

PRICING WITHOUT APOLOGY

How I Went From \$2K Projects to \$5K Monthly Retainers Without
Changing What I Build

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THE PRICING CONVERSATION THAT CHANGED MY BUSINESS

September 2024 - Discovery call with potential client:

Them: "What do you charge?"

Me (nervously): "Well, for a project like this, probably around \$2,500? But I can work with your budget..."

Them: "Let me think about it."

Result: Ghosted.

December 2024 - Discovery call with similar client:

Them: "What do you charge?"

Me (confidently): "\$5,000 monthly. Based on what you've shared, you're currently wasting \$8K monthly on this problem. My solution eliminates that waste for \$5K, so you net \$3K in savings from month one."

Them: "When can we start?"

Result: Closed in 3 days.

Same solution. Different price. Different framing. Different result.

This guide breaks down the pricing psychology that lets you charge premium rates without apology.

WHY YOU'RE UNDERCHARGING

THE CONFIDENCE GAP

You undercharge because:

- You're comparing yourself to what YOU'D pay
- You don't see the full value you're creating
- You're scared they'll say no
- You apologize for your pricing before they even object
- You offer discounts before they ask

Here's the truth: **Your pricing insecurity costs you more than bad pricing.**

When you say "\$3K... but I can work with you on that," they hear "I don't believe my work is worth \$3K."

THE HOURLY RATE TRAP

Most people price like this:

- Estimate hours: "This will take 20 hours"
- Pick hourly rate: "I want \$100/hour"
- Calculate: " $20 \times \$100 = \$2,000$ "
- Add buffer: "Let's say \$2,500"

This is backwards.

You're charging for your TIME, not their OUTCOME.

A voice AI receptionist takes you 3 days to build. That's 24 hours. At \$100/hour = \$2,400.

But it saves them \$3,000 monthly in receptionist salary PLUS captures leads they were missing.

They don't care about your 24 hours. They care about \$3K+ monthly value.

THE VALUE-BASED PRICING FRAMEWORK

STEP 1: Quantify Their Pain

In discovery, extract dollar figures:

- "How much time does your team spend on this weekly?"
- "What's the hourly cost of that time?"
- "How many leads/sales are you losing to this problem?"
- "What's the revenue value of those losses?"
- "Have you tried solving this? What did that cost?"

Example:

Them: "We process 150 CVs weekly, takes about 25 hours total."

You: "And what's the loaded cost for recruiter time?"

Them: "About \$80/hour."

You: (calculating) "So that's \$2K weekly, \$8K monthly on CV screening alone."

Now you have a number: \$8K monthly pain.

STEP 2: Anchor to Their Cost, Not Your Effort

DON'T say: "This will take me 3 days to build, so \$3K."

DO say: "You're spending \$8K monthly on this. My solution eliminates that cost for a \$5K monthly investment. Net savings: \$3K monthly, or \$36K annually."

You just anchored to THEIR \$8K cost, making your \$5K feel like a bargain.

STEP 3: Use The 30-50% Rule

Your fee = 30-50% of the value you create

- If you save them \$10K monthly → Charge \$3-5K monthly
- If you generate \$20K monthly → Charge \$6-10K monthly
- If you eliminate \$5K monthly → Charge \$1.5-2.5K monthly

They keep 50-70% of the value. You take 30-50%. Both win.

STEP 4: Frame As Investment, Not Cost

Costs are expenses. Investments have returns.

DON'T say: "The cost is \$5K/month"

DO say: "The investment is \$5K monthly, returning \$3K in net savings from month one. That's a 60% monthly ROI."

Same number. Different frame. Changes perception.

HOW TO DELIVER THE PRICE

THE CONFIDENCE FORMULA

When they ask "What do you charge?", use this structure:

1. **Restate the problem** (shows you listened)
2. **Confirm the cost** (remind them of their pain)
3. **Present your solution** (what you'll deliver)
4. **State your price** (confidently, no hedging)
5. **Show the ROI** (make the math obvious)
6. **Shut up** (let them process)

Real example:

"Based on our conversation, you're spending \$8K monthly on manual CV screening. That's \$96K annually. I'll build an AI system that handles the extraction, ranking, and filtering in 30 seconds per CV instead of 10 minutes. The investment is \$5K monthly. That nets you \$3K in monthly savings, or \$36K annually. When would you like to start?"

Notice: No apology. No "Is that okay?" No "Does that work for you?"

You stated the price like it's obvious. Because it is.

THE SILENCE TECHNIQUE

After stating your price: **Shut. The. Fuck. Up.**

Don't fill the silence with:

- "But I can work with you on that..."
- "Does that seem reasonable?"
- "We could do a payment plan..."
- "I'm flexible on pricing..."

Let them sit with the number. The first person to speak loses.

They're processing:

- Is this worth it?
- Can we afford this?
- What's the alternative?

If you break the silence first with concessions, you just told them you don't believe your own price.

THE OBJECTION HANDLING

"That's too expensive"

Response: *"Compared to what? You're currently spending \$8K monthly on this problem. I'm proposing to solve it for \$5K. That's a \$3K monthly savings. Which part feels too expensive - solving the problem or the \$3K in savings?"*

"We don't have that in the budget"

Response: *"I understand budget constraints. Let me ask: if this problem costs you \$8K monthly, and you don't solve it, how does that affect your budget for the next 12 months? That's \$96K. Would reallocating \$60K of that \$96K to solve the problem make sense?"*

"Can you do it for \$3K?"

Response: *"I could, but here's what changes: [list reduced scope]. You'd still have [remaining pain points]. Given you're losing \$8K monthly, does saving \$2K on my fee but keeping 40% of the problem make financial sense?"*

Notice the pattern: Always redirect to THEIR costs, not your pricing.

PRICING TIERS THAT SELL

THE THREE-TIER MODEL

Don't give one price. Give three options:

BASIC: \$3K/month

- Core solution only
- Standard delivery (21 days)
- Email support
- Quarterly check-ins

PROFESSIONAL: \$5K/month ← Recommended

- Core solution + optimization
- Priority delivery (14 days)
- Slack/phone support
- Monthly strategy calls
- Continuous improvements

ENTERPRISE: \$8K/month

- Everything in Pro
- Custom integrations
- Dedicated support
- Weekly optimization
- Expansion roadmap
- SLA guarantees

Psychology: Most pick Professional (the one you wanted to sell anyway).

Basic makes Professional look reasonable. Enterprise makes it look affordable.

THE ANCHOR TECHNIQUE

Present Enterprise first:

"For \$8K monthly, you get [list everything]. Most clients don't need this level unless they're processing 500+ [units] monthly."

(They're now anchored to \$8K)

"For most companies your size, Professional at \$5K monthly is the sweet spot. You get [list benefits]."

\$5K now feels reasonable compared to \$8K.

WHY RETAINERS > PROJECTS

THE MATH OF RETAINERS

Project pricing:

- Build voice AI: \$5K one-time
- Client pays once
- Relationship ends
- You start from zero next month

Retainer pricing:

- Build voice AI: \$5K/month
- Month 1: Build and deploy
- Month 2+: Optimize, monitor, expand
- After 6 months: \$30K from one client
- After 12 months: \$60K from one client

Same work. 12X the revenue.

HOW TO JUSTIFY ONGOING FEES

They'll ask: "Why monthly? Can't I just pay once?"

Your response:

"You could pay once for a static solution. But here's what happens: Your business changes, new edge cases appear, your team's needs evolve, integrations break, optimization opportunities emerge. The monthly retainer ensures I'm continuously adapting the solution as your business grows. You're not paying for maintenance - you're paying for strategic partnership."

Then show them the value:

- Month 1: Build + deploy
- Month 2: Fix edge cases discovered in real use
- Month 3: Add feature they didn't know they needed
- Month 4: Optimize based on 3 months of data
- Month 5: Integrate with new tool they adopted
- Month 6+: Continuous improvement

That's not maintenance. That's evolution.

BUILDING PRICING CONFIDENCE

THE BELIEF FORMULA

You can't charge premium prices without believing you're worth it.

Here's how to build that belief:

1. Track the value you create

- Hours saved: "I saved them 20 hours weekly"
- Money saved: "I eliminated \$8K monthly waste"
- Revenue generated: "I helped them capture \$15K in missed opportunities"

Write this down after every client. Read it before pricing calls.

2. Compare to alternatives

- Hiring a developer: \$80K+ annually
- Agency solution: \$10-20K setup + \$2K monthly
- SaaS tools: \$500-2K monthly (but generic, not customized)
- Your solution: \$5K monthly, fully customized

You're not expensive. You're appropriately priced.

3. Raise prices systematically

- Client 1-2: Charge \$3K monthly (you're learning)
- Client 3-5: Charge \$5K monthly (you're faster)
- Client 6+: Charge \$6-8K monthly (you're expert)

Each raise builds confidence for the next one.

THE REJECTION MINDSET

When someone says "That's too expensive" and walks:

DON'T think: "I charged too much. I should lower my price."

DO think: "They weren't my ideal client. My ideal client sees the value."

If you close 100% of prospects, you're undercharging.

If you close 0% of prospects, you're overcharging or targeting wrong.

If you close 50-70% of prospects, your pricing is right.

Getting rejected on price = proof you're charging enough.

THE RESULTS OF CONFIDENT PRICING

MY PRICING EVOLUTION

Month 1: \$1,500 per project → Closed 20%, felt desperate

Month 3: \$3,000 per project → Closed 40%, felt undervalued

Month 5: \$5,000/month retainers → Closed 70%, felt confident

Month 9: \$6-8,000/month retainers → Closed 60%, feel premium

Paradox: **The higher I price, the higher my close rate.**

Why? Because premium pricing signals quality. Cheap pricing signals desperation.

THE CLIENT QUALITY SHIFT

Low-paying clients:

- Negotiate everything
- Question your value constantly
- Delay payment
- Demand scope creep
- Treat you like vendor

High-paying clients:

- Trust your expertise
- Pay on time
- Respect boundaries
- Value your input
- Treat you like partner

You don't just make more money at higher prices. You work with better humans.

WANT THE COMPLETE PRICING SCRIPTS AND CALCULATORS?

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- Value-based pricing calculator
- Pricing conversation scripts
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