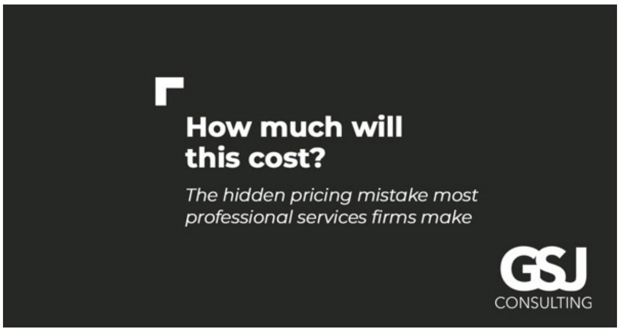

The hidden pricing mistake most professional services firms make

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“How much will this cost?”

It’s one of the most common questions clients ask, and how you answer it is one of the fastest ways to erode your pricing power.

Most professionals respond immediately. It feels efficient. It feels commercial. It feels like good service. But the reality is it’s usually the moment where value is lost. Because when you answer too quickly, you’re not pricing the work properly, you’re second guessing.

At that point in the pricing conversation, you only understand what the client has asked for. You don’t yet understand what they are trying to achieve, what’s at stake, or what success looks like from their perspective.

And that distinction matters.

Clients are not buying tasks. They are buying outcomes.

The more clearly you understand that outcome, the more accurately and confidently you can price the work.

Without it, you default to pricing inputs: and inputs are always cheaper than outcomes.

Start with the outcome

The shift is simple, but it requires discipline. Instead of answering the question: “How much will this cost?” start with defining the benefits the outcome(s) will provide.

While this shift in framing is simple, it requires discipline. Instead of answering the fee question, slow the conversation down and start doing some diagnosing. Not with the work itself, but what sits behind it.

- Are they trying to get a deal over the line quickly?
- Avoid a specific risk?
- Create certainty so they can move forward with confidence?

The exact same piece of work can carry very different value depending on what it unlocks for the client. But if you don't (or cannot) understand the outcome, you default to pricing inputs and inputs are always cheaper than pricing outputs.

Understand urgency and importance before you price

The next step is to understand the urgency and importance of the matter at-hand.

Not all work is equal in the client's world, even if it looks familiar to you. A tight deadline, a sensitive issue, or a high-stakes decision changes how the work should be prioritised, resourced and, ultimately, priced.

If you treat everything the same, you quietly give margin away without even realising it.

Yet many professionals price these scenarios in the same way. When urgency and importance are not factored into pricing, you end up absorbing the pressure: working faster, taking on more risk and not being compensated for either.

Understanding these dynamics allows you to prioritise appropriately, resource effectively and price in a way that reflects the true demands of the work.

Know what the client values

And then there's what the client values.

- Some want speed.
- Some want certainty.
- Some want access and responsiveness.

Others just want to minimise cost.

If you don’t understand this, you default to a single, safe fee and that’s usually lower than it needs to be.

Pricing isn’t just about the number; it’s about how you structure it around what matters most to the client.

In a nutshell

The next time a client asks, “How much will this cost?”, resist the instinct to answer immediately.

Pause.

Ask a better question.

Because the quality of your pricing has very little to do with your rates…

…and everything to do with how well you understand the problem in front of you.
