



What to Say When the Client Says [Your Price Is Too High](#)

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If you're like most professionals, you're not too comfortable with selling in the first place. It's not easy fighting that feeling that hyping yourself feels somehow inappropriate. And it's worse having to deal with objection-handling, doing presentations, and getting rejections. Or waiting for the phone to ring.

But little can compete for sheer discombobulation with the plain old, "We think your prices are too high." What do you say to that?

LISTEN TO YOUR GUT

When you hear those words—"your prices are too high"—you probably have one reaction in your mind. "What? How can (s)he possibly think our prices are too high? What are they talking about? We've trimmed them already; I know they're not too high, other firms have got to be that high, and our costs are barely covered here, we're absorbing a lot—how can they say our prices are too high?"

In other words—you really do not understand what they mean.



Charles H. Green, 2009

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Go with that instinct. Ask your self seriously, objectively, curiously—just what exactly is it that they mean when they say your prices are too high. And stay there for a minute. Do not pass Go, do not jump to “how could they?”

Because until you know what they mean, you are simply having an argument

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with yourself. You are presuming to know what they mean, and are starting to answer the presumed objections you have invented in your own mind.

Think there’s only one possible meaning? Think again. Let’s go through some of those answers you so quickly provided in your own mind, and explore just what questions those answers might be responsive to—and not responsive to.

- **Sticker shock.** Sometimes, a client simply is not up to date on the cost of what you have proposed (which hopefully bears some resemblance to what they had asked for). Maybe they’ve never bought this service, or

not bought it lately. In any case, they may feel embarrassed by their ignorance. Not wanting to appear at fault for not being current, they may react with some aggression, masking their defensiveness. “You’re just quite a bit too high,” they say, hoping to bluster their way out of the difficult situation.

- **Budget Busting.** Sometimes a client simply hasn’t thought through the combined costs, or the timing of costs, and the total picture ends up being out of sync with the reality of their budget. In this case, they may not be embarrassed so much as disappointed. But it may be heard to tell the difference from their tone.
- **Bazaar Bargaining.** Some clients simply prefer to use the approach of a bazaar: to assume that their buying process is one of back and forth negotiation, that their stated price is simply an ‘opening gambit’ in an exciting game. In such a case, the client is neither embarrassed nor disappointed—rather, somewhat excited by the process. But their stern countenance will suggest anything but that.



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- **Sucker-punched.** If you get a particularly aggressive pushback from a client, suggesting strongly (even literally) that a competitor has deeply undercut you, you may have been sucker-punched by a low-balling competitor. It happens. If you're honest, you may admit you've done it once or twice yourself.

“Different clients often mean widely varying things when they say the price is too high.”

Therefore their furrowed brows reflect a genuine belief that you're trying something shady.

Here's the key point. If you try to guess which one of these scenarios is operating behind the curtain of your client's eyes, you have maybe one chance in four of getting it right. But far, far worse—if you choose to guess, without *confirming your guess* with the client, you will lose—even if you guessed right.

Therefore the worst thing to do is start defending against the attack you are imagining in your own head.

And the best thing to do is exactly what you don't want to do—to ask the client, simply, “Can you help me understand just what you mean by that?”

ASKING THE HELP ME UNDERSTAND QUESTION

You're probably afraid of your mind's version of the client's answer in your head: it probably sounds something like, “What part of ‘too high’ didn't you understand, you fool! Like, way high. Like costs too much, out of the realm, not going to win, out of line. Too high! What is it you think you need explained?”

But the clients in our mind are far worse than clients in the real world. When you say, “help me understand,” real clients will react one of two ways. Either they'll begin to explain (“well, we just haven't got that kind of budget,” “we think you guys always come in high,” etc.), or they'll look a bit confused and ask, “uh, what do you mean?”

In either case, all you have to do is explain that “different clients often mean widely varying things when they say the price is too high.” Then read off the list above: “some find it like sticker shock; some have budget problems; some just figure our opening prices are just that, and some have been presented some really different proposals.”



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Go on to say, “I don’t know if I can help or not. Some of these situations lend themselves to working out, and some don’t. In any case, if you’ll share with me a little more about what’s behind your concern, then we can see if something can be done or not. If so, great. And if not, then we’ll both at least know we tried.”

Your intent, as always, is to develop a deeper relationship with the customer, and to do the right thing for that customer.

THE INTENT BEHIND THE CONVERSATION

Your words have to work for you; using my words may or may not do the trick. Which means, you need to be very clear about the intent behind this conversation.

The intent is to treat price concerns like any other objective piece of information: you explore its meaning and implications with the client until you have a shared understanding. Your time to market is too slow? What do you mean by too slow? Compared to what? What are the implications of being too slow to market? What are the drivers of being slow to market for you?

In that same spirit you want to understand the drivers of price concern for the individual in front of you. The fact that the discussion is about price and price is usually an emotional topic is not a problem—it’s a great opportunity. Because price is an equally uncomfortable topic for most clients (the Bazaar Bargainer an exception).

And if you can be the one that turns a difficult one into a pleasant, curious, customer-focused question, then you are the one that gets credit for transforming the conversation into greater trust.

Your intent, as always, is to develop a deeper relationship with the customer, and to do the right thing for that customer. You can never control the outcome of a price conversation; but being curious and honest about it increases the odds, and pays relationship dividends in future.

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