ANATOMY OF THE INTERVIEW:

Who asks the questions is in control

Of all the things brokers do, conducting the initial customer interview is the most important. The interview is when you lay the foundation for a successful transaction and relationship. You establish trust, identify the most appropriate product, plant the seed for future business, lay out your plan for how you will deal with the application and demonstrate your professionalism. The list goes on. So why is it there are so many different approaches to conducting an interview?

Let's have a look at some of the basics of a loan interview. The first thing to understand is that a loan interview is unique. I've heard lots of speakers over the years from other industries and other countries trying to teach interview techniques. The problem is that although other industries may appear on the surface to be similar to ours, when you have a close look they are in fact nothing like us. For instance, trying to compare the insurance industry to the mortgage industry is like trying to compare Rugby League with Rugby Union. They may look similar but are totally different games.

Let's have a look and do a little analysis of the interview and see why brokers are special. To do this you need to understand what selling is and is not. It is not forcing someone to buy something they don't want. If you would like a definition, try this one; "Selling is the exchange of goods or services for cash or kind predicated on the exchange of trust". The key part of this definition is the "predicated on the exchange of trust" bit. No one will do business with you if they don't trust you. This leads me to my next point, which is "the only sale you make during a loan interview, is you". Whether you have a multiple of brands and products or just one brand, you are the critical piece in the customers mind.

A while back I employed a loan writer with years of experience, let's call him Bob. Bob had no problem getting leads or appointments. What he did have a problem with was converting appointments into loan applications and converting loan applications into repeat business. It didn't take long for me to identify Bob's problem. He conducted interviews in the customer's home, so I decided to tag along and observe how he worked.

From the moment we arrived out the front of the customer's house the problems started. We arrive early so Bob could have a cigarette right before we went in. Not just any cigarette either it was one of those real smelly buggers. That completed, we ring the door bell and are greeted by a pleasant young woman who invites us in. Bob not only does a poor job of introducing himself he neglects to tell the young woman who I am and why I was there. I do this as we sit down. Bob then proceeds to produce a calculator, (I'm sure that it was the one he had at school), and asks the customer how much money she made. This was the point that she took control. She produced a list of well thought out questions and proceeded to ask them in a thoroughly professional manner. I assisted Bob on several occasions but mostly I chose to remain silent and observe how Bob, the seasoned professional as he called himself, would handle it. After completing the questions and being satisfied Bob jumps in to take control again. "So how much do you earn then".

It was at this point I asked for a cup of coffee. When the customer had left the room I told Bob I was taking over and asked him to remain quiet for the remainder of the interview. Bobs response was "you're wasting your time, she is a shopper and who does she think she is asking all those questions, I haven't got time for this". The up-shot is we did write the loan, the first of several investment loans this customer would take out over the next three years. There is a lot more to Bob's story but I will share that at another time.

Without stating the obvious, there were two critical mistakes Bob used to make in his interviews. The first was that he did not sell himself. He assumed because the customer had agreed to the interview that was it, nothing else needed. The second was, he lost control of the interview. The fact that in this case the customer had a list of well thought out questions was not the reason he lost control. Let me explain. There are six stages in a home loan interview:

1 Pre Qualifying

2 Greeting

3 Relax

4 Fact Finding

5 Solution

6 Completion

Old mate Bob was going straight to stage 4. This is the bit every broker should be able to do very well. The problem is that he skipped a few stages. A bit like trying to build a house by starting in the middle, it just doesn't work does it?

Of these six stages the most important stage is the Relax. This is the part where you sell yourself; this is the part where you earn the right to continue with the interview. The key to these stages is to ask the right questions, "Who asks the questions is in control". What I mean by that is this, if you find yourself spending more time trying to answer the customers questions, your interview will have no structure, no logical path. The other point here is that the customers don't know what they don't know. So how do they know what question to ask. Now don't misunderstand me here, I'm not suggesting you don't answer the customers questions, just answer them at the appropriate time. If you follow a structured interview path you will more than likely answer there questions in the process any way.

Every stage of the interview involves asking questions. Remember "prognosis without diagnosis is malpractice". How can you recommend the correct product if you don't have all of the information and how do you get all of the information if the client does not trust you?

Breakout box

Maintain control through having a structured loan interview.

Sell yourself before anything else.

Know what you are going to say and when you are going to say it.

The interview is the most important part of the process.

The customer is looking to you to be the professional, don't let them down through a poor interview technique.