Prospecting Through Educational Events and Workshops

By the end of this course, participants will be able to plan and execute successful educational events for clients and prospects that provide client value and build new business.

Overview:

Hosting educational events is an important component of your annual event strategy. Educational events are important to provide and demonstrate value through enriching content. And they are equally important as a component of your annual marketing and prospecting strategy.

Learning to conduct quality educational events with relative ease through this course is a process that will take practice and diligence to achieve accolades and new business. But the rewards are well worth the time – especially since the time and activity are things you can control.

This course will help you demonstrate your expertise in a non-pressure, non-sales environment, while providing an opportunity for prospects to get to know you on a personal level. Prospecting events are important for engaging prospects beyond the printed or online content they might see, as a bridge to securing an in-person consultation with them soon.

The high-level steps are:

- **Step 1:** Identify relevant topics of interest to your prospects (and clients, if relevant)
- **Step 2:** Plan useful and educational events that will engage prospects to want to come in for a first meeting
- **Step 3:** Invite prospects who would enjoy the topic (and, for some events, clients who will bring referrals that you would welcome as new clients
- **Step 4:** Host a successful educational event that provides an opportunity to engage with prospects and any referrals your clients bring with them
- **Step 5:** Connect with prospects and referrals, and when the timing is right, convert them to new clients

Hosting educational events and workshops is about bringing value to guests in a well-executed forum. You'll know your event was successful when attendees tell you they're glad that they attended, and they appreciate the information and experience you provided.

Step 1: Identifying topics of interest to your clients and prospects

It's important to have an annual strategy for events that covers various needs. Factors like available time, your audience's topic interests, budget, and your preference for presenting will determine what mix of event types and topics might be right for you. Let's look at types of events and topics.

Pure Prospecting Events

For the purposes of this course, we're focusing on prospect-oriented events, for the purpose of educating to attract new business. Prospecting events are just that – taking steps to finding the right new people to fill the seats. There are two ways to produce prospecting events:

- DIY – Write or obtain your own content, promote it to your existing or a purchased prospect list, and go.
- Partner with someone who will provide the content – and sometimes, event services like lead sourcing and follow up – for you. Check out our educational topics found in *Carson Coaching Online* – *Resources* or vendors like Horsesopmouth for seminar or workshop content that's ready to go.
- A more comprehensive solution is to purchase content from vendors like FMT, White Glove or others. These offer content within a marketing program where they will advertise your event, manage the leads and invitations, and provide follow-up marketing. Sources like these can be handy and effective if you follow their program guidelines and methods.

Clients-bring-prospects Events

Sometimes the best source of prospects is your existing client base. Examples of events where both clients and prospects might attend are things like regularly scheduled economic and/or market-related updates that you produce and host.

Typically, these are presented by you or a team member as an expert on behalf of your firm. Some firms choose to make these larger-scale events, sometimes even in a classroom format held in a hotel or venue that can accommodate most of your clients.

Establish this type of event as a mainstay that clients are accustomed to attending – in person or via webinar – to hear from you "live" about your analysis and opinions on the market and current financial topics. These events are an opportunity to showcase your expertise, but equally as important, to deepen your team's and your presence with clients (and their guests) as an engaging live speaker. Events of this nature might include:

- Your annual or bi-annual economic forecast
- Carson's "Forecast" and "Half-Time" presentations (available mid-January and -July on *Carson Coaching Online*, under the *Resources* area)
- Quarterly market updates prepared by your firm

Virtual Events: Webinars (video meetings)

Traditionally, most educational events have been hosted "live" either at an advisor's office or other setting. More frequently now, client- and prospect-facing webinars are gaining in popularity as more people are experimenting and becoming comfortable with video meetings as a norm.

There are many advantages to hosting a webinar format in lieu of having the event in-person. It can be less expensive, it's convenient to attend, and clients can easily forward the invitation to others. However, in some instances, webinars have the potential to decrease the "wow" factor of a live speaker. If you have an Advisory Council, see what they say about when clients might prefer a webinar event format. Consult our *Client-Facing Webinar Best Practices* guide for hosting your successful webinar.

Topics related to people's financial lives

These are popular topics for events that support financial thinking and learning for prospects and clients. If you have good working knowledge in any of these areas, you can put together a presentation that highlights your range of services or your approach to holistic planning that includes the big picture.

It is perfectly acceptable – and many times desirable – to sponsor an outside subject matter expert to present. These are great opportunities to partner with a Center of Influence (COI) with expertise in the area or host a well-known speaker sponsored by your custodian. Some topic ideas are:

- Retirement Planning
- Identity Theft
- Cybersecurity
- Social Security
- Preparation for Estate Planning
- Long-term Care Insurance
- Healthcare Reform
- Various presentations found in the *Carson Coaching Online* Resources area

Step 2: Planning a prospecting event

Planning the details of your educational event can be a lot of fun – and it can be a lot of work. Be sure to leave yourself plenty of lead time before your anticipated event, so that you're not rushed or stressed, and the details are all covered so your event goes smoothly and meets – and hopefully exceeds -- expectations.

Choose the date and time

- Setting the day of the week for your events may take a little trial and error for maximum attendance. Carson Coaching recommends holding events on Tuesday or Thursday evenings from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

- Verify availability on advisor's calendar.
- Place the event on the calendars of those at the office who should attend (everyone on the team should attend!)

Confirm date and timing with the speaker (if applicable)

- If you do bring in a guest speaker, make sure time is allotted for the advisor to address the attendees because the clients do want to hear from the advisor.

Select Venue and Manage Logistics

To reduce costs, consider hosting in a conference room in your office. Renting another space is also a possibility if a bigger venue is needed. A nearby restaurant (if they have audio/visual (A/V) equipment for presentation) or local country club where someone in your office is a member can help save on room rental fees.

Items needed will include:

- Registration table for name badges
- Banquet table skirted with chair(s)
- Indicate if you wish for registration table to be inside or outside room
- Communicate if you want tables with chairs or just chairs
- Podium
- Lavalier microphone(s) for speaker(s)
- Hand-held microphone for attendee questions and introductions
- LCD projector and screen for presentation
- Laptop (confirm need for venue's or use own)
- Clicker to advance slides
- Buffet-style setting for food and beverages in back or side of room
- Food Suggestions:
    - Fruit Platter
    - Cheese and Crackers
    - Vegetables and Dip
    - Kabobs
    - Swedish Meatballs
    - Popcorn
    - Pretzels
    - Peanuts
    - Cookies
- Drink Suggestions:
    - Regular/Decaf Coffee
    - Tea Bags/Hot Water
    - Hot Chocolate

- Iced Tea
- Lemonade
- Wine
- Water

- Round tables in back of room for dirty dishes
- Coat check (if applicable)
- Valet parking (if applicable)

Prepare for a Successful Event

The key to a successful prospecting event is in the details. Ensure your team stays organized by setting up the event as a campaign in your CRM and/or online event tracking software. Use our *Educational Event Checklist* to ensure you have the basics covered. We recommend building the items from the checklist into an automated CRM workflow or project management software template.

Step 3: Inviting prospects to your educational event

Now that you've invested quality time in setting the details, make your efforts pay off by filling the seats with the right prospects and referrals.

Gather list of prospects to invite

There are various sources for gathering a good list of prospects to invite.

As mentioned in Lesson 1, go to vendors who have turnkey programs that source leads from the internet and fill the seats for you. These programs have associated costs per person who attends (cost per lead), but that covers the content they also provide, sign-up logistics and, many times, automated follow up campaigns.

Self-source your prospect invite list from your referral lists, old prospecting lead lists, personal and professional contacts you would like as clients, etc. Here are additional ideas:

- Purchase lists from lead sources on-line, such as lists of first-time home buyers or other demographic groups
- Post on Eventbrite for their public listings to be found on search
- Post to social media accounts; boost posts on Facebook & LinkedIn to get in front of prospects
- Joint presentations with COIs; they invite their clients, and you invite yours (and guests)
- Mass media (wider reach, but also higher cost, and lower targeting ability)
  - Radio advertisements
  - TV advertisements
  - Search engine leads
- Connect with people who may be looking for quality educational programming for their clients or communities:

- Programming directors at active retirement communities
- Church leaders
- Small business owner groups (for the owners)
- Small to medium-sized businesses (for their employees)
- Activity centers and country clubs
- Professional groups and conferences

If you're having an event for both clients and prospects, dig into your client list in CRM. Don't forget to encourage clients to invite their friends to those events.

Verbally invite prospects

Although we recommend inviting every person verbally, depending on the size of your event it may not be practical (such as for a large annual economic update meeting). If it's a combined client and prospect event, at a minimum, ensure you verbally invite all A and A+ clients. Then send a formal printed invitation to everyone.

The verbal invitation should sound something like this:

For Prospects:

Hi ***{Insert Prospect Name}****!* ***{Insert Company Name}*** *is hosting a* ***{Insert Event Name}*** *on* ***{Insert Event Date}*** *on the topic of* ***{Insert Topic****}. I hope you'll join us. You can bring a guest if you wish, too. We'll be sending formal invitations soon.*

For Clients to attend with a guest:

Hi ***{Insert Client Name}****!* ***{Insert Company Name}*** *is hosting a* ***{Insert Event Name}*** *on* ***{Insert Event Date}*** *on the topic of* ***{Insert Topic****}. I hope you'll join us, and also bring a guest who would enjoy it and benefit from our services at some point in the future. We'll be sending formal invitations soon. Who would you like us to invite on your behalf?*

Create and send invitations

Once you've made your round of verbal invitations, email or mail (based on firm culture) a formal invitation with event details. Check out our resource ***Event Invitation Fact Sheet*** to find handy online resources for great invitations. Tip: If you need help with event invitation design, consider hiring a graphic design freelancer on a site like Upwork.com for a professional look at a very reasonable cost.

Prepare an event evaluation form:

- Prepare an event evaluation form to distribute after the event.
- Carson Coaching provides an ***Event Evaluation template*** for you to edit with these details below and leave in chairs or send via email after the event.
  - Add date of event
  - Add event title
  - Add upcoming events

Step 4: Executing a Successful Educational Event

Executing an enjoyable, informative, strong showing starts with a countdown weeks before the actual event date. Follow these guidelines for preparing ahead of time. Refer to our ***Educational Event Checklist*** for detailed actions and timeline, to ensure your event goes off without a hitch.

COACH TIP: As you host subsequent educational events, items in the checklist items will become habits. But, like a good pilot does, never abandon your pre- and post-flight checklist to ensure that nothing falls through the cracks, and that new team members are well-trained.

Several weeks prior to the event

Walk through (like a dress rehearsal) the event agenda, which includes opening and closing scripts, and presentation material if you are presenting. Practice your opening and closing, and your presentation out loud to yourself or a trusted colleague.

Beginning and ending your event on time doesn't happen by accident. It's especially important to end on time if you've rented space. Walk through the actual content – including time for getting settled, introduction and closing comments -- several times and time it. We recommend the actual presentation material be no longer than 40 minutes. More is not more – studies show that attention wanes beyond that.

If someone else is presenting, insist that you review their presentation – their outline, at a minimum – a few weeks ahead of time. This is not the time for surprises. Gently ensure their understanding that they will be able to stay within the 40-minute timeframe.

Practice our ***Event Opening & Closing Scripts***, and feel free to adapt them to meet your needs.

Day prior to event

The day prior, it's all-hands-on-deck to make final preparations.

Begin with a team huddle to cover important information, led by the event project manager:

- Review the attendee list, including final number attending
- Review event details: time to arrive at the event, location, special parking instructions, and proper attire for the event
- Reminder to bring individual company name badges
- If event being held in the office, reminder to ensure individual offices are clean and all client data is out of sight
- Confirm everyone is on the same page with event roles – who will be doing what
- Confirm final preparation checklist items are assigned
- Answer any outstanding questions

Next is one last round of calls to those people you haven't reached or who might need an extra day-of confirmation reminder. Team members should call clients, and the advisor should call prospects &

guests. In making the call to prospects and guests, advisors should simply introduce themselves, confirm the guest's attendance, and express that they look forward to getting to know the attendee at the event.

The event project manager should next print an attendee list, name badges, and prepare a box with event supplies. See the ***Educational Event Checklist*** for details.

Day of the event

Plan on arriving at the venue approximately two hours before the event. The advisor and event project manager should use this extra time to introduce themselves to the site manager/contact, familiarize themselves with the space, set up any necessary signage and A/V equipment, and organize the check-in table. Some clients and guests will arrive early, so make sure you're prepared for guests at least 30 minutes before the start of the event.

As clients and guests arrive, check them in at the registration table and hand out name badges. If guests arrive who did not RSVP, make a handwritten nametag and make sure you collect their name and contact information so that you can follow up after the event. The advisor should be welcoming clients & guests, so make sure you have at least one or two team members operating the check-in table.

Event Opening and Closing Scripts

3-2-1 and it's curtain time. Smiles everyone, smiles! The advisor should kick-off the event with a warm welcome and brief introduction (see ***Event Opening & Closing Scripts***), then the presentation follows, then closing remarks.

Don't make a sales pitch about your firm. Your welcome and closing should make it clear enough who is hosting the event -- even if someone else is presenting -- and how to follow up with you for a continued conversation. Be a gracious host, showcase your team, and endeavor to be present for meaningful connections with prospects (and clients if they are attending!)

Event agenda:

Opening:

- Advisor introduces self
- Thank attendees for coming – clients and welcome to guests
- Thank sponsor for support (if applicable)
- Share mission statement/value proposition (short and conversational style, not long formal statement)
- Share investment management process (if applicable)
- Introduce client for short anecdote about their client experience (optional)
- Share expectations after event (e.g., take a prospect packet, call to schedule complimentary consultation)
- Introduce speaker (if applicable)

Presentation:

- Don't exceed 40 minutes – start wrapping it up at 35
- Involve the attendees where applicable

Closing:

- Thank speaker for presentation (if applicable)
- Remind attendees to complete evaluation
- Mention next one or two events
- Hold drawing for prize (if applicable)
- Offer information to anyone interested in learning more about the practice; packets available on registration table

COACH TIP: Much like when you're hosting a large special party or reception, it can be difficult to manage pre-event and on-site event details while having adequate quality time to interact with your guests. Especially if you're hesitant to host events in the first place, or if your team could use a little extra help – research your local area for an experienced event planner or team to help with event planning and management. Freeing up your staff's and your time to engage with clients and create new relationships is worth the investment.

Step 5: Following Up with Educational Event Prospects

The actual "event" may be over with great applause and valuable results for your attendees. But following up with prospects – and thanking clients – after the event is where results happen for you and your firm. Plan ahead by having everyone block off time on their calendars for follow up calls. Then, distribute and practice scripts for following up so that you and your team are primed and ready to make those calls while good memories of the event and connections are fresh in everyone's minds.

It's so much easier to get going from a "warm start" right away. Be sincere in expressing how much you enjoyed meeting the prospect, and/or how much you appreciated the prospect (or client and their guest) attending.

Sample scripts for following up with prospects

The purpose of calling the prospects is to connect, check for an opportunity to meet again in person, and leave the door open for future business when the time is right, if not now.

> *"Hi **{Prospect Name}**, this is **{Advisor Name}** from **{Firm Name}**, how are you doing?*
>
> *I want to thank you for being at our event the other night. It was great to be able to spend a little bit of time with you. Did you enjoy the event? Is there anything we could do to make it an even better event next time?*
>
> *{Wait for answer}*
>
> *I appreciate your sharing that. The other reason I'm reaching out to you is to see if we could get together. I'd love to learn more about where you're at in your financial life and see how we might be able to help. Would you be open to spending a little bit of time with me in the next week or two?"*

If there is anything you want to share in more detail as to how you might be able to help, you certainly can, such as:

"We're having some great success with business owners through our financial planning process and I think you could really benefit from seeing what we've done for business owners like yourself."

OR

"Just to give you one example of how we work with clients like you…I've recently helped some affluent clients like you with establishing a trust to make sure the wealth they pass on is managed properly and in a tax efficient way. I think you'd benefit from seeing what kind of work we do in that area."

If you determine that the prospect would fit your ideal client profile, and you are able to schedule an initial consultation meeting, that's great! Follow your defined appointment (sales) process including getting to know their needs, expressing your value, gathering data, presenting solutions, and, hopefully, welcoming them as new members of your client family.

If the prospect is not interested in a meeting when you follow up, get permission to stay in touch:

"No problem – I'm glad you feel like you're in a good spot with your current situation. I know our situations can change over time, so I'd love to stay in touch. Would it be alright if I had my office reach out to you periodically about events like the one you attended or other educational events?"

Staying in touch:

If the prospect or referral isn't ready to meet, but is open to staying in touch, enter them into your CRM system as a prospect, including all referral information. You never know when someone will be ready for a change.

Keep the connection with them warm through a number of possible communications:

- Add them to your firm newsletter mailing list (with permission)
- Invite them to upcoming educational workshops, like the Forecast/Halftime events, or presentations on wealth management topics like Medicare, Estate Planning, Social Security, LTC insurance, or Tax Planning
- Invite them to coffee or lunch with the client who made the introduction
- Have your scheduling assistant call prospects who have attended any event in the past with the following script (once per quarter), "I'm calling on behalf of **{Insert Advisor Name}.** We're getting ready to do **{Insert upcoming quarter number}** quarter reviews with clients and he wanted to find out if you'd be interested in scheduling a complementary review while we're scheduling these appointments with existing clients. Would you like to be added to our schedule this round?"

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Summary

Everyone needs educational workshops as part of their prospect strategy. It's a step between seeing your brochure and calling you up. During the event they're getting to know you and your team as people and sampling your expertise. People need a way to engage in a one-to-many, safe space where there is less pressure to see what you're like.

It's a stage where you have control to set the experience and the message. It's so much easier to transition to a first meeting from a warm greeting from a real person whom they've already met. You're giving, not selling something.

Always have an event that prospects can sign up for so that your door is always open when you meet new people.

Pull out your planning calendar and determine topics for 2-4 prospecting workshops for the next year. The sooner you begin, the sooner that the wonderful prospects you meet will become new clients you serve!

FAQs:

- **How many team members should I have on hand for events?**
    - If possible, have all of your team members who interface with clients (in person or by phone) on hand to greet everyone, staff the event, and make personal connections. Even if you have only a few staff members – or even one – don't hesitate to host events that are of a size you can comfortably handle. Good alternatives are doing more webinar-based events and hiring event staff to assist you.
- **Should I get wholesalers to sponsor or pay for part of the event?**
    - Wholesalers are often able to offer financial support for events and it might be appealing to you for budget reasons to reach out to ask for support for your event. However, support can often come with expectations for them to speak about their product or service.

      Carson Coaching does not recommend allowing wholesalers to speak at events, but it's certainly fine for them to attend events they support. If they have provided financial support to your event, be sure to be courteous and thank them at some point during the event.
- **I am really worried about hosting an event and having no one show up. What should I do?**
    - Even if you're not new to hosting events, it's completely normal to feel a sense of urgency or pressure to hold a "successful" event. Just make sure you're not putting undue pressure or stress on yourself – or especially on your staff. If you follow the preparatory steps in this course (especially making a concerted effort to invite people verbally and follow up to ensure they received the invitation) you'll have the comfort of knowing who and how many are coming.

It’s unlikely that if you leave enough lead-time, and follow our checklist to prepare well, that you’ll have an event that’s a “flop.” Don’t worry about perfection. Concentrate on satisfied smiles and good feedback from those who attended, no matter how many or few!

- **Will having someone else present take attention away from our firm or diminish our credibility?**

    - Not at all if you position yourself well, follow the tips in this lesson for opening and closing remarks, and ensure you and your team are visible. In fact, having a great outside speaker who provides valuable take-away information, positions you as the savvy, influential firm that made it all happen! Just know your speakers well enough to trust that their content will be good.

- **I don't want to feel like I'm doing a "bait and switch" by asking clients to invite friends and family to attend the event then following up immediately to ask their guests to talk business with me. What's appropriate here?"**

    - It's all about setting expectations. If you've asked clients to bring a guest to enjoy the event, then calling their guest the next day to ask them to talk business might frustrate your clients and prevent them from bringing guests in the future. If you specifically ask your clients to bring guests who might be people you could help and you set the expectation that you'll call anyone who attends after the event, then your client will be prepared for this and potentially inform the people they invite that you'll be following up.

Resources:

Learn more and download the resources referenced in this document from the ***Prospecting Through Educational Events and Workshops*** course in Carson Coaching Online.

- **Educational Event Checklist**
- **Event Invitation Fact Sheet**
- **Event Evaluation**
- **Event Opening and Closing Scripts**
- **Client-Facing Webinar Best Practices**
- **Forecast Event Executive Summary**
- **Half-Time Event Executive Summary**