How To Profit From Initial Consultations

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"I'd love to work with you, but…"
How many times have you heard these words? As a professional service provider looking to grow your business, isn't it sometimes frustrating to hold an initial session with someone who you'd love to work with but the potential client has a whole list of reasons why s/he would love to work with you, but…?

As in, "I'd love to, but.."-"I can't afford it." Or "I'm not sure if it will work for me." Or "I'm going to try to work on it by myself and will get back to you."

Here are some tips and strategies for overcoming the dreaded "I'd love to work with you, but…" syndrome. These are gleaned from my own personal experience in building my coaching business, as well as tips & strategies I learned in the SalesCoachTraining.com program. I'm happy to share these with you because I really believe it is much easier to run your business when you can afford to do so because you have enough clients who pay you well.

So, there are 10 steps to consider:

1) From the beginning, make sure your potential client has a need for your service and can afford it. I can't tell you how many times professionals hold a free consult, and then find out, after the 30-45 minutes is over that the potential client can't afford the service. It might sound a bit severe, but if you're in business to make money, you need to make certain you're spending your time in the most profitable ways.

2) Consider cutting down the length of your initial consultations. When I first started out, I used to offer full initial sessions of 45 minutes or more. Now I offer 10-15 minute sessions. Within this time frame I can tell if the prospective client and I are a good match. If the client doesn't sign up I won't feel bad or annoyed since I didn't invest a great deal of time in the consult. If you are having trouble converting initial consults into paying clients, it may be because you're "giving away" too much at the beginning and the client is not left wanting more.

3) Frame the call. At the start of the call, gently instruct the client that at the end of the allotted time, they will be called upon to make a choice about the next action. Help the client recognize that you are happy to assist them in making a decision and that you aren't tied to the outcome of their decision. The simple words, "I'm here to help you make the best decision for you and I'm not tied to

any particular outcome." have gone a long way to create trust rapidly and easily.

4) Listen carefully. Spend the time with the client listening "under the surface" for larger themes and bigger issues. Put forward one or two insights that come from your deep listening. Take care to avoid offering too many solutions or too much advice.

5) Reflect back. Near the end of the allotted time, take a few minutes to summarize what you heard and what the client sees as desired goals. If appropriate, take this time to let the client know how you've helped other clients with similar concerns.

6) Take the lead. If you'd like to work with the client, say so. Let him/her know that you really enjoyed spending time with him/her today and you are excited about being able to help him/her reach their goals.

7) Don't push. If a client asks for more time to make a decision or wants more information give only as much time as you are comfortable. It's good to ask in this case a question like: "Is there anything more you would like to know about me that would help make your decision easier or clearer?". In this way, you keep the dialogue open and find out what concerns the client may have.

8) Don't take it personally. If the client doesn't sign up, despite your best attempts, let it go. Somehow s/he was not a match for your business and this is ok. By going to shorter consults you can do more of them in a day. Sometimes you do have to go through a certain number of No's to get to Yes.

9) Avoid adjusting your prices. It's not worth it for you to drop your prices just to get the client. I have had clients ask for my fees and then say, "Wow. That's really high." In the past, I would have responded back in some way. Now I just agree. "Yes, they are." And, if applicable, I might follow up by offering a product or group coaching option that might better suit their financial constraints.

10) Practice and practice some more. Initial consults flow more easily and proceed more satisfactorily the more you practice them. Aim to make a lot of contacts and practice these skills. You'll find your confidence and success grow exponentially.

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