The Walk Back to Office

Idea In Short

Client executives are genuinely busy, and getting dedicated time on their calendar can take weeks, even after they have formally hired an adviser. A few informal minutes, walking a client back to their office after a meeting concludes, sharing a coffee, or simply offering to help with a small task, often build more trust than an entire scheduled session. These moments feel personal precisely because they are unscheduled, and that authenticity is exactly what makes them valuable.

Getting time is genuinely hard

Client executives run genuinely demanding schedules, and getting dedicated time on a calendar can take weeks to arrange, even well after a client has formally engaged an adviser for a project. That scarcity makes every minute of actual access valuable, and it rewards anyone willing to find time outside the formal, scheduled structure of meetings and calls.

Take the time when it appears naturally

Some of the most valuable conversations with a client happen immediately after a scheduled meeting ends, on the short walk back toward an office or an elevator. Asking a client directly whether it is acceptable to walk them back offers a natural, low-friction way to extend a conversation without asking for anything additional on the calendar.

- It provides a client's full, dedicated attention, even for just a few minutes
- It feels authentic and personal, the way friends and colleagues naturally interact
- It functions as a genuinely useful, immediate follow-up to whatever was just discussed

Treat a client the way you treat a friend

Much of what actually needs saying to a client is personal in nature and does not require the weight of a formal email, phone call or scheduled meeting. A few informal minutes convey the message just as effectively, often more effectively, since it removes the performative quality that a structured communication channel tends to add. Building a relationship this way mirrors how genuine trust develops in any professional context, through small, consistent, low-stakes interactions rather than occasional formal ones.1

Other small, high-impact gestures

A handful of additional habits build the same kind of informal trust without requiring much time.

- Share a coffee or a meal together outside a formal agenda
- Offer to help with a small, concrete task, drafting a chart or a short communication
- Send over a relevant research report or industry benchmark unprompted
- Type up meeting notes or interview summaries and share them proactively
- Connect a client with someone genuinely useful in a broader professional network
- Help a client identify and evaluate strong talent worth hiring

Why authenticity matters more than structure

Formal meetings carry an inherent performance quality; both sides tend to communicate somewhat differently when an agenda and a full room are involved. Informal moments strip that performance away, surfacing more honest reactions and building the kind of trust that formal structure alone cannot produce.2 Advisers who rely solely on scheduled sessions miss an entire category of relationship-building available to anyone willing to notice the moment.

A habit worth building deliberately

None of this requires charisma or an extroverted personality to execute well. It requires paying attention to small windows of opportunity, an elevator ride, a walk down a hallway, a few minutes before a call starts, and using them intentionally rather than reflexively checking a phone instead.3 Advisers who build this habit consistently tend to develop client relationships that outlast any single project.

- 1Rapport
- 2Interpersonal Communication
- 3Professional Networking

Summary

A few informal minutes with a client, walking back to an office after a meeting, sharing a quick coffee, or sending over a useful piece of research unprompted, often build more trust than any scheduled session. These moments work because they feel personal rather than transactional, and that authenticity is precisely what a fully scheduled meeting cannot replicate on its own.