

Ten Ways to Increase Client Value, While Reducing Your Time and Effort of Delivering It

By Tom "Bald Dog" Varjan

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Many service professionals mistakenly believe if they work harder, and their clients acknowledge those efforts, they will be willing to pay more.

Yes, very often service professionals are regarded as outsourced labourers, and get paid in proportion with the sweat on their brows. But this is just a positioning problem. Who gets more objections, The Ford or the Ferrari salesperson? These professionals work like dogs, neglecting their families because "the job must be done." Mistakenly they sing this erroneous mantra: "The client comes first."

They run around with their mobile phones permanently plugged into their ears because they think they must be available day in day out. I know an IT guy who puts his mobile phone under his pillow, in case the client calls him at night, so he can be instantly available at his premium rate of \$75 per hour.

After having consulted with dozens of professional service firms all over the globe, I have come to a different conclusion, and would like to disabuse you of this "client comes first" paranoia. Unless you want to position yourself as situational elbow grease (a wage slave), you have to make sure that the perceived value of your services does not lie in the manual labour you perform. If it does, then you are not a service professional but a service slave.

So, let's see what you can do to increase the value of your contribution (your fees), if you are one of the minority—less than eight percent at this time—who charges for value, not time. And this is the key here. If you are a wage slave, that is, getting paid for elapsed time, then you are in trouble in the long-term. There are only 24 hours a day, so you are limiting your earning potential.

1 Understand that if your value to your clients lies in the number of hours you perform manual labour, then you are in deep trouble.

You are perceived as a service slave (working for the client as a subordinate) not as a service professional (working with the client as a peer), and throughout history slaves have been exploited, whereas professionals have been respected. Consider which option will serve your life better. Focus on intangible deliverables and minimize tangible deliverables to the bare minimum. Stop writing reports and creating silly PowerPoint presentations. Peers do not present to each other—salespeople do that. Peers compare notes and discuss their findings.

2 Detach your fees from time and other arbitrary "measuring" units.

Make sure both you and your client focus on the outcomes of the project and the qualitative, quantitative and personal impact and improvement the completion of the project means.

Everywhere I have searched on the Internet, per diem fees are mentioned in relation to subsistence. Attention amateur linguists: might subsistence be the short form of sub-existence? Personally I want to thrive not barely exist, and definitely not to sub-exist. Make certain you do not get lost in the tactical details, that is, how to achieve the outcomes. That is something you create with the implementing team in a collaborative manner.

3 **Steer away from committing to spending certain number of hours performing tasks and creating deliverables.**

Communicate to your clients that the value of your intervention has nothing to do with number of hours worked, and poundage of deliverables produced, but it is all about the magnitude of improvement in the client's condition. If you take 10 minutes to double the response rate of a company's Yellow Pages ad, which brings in \$1 million annual sales right now, feel free to charge \$50,000 for those 10 minutes. They pay you based on the extra \$1 million potential income. However, the company's sales staff must still close the sales.

4 **Focus on maintaining or even increasing the "intensity" of the project.**

Intensity is about effort focus, commitment, level of challenge, use of resources, energy, responsiveness, level of access, interest and passion. An intense strategy-setting weekend is more valuable than six months of aimless tactical drifting.

5 **Emphasise the soft benefits and personal wins of your interventions.**

Highlight enhanced corporate image, reputation, lower stress level, better sense of strategic purpose, regarded as a true leader and innovator, higher level of respect from employees, higher level of pride from your kids, etc.

6 **Utilize e-mail, telephone and web casts as much as you can, and pay attention to how much "face time" you put in.**

In face-to-face meetings you can waste lots of time on small talk and irrelevant chitchat. It is easier to get to the essence on the phone or in e-mail. Also, you create higher perceived value by giving unlimited access to your clients to contact you whenever they need some feedback on the homework they are working on.

7 **Keep your work as strategic as humanly possible and never succumb to tactical grunt work beyond the bare minimum.**

Make sure the client's implementing team is doing all the tactical work—you work with them as a guide not as a labourer. For instance, if you are a marketing consultant, never agree to stuff and lick envelopes. Remember, the client hired you for your brainpower, not for your brawn power. Spare your brawn for your workouts in the gym.

8 **Always keep your buyer up to date with progress, and share both good and bad news.**

Create a template for good and bad news. Once a week or once a month, depending on the duration of the project, print out a one-pager and slap it on your buyer's desk just to keep her/him up to date. Always keep in touch with the buyer.

professional, you are supposed to keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities while delivering your service.

9 **Strictly for internal use, create and use a profit loss account for each client, including the amount of time you have invested in each project.**

You can calculate your productivity by dividing your fees by your invested hours. This is vital. You must know where you stand with each client. Using Pareto's rule, some 20 per cent of your clients give you 80 per cent of your revenues. And the irony is that the other 80 per cent eats up most of your time and attention, giving you late payments, stress and stomach ulcers. Get rid of them before they drive you to the brink of insanity.

10 **Never accept contingency payment of any kind.**

In any engagement there are far too many variables that are out of your control. Yes, you must provide the best pragmatic advice, but it is up to clients whether or not they take action on your advice. Could you pay your office rent, car lease, business phone line and other business expenses based on a certain percentage of your monthly sales? If those people would not accept this setup, why would you? Create a message or—even better—a written document that explains to prospects that it is in their best interest to work with you on a flat fee basis.

So, are you perceived as a service slave or as a service professional? If you are on the service slave side, what are you doing about changing it? The way I see it, your business should support you in your quest to create a bigger and brighter future for yourself and for your family. What is the honour in pumping in 70-plus hours of work every week for the rest of your life, even if you love your work? All right, you love your work. But do you love it so much that you are willing to neglect your family in the process?

You may love your family, too, just as much as you love your work. It may be a good idea to spend more and higher quality time with them. So, who should come first? Clients or family? I vote for the family. Would you agree? Serve your clients well, but make sure you do not become their slave. Never confuse having a career with having a life. **BSW**