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Avoiding Awkward Client Conversations as a Consultant

No one likes to have their value questioned. That goes for both personal and professional value. Unfortunately, as a contractor, there will be times when your clients start to wonder, "are they really worth what I'm paying them?" "Are things better now than before I hired them?" When confronted with these types of questions, you have to control your gut reaction of "yes, absolutely I am! And here's why..." Understand that your client is trying to do what's best for their company, just as you're trying to honor that and do what's best for yourself. Not only that, but there are ways to avoid, or at least lessen the frequency of these types of conversations.

Regular Check-ins

Having a time set at a consistent interval to meet with your project sponsor will have a massive impact on their happiness and satisfaction with your relationship. Keeping your client in the loop on the pulse of the project helps settle their mind to know that things are progressing, even if they're not directly involved.

Proactive Updates

Just because you have scheduled check-in meetings does not mean you should wait until then to update the client on important project shifts that deviate from the original plan or require their attention. Be proactive in your communication rather than holding out for a later date. If something has changed and the client is unaware, they may act upon or communicate outdated information, causing the issue to spiral into something larger than it should. It's always better to be upfront and honest.

Keep Track of Milestones

As a consultant, you're brought into a company to accomplish a certain goal or series of goals. These goals should be actionable and measurable in nature. Therefore, you should be able to track your progress and set up milestones to show that things are verifiably better than when you were contracted. Sharing this with your client not only shows that you're organized and doing the job you were brought on to do, but also that you value accountability in your work. Be sure to highlight what you were initially tasked with, what has been completed, what new work has surfaced, what work remains pending, and what you have decided is not a priority. In doing this, your client can see how the project has evolved.

Review Hours Worked

If you're charging an hourly rate for your services, you've no doubt run into situations where clients are taken aback by your invoice at the end of the month. Your clients have many things on their plate, which is probably one of the reasons they hired you in the first place. If you're anticipating a spike in hours, it's important to have a meeting to go over them beforehand. That way, you can discuss and address concerns in a calm, professional manner to ease the shock of just sending an invoice. Ensure this actually happens, however. Don't just send an email and hope they'll read it. Plus, doing it in person will allow you the opportunity to push the conversation past "pay me for these hours" and,

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instead, expand upon the progress you made during those hours.

You'll have probably noticed a common theme running through all these tips of upfront and honest communication. I truly believe that overcommunication is better than minimal communication. It keeps your clients happy knowing that they have a business partner that checks in and keeps them in the loop.

Set up a 20 minute call here to see if we are a good fit to spark your project!

A passionate organizer of people and initiatives, Erica Smigielski brings over twenty years of experience in project leadership to financial software and SaaS companies who want to launch their next big idea. She leads large-scale, complex projects like product launches and company mergers and acquisitions as well as focused efforts to bring structure and process to fast-track businesses. Erica holds certifications as a Stanford Advanced Project Manager as well as a Certified Group Facilitator, making her a master orchestrator of strategic planning, as well as a skillful communicator who can expertly navigate complex group dynamics.