or financial needs.

At this time in the sale, I also stress the importance of adding optional riders to the DI policy, including the surrender value rider (SVR), which I sell to about 90% of my clients merely by asking. It provides a guaranteed money-back option by returning 100% of premiums paid, less benefits received, at age 65. In other words, the SVR offers protection if clients need it and money back if they don't. Some of my youngest and oldest clients have included the rider as an addition to their retirements. They are willing to spend the extra money for the benefit received.

Through the years, some clients have used their refunds to start an annuity, pay long-term care premiums, begin a monthly or annual income, or otherwise invest it. Because of the money-back option, all ages are receptive to this powerful rider.

Where to Ask

Asking is easy. It's getting out there to do it that's hard. For me, there's no better way than to see the people. In today's technologically driven age, there is a severe lack of personal contact. Getting out and meeting with prospects makes a world of difference. Likewise, with each prospect, I make sure to remember the real reason for our meetings.

Above anything else, I try to help my prospects see the need for and the importance of DI and help them purchase the protection they need. If they decide not to purchase now, at least I have planted a seed for the near future. If the DI sale is not made, the producer must not fear rejection. He should go into every meeting knowing that something good will come of it. If not now, in the future he may make a life or annuity sale, a referral, or a future DI sale.

The only way this approach will work is if the producer thoroughly is educated on the importance of DI and has learned the mechanics of his DI carrier's different products. Knowledge is power, and a sale can be made only if the producer is prepared.

A good way is for the producer to own a DI policy, which adds to his credibility and belief in the product. In owning my own DI policy, I've found it much easier to relate to those who once were in my shoes.

On the same note, it also is important to build rapport with the insurer. The producer should treat his insurer's staff, especially the sales team and underwriters, well. Mutual respect always is appreciated.

Asking Really Works

The best example of how I've used this approach happened in my local dentist's office. During a regular visit, I met a

young hygienist filling in for the office's regular hygienist, who was out sick. As I sat in the chair and talked with her, I learned she recently had divorced and moved back home to get back on her feet. She worked for various dentists as a substitute hygienist, liked what she did, and was happy to take jobs as they came.

I asked about disability insurance. She hadn't heard of it but was interested in learning more. A short time later, I met with her at her mother's home to explain how she could protect her income. Seeing the importance of taking care of herself, she purchased the policy.

Only a year and a half later, I received a telephone call from the young woman, calling to tell me she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Soon after, despite treatments and many visits to the physician, she had to undergo a double mastectomy. For a year, she worked hard to adjust to everything she went through and get better.

Luckily, her DI policy enabled her not to have to worry about finances during such a difficult time. She also was fortunate to have added the guaranteed insurability option rider to her DI policy. This rider insures clients' insurability by providing five options to purchase future benefits without evidence of good health. For my client, this meant that, despite her cancer, she did not have to undergo any medical exams to increase her coverage. Without this rider, it would have been difficult to increase her coverage for future protection.

Today she happily is married and even working again. She continually thanks me for asking her about DI that day. Without it, her battle with this devastating illness would have been much more difficult. Since her recuperation, she has referred me to other hygienists who have purchased their own policies. This is one of the many clients whom I have asked about disability insurance who have thanked me for doing so.

Asking for the sale has worked for me for many years. I always have said that if the producer keeps doing what he's doing, he'll keep getting what he's getting. While this may keep others in a stagnant state of business, this strategy has enabled me to achieve success in my 30-year career.

I also have found that being able to apply my passion and skills in what I do can lead to great strides in my personal life. As an avid bowler, I have bowled five perfect (300) games and three 800 series that have been recognized by the American Bowling Congress.

Whether it is gaining a new client, servicing an existing one, or working toward my next perfect game, I try to follow my golden rule: If I want to be successful in anything that I do, I have to work at it, whether it is personal or business. For me, the work never stops, but that's exactly how I like it.