

Customers want you to ask for their money

By Cathy Goodwin

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Cathy Goodwin
cathy@movinglady.com

Escape to Career Freedom <http://www.movinglady.com>

Many years ago, I ran a part-time resume service out of my New York apartment. My client showed up on time for her first appointment, nervously clutching her old resume.

"Can we just talk for awhile?" she asked.

"No," I said firmly, amazing myself. "If you want me to work on your resume, there will be a charge. You can decide not to hire me. But we can't just sit and talk."

I remembered this incident yesterday, when I greeted a neighbor in our local coffee shop.

"I've got a friend visiting," she said. "He's thinking of starting a business and he wants to talk to you. We'll see you tomorrow when you walk the dog,"

I went on autopilot. "I'd be happy to talk to him for a few minutes," I said, "but if he wants to work with me, I'll have to charge. This is what I do for a living."

Customers are rarely evil people who want to steal services. My neighbor did not realize that consultants earn real money for "just talking" about business.

Others have no idea what they are asking.

Coach Jane asked me to make a few changes to her website. In return, she offered "a couple of half hours of coaching or something." After peeking at the source code of Jane's site, I emailed, "This project will take two to four hours. Here's what I will charge."

Jane knew nothing of web design (a mistake -- but that's another article). She honestly thought I could accomplish her goal in less than an hour.

Customers bring their own experience to your service. One veterinarian will clip your cat's claws after giving booster shots; another charges extra. Some hairdressers charge for a conditioning rinse or blow-dry.

Pricing practices vary geographically. If your customer has just moved to your city, he won't know what to ask. He'll just fume quietly when she sees the bill.

Finally, customers can be naïve. Janet ordered artwork for her brochure. When the designer

offered an option for "one-fifty," she Assumed he meant a dollar and fifty cents! Fortunately, she clarified the difference before signing an order for one hundred and fifty dollars.

Janet's designer was uncomfortable talking about money -- but not uncomfortable handing her a bill. Then it was Janet's turn to be uncomfortable.

The time for a frank discussion of costs and contingencies is before you deliver the service. A book promotion coach informed me, on our second call, "I rewrote your copy. That will be an extra fifty dollars." I refused to pay and will never recommend her firm.

A written schedule of fees and terms can avoid bad feelings. You can always offer discounts or "throw in" extras to cement relationships with loyal customers.

And when you ask a customer, "Would you also like to have..." mention the cost. Otherwise, I believe, she has every reason to expect it will be free.

Cathy Goodwin, Ph.D.

Author, Career Coach, Speaker

<http://www.movinglady.com>

When Career Freedom Means Business <http://www.movinglady.com> Ezine:

<http://www.movinglady.com/subscribe.html> <mailto:cathy@movinglady.com> 505-534-4294

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