

From Initial Meeting to Profitable Clients

26/03/2024

CCH Learning:

Hello everybody and welcome to today's webinar, New Clients! From Initial Meeting to Profitable Clients. I'm Susannah Gynther from Wolters Kluwer CCH Learning, and I will be your moderator for today.

A few quick pointers before we get started. If you are having sound problems and can hear me, please toggle between audio and phone. Hopefully you can see this instruction on the screen regardless. If you are looking for the PowerPoint for today's session, it's saved in the handout section on your GoTo Webinar panel. You'll also find that today there's a supplementary document which will be discussed in the presentation. And just a reminder that after the session you will receive an email letting you know the e-learning recording is ready to be viewed. You can ask questions at any point during the presentation by sending them through the questions box. I will collate those questions and ask them at the Q&A towards the end of today's presentation.

CCH Learning also offers a subscription service, which many people have termed Netflix for professionals. It provides members with access to our entire library of recordings as well as live webinars for a competitive flat fee. That's for over 500 hours of content. For CPD purposes, your viewing is logged automatically.

Your presenter today is Dr. Abbie Widin, strategy director, Go to Marketing Company. Abbie runs a successful boutique consultancy, GTM Co, and designs go to market strategies. She coaches sole practitioners and professional firms and helps them identify their highest potential clients, package their services, and set their fees. She also helps them stay focused on their most effective business development opportunities. Abbie is also a director of both public and private Australian companies. I'll now hand you over to Abbie to commence today's presentation.

Dr Abbie Widin:

Oh, thank you Susannah. So hopefully you can see during this webinar. You will discover how to... You can't see anything?

CCH Learning:

Not just yet. Oh, there it goes. Yep.

Dr Abbie Widin:

Oh, good. Well, I'm giving it away. Okay, during the webinar. Welcome everybody. It's very nice to have you here. I love getting new clients. I think that it's just critically important. Even if you've got a nice full book of clients today, they move away, they fade away, they pass away. You've always got to find a way to get new ones in the door.

And so during this webinar, we're going to discover how to take the lead in your initial client meeting. We want to qualify the client, the prospect, so that you know if they're just kicking tyres or they want to get going immediately. It's very easy to waste time at the beginning. You want to communicate the value of your service and not just the price. You want to figure out what it's worth to them. And you also want to set some expectations of how you work with your very best clients.

Clients are, and this isn't entirely true, but we know each other now well enough for me to say they're a little bit like toddlers. You've got to set some boundaries for them and say, "This is how we're going to operate today and in the future" and keep reminding them, "This is how we operate."

And towards the end, we're going to talk about how to make an offer with grace and ease by presenting your service as the solution to their problem. Now, I'll just point out that I don't know exactly where you are in your journey of business development prowess. I don't know whether you've just hung out your shingle and started rattling the tin around, or whether you've been at this for decades and you're here trying to sharpen the saw. I don't know whether you are a solo practitioner or whether you are a partner in a big firm or one of the other people working in a big firm. I don't know whether it's your own show or whether you're part of a larger organisation.

But what I will encourage you to do is in any presentation like this that's skewed towards a large audience, it's going to always be at a slightly different level to where you are. I might be a little bit above or below, but you can always take out two or three points that are useful for your situation. Now the second thing I'll ask you to do is just have a look at your calendar in the weeks ahead and see if you've got one or two people who are booked in already for that initial meeting.

So you might've had a five-minute conversation with them on the phone and now you're going to sit down and do a proper paid discovery session. Or you know that someone's calling you. It's the first time that you're going to be speaking with them, but you put aside half an hour to an hour just to see what sort of help they need. Think of that person, or a couple of them, but think of at least one person in the future if you've got them where you can think about, "I want to implement some of these tips that I'm going to learn here today."

Okay. So from initial meeting to profitable client. So when you're running a professional services firm, you've got one of two problems. You might have a capacity problem in that you're so busy you've got so much work on that you don't actually have the capacity to bring on any new clients. The other problem you might have is a conversion problem. Not enough clients. People might either be coming through the door, but for whatever reason they're not turning into clients.

Broadly for a capacity problem, increase your fees. Increasing your fees is number one, the best way to make more out of the same number of hours. And it's also the best way to make sure you've got great clients. Clients who can afford higher fees generally have got more resources at their disposal. I would encourage you all, if you have a capacity problem, to increase your fees.

Now the other problem, the conversion problem, this is what we're going to tackle here today. Not enough clients. That we are not going to go through the marketing exercise of figuring out how do you fill the pipeline and get these people to come to your door, but once they're there, let's not let them go. Let's make sure that they stay and take advantage of all of the capabilities and all of the services that you have to offer.

So it is very easy for these people once they get to your door to sit down, you have a great meeting with them, you all smile nicely the whole way through. They say, "Gosh, that was a good meeting." You say, "I know. Wasn't it a great meeting?" They say, "Yes. Yes, it was great meeting. We'll get back to you." And then they walk away and you get a bit confused because two or three weeks later you thought, "Oh, I thought we had a great

conversation." So that time is an opportunity cost. It's not just that you don't have a client at the end of it. It's also that you've wasted that time with this person when you could have been doing something like incurring a billable hour. So there is an opportunity cost, and it's very important to figure out where it's going wrong in the conversation.

If you leave the conversation and you think, "Gosh, that was great," and then they haven't signed up, there is definitely a gap. That's a clue. And so what you can do is you can look back in the conversation where you might've lost them. And chances are, it was that even more likely the step just before that. So let's go into this and do it. But before we do that actually, let's check. Susannah, we're going to find out what the audience's conversion rate is. This is when somebody comes, you make an offer, you say, "Let me help you with this," and you send them a proposal. How many of these conversations turn into a signed up client?

CCH Learning:

Thank you for that, Abbie. So our poll is, what is your conversion rate? Is it A, less than 10%? B, 10 to 39%? C, 40 to 69%? Or D 70 to 100%? Or even E, "I've never worked it out"? So I'm going to launch the poll. And if everybody could please put a click in the radio button next to the answer that best describes their situation, that would be brilliant.

Just a reminder of course to please put your questions into the questions pane and we will get to those questions in the Q&A session at the end of the presentation.

I'll just give you about five more seconds to get your votes in and then we'll close the vote. Okay, so I'm going to close the vote. Let's have a little look at the answers.

Dr Abbie Widin:

[inaudible 00:09:38].

CCH Learning:

So we have 39% who say, "E, I've never worked it out." 33% that say B, 10 to 39%. 22% said C. And 6% said D. Back to you, Abbie.

Dr Abbie Widin:

Thank you. Those are 70 to 100%. Those 6% of people saying they are definitely here sharpening the saw. That is great. Because sometimes it's just not a good fit. It might be that what they want and what you offer just aren't a good match. But for those people where it's less than 30, 39%, let's see if we can definitely get some of the strategies in here worked out.

Now the first thing we're going to do is just think about your attitude going into the meeting. There are a number of different personas you can have, but whichever one it is, you need to be willing to lead. You have to be willing to step up and be the expert. Everyone on the call is probably in a white collar professional services business. You, the audience, will be stacked full of accountants, legal professionals, some consultants, people who it is your advice and guidance that people are looking for.

The client wouldn't be switching professional service providers very often, and so you have to guide them through the process and help them to understand what's important or not. Think about from their perspective. What are they thinking and what are they feeling? So although as we go through this conversation, I'm going to take you through the arc of the conversation for when they walk in the door, metaphorically of course, all the way through to when they say, "Oh my God, I can't believe it. Let's get going."

I've peppered it with lots of questions, but it's not like an interview. You're not an investigative journalist. You are trying to guide the conversation in a little bit the same way that a doctor, like a medical professional will guide you through. They'll ask questions like, "Tell me..." If you walk in with a headache, you want someone who says, "Let's learn more about that headache of yours. Let me understand how bad it is. Is it worse in the morning? Worse in the evening? Before food? No food? Does it hurt when you look at the light?" You want someone who's going to diagnose whether you need a couple of Panadol or straight to the MRI. But for you, it's a conversation.

So your greatest challenge is inertia. It's really easy for your client to say, "stuck in their own muck" and not change. Because if they don't have a compelling reason to change, they probably won't because of their fear, doubt and uncertainty. "Is the new environment actually going to be better than my current one?" So the cost of staying where they are is the cost of paying minus the cost of changing. You have to make the cost of changing minimal, absolutely immaterial to their ability to change.

So this is the flow of an ideal initial meeting, either offline or online. You've got a cheat sheet in the handouts to help guide you through this. Broadly, these circles represent where you spend the time. Now you want to spend a small amount of time on the greetings, a good amount of time on the discovery. This is where you are doing less than 30% of the talking. You want to share a compelling narrative. So you're going to be doing most of the talking in this compelling narrative. You're going to recommend a way forward. And again, even though you are doing the recommending, you've got a couple of points in there where you are going to really insist that the prospective client do some contribution as well. And then you're going to make an offer and say... Well, if they say yes, you're going to say, "Here's what the next steps are." If they say no, you're going to say, "Well, here's what the next steps are."

So we're going to go through these one by one. We're going to start with the introduction, the time check and the agenda. If there's more than just you and the other person in the room, make sure that everyone's name is said out loud. Take the lead and say, "Sally, why don't you start, introduce yourself and say one sentence about what you do here." This is particularly important if everyone is on a video call, there's nothing more disconcerting than being on a call seeing somebody else listening possibly with a recording going and have no idea who they are, what they're doing, or whether or not whether you're paying for their time to be in the call. So do make sure that you say everyone's name out loud.

So this could be a telephone call, it could be a video call, it could be a face-to-face call. Ideally it's scheduled. Even more ideally, it's paid for. But you don't have to. If you are without any clients at all, you might say, "Let's spend half an hour rather than just five minutes on the phone."

Now, at the start of the meeting, do be clear on how much time you have together because you also need to be timekeeper during this. You want to outline your proposed agenda and you want to make sure, you want to check in, "Is this what you are expecting us to cover?" You also want to see if anything else has come up for them that they want to add to the agenda. Because even if somebody calls you and they say, let's say you're a divorce lawyer, they call you and say, "I'd like to talk about my upcoming divorce," you'll end up saying, "Is there anything else that you want to add to the agenda?" And they'll say, "Actually, since we last talk, I realise now that I've separated, I'm going to need new will, new power of attorney, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah." And all of a sudden you've got two or three more things that you can help them with.

Now, you may have also planned to tell them that they need those things, but yeah, you want them to tell you that they want it because it's a lot easier to sell something that somebody has asked you for.

So here's the script that I would suggest starting with if you have nothing. Now, if you have your own style or your own template, try to find the triggers or the pivot words or the concepts in here that are going to help somebody understand the meaning behind the words. So change it to be your own words. You want it to sound authentic, you want it to be you, but do try to make sure you cover off the key points.

Okay, "So Bob, we have 30 minutes scheduled for this morning's introductory meeting. This should be enough to get us started and see how we want to progress from there."

"Is this still the time you have available?"

"Today I'd like to understand more about what your situation is and what's triggered you to be in here today."

And, "If it sounds like we can help, I'd like to share our philosophy, the way we work here and the expectations we have of ourselves and our clients."

"How does that sound? Is there anything else you'd like to cover?"

If there is something else, write it down. One of the beautiful yellow legal pads are great, but write it down because it is very easy to get caught up in the momentum of it and forget, and then they will feel as if you haven't taken care of their needs adequately. You want to create a very safe, comfortable environment where the person knows that you are already engaged in your duty of care towards them.

Let's assume you've now got the agenda, you know whether it's 30 minutes or 90 minutes. Let's get into the discovery part. Now these people are buying your ability to solve their problems. So you want to be suitably diagnostic. Ask them why they're looking for new professional services. Is it because there's been a significant change in their circumstances? For example, they used to be a small mom and dad business and now they have turned into, they're employing a couple of hundred people and they've got branches all around Australia and they've just realised, "Actually, you know what? I need to step up to a different level of service."

Or is it because they've burnt their previous professional service people and they've had four advisors in the last three years and none of them have worked out? That's really useful information because chances are it's not the advisor. So you want to start with an open question.

"Tell me, what brings you in here today?" Now, if you already know what brings... Let's go back to that divorce example. If they've told you on the phone what brings you in here today, you might say, "Sally, when you booked this session, like when we decided to have this meeting together, you mentioned it was about the divorce that you've got coming up. Tell me more about that and tell me what brings you in here today in relation to that." And that is open enough, it covers any way that they want to take the conversation. Now you are still the expert and you are still guiding the conversation, so if they launch off on, "This is what's happened every day of the last 30 years," you need to shut that down.

You can also say, "Tell me, how can I help you today?" You can channel Fisk, which is one of my favourite comedy shows [inaudible 00:19:27]. Susannah, let's quickly go to a poll so that nobody realises that I mentioned Fisk out loud.

CCH Learning:

Thank you for that, Abbie. So what triggers a new initial meeting? Are they, A, really looking for the best? B, are they unhappy with the current provider? C, they want a new service? Or do they just like to kick tyres? So I'm just going to launch that poll. And if you could please put a click in the radio button next to the answer that best describes your experience, that would be really great.

And of course, once again, just a reminder that if you do have any questions, please put them into the questions pane and we will get to those questions in the Q&A session at the end of the presentation.

I'll just give you about five more seconds to get your votes in. All right, we're going to close the vote and have a look at the answer. So 87% said they were B, unhappy with the current provider, with 13% saying C, they wanted a new service. Back to you, Abbie.

Dr Abbie Widin:

Thank you very much, Susannah. I would actually agree with that. I think that's about... I know that you can only choose one button and it's not really fair when you want to click on two buttons, but I think that's true. I think most people are not happy with where they are. They want to move because they no longer like it. Every now and then you'll find people who really are looking for something different.

Right. Let's go. So let's discover the pains behind the why. So depending on who your client is, you're going to ask different questions. Mostly the difference is are these a consumer, like an individual. Or they are a business. And if they're a business, what type of business they are. So you want to discover more about who they are and what help they think they need. Now, you may assess it ultimately as they need different help, but at the beginning it's very important that you find out what they think they need.

So let's say you might ask some, they'll say, "I am here to talk about XYZ." And so you'll say, "What are you trying to achieve in that XYZ area?" Now you can also then go a step beyond that and say, "In the area of the next level up, what are your key priorities?" Because you want to find out where this problem fits in the overall scheme of things for them. Once you've got a sense of that general situation, you want to go a little bit deeper into, "Let's talk about the challenges you have in XYZ." Oh, I put XXX, but it's really XYZ. "What are they costing you? What aren't you able to get to because you're spending so much time on this problem? So what's your main difficulties when it comes to this? What causes you the most frustrations?"

And then once you've finished all of that, you'll say, "Changing providers, that's generally a pretty significant step. What's your biggest concern? Because I want to make sure that I can make this transition as seamless as possible for you." And that is part of having a courageous conversation. It's making yourself vulnerable and recognising that this is not a done deal. Although they're here and they're asking for help, they are changing from one situation to another by reaching out and saying, "I know this isn't a done deal. How can I make this a more safe and secure environment for you to make that transition?" It's very powerful.

Once you've done all of the problems, you know they're spending a million dollars a month on XYZ problem, "What benefits do you see in getting this solved?" Because if you can take away the pain, make this problem go away, there is going to be an upside.

"So if this is fixed, what upside will you see?"

"Now, if we could get this working as you want, how would that flow through onto the other areas that you described previously?"

You want them talking. You want to let them show you what the land of milk and honey looks like. Then once you've done that broad area again, the general situation, you go into the nitty-gritty of that problem.

"So why do you find it useful to solve the problem?"

"Is it important for you to get this fixed?"

"Can you expand on that?"

You want to know how important it is. A really useful way of figuring it out is you ask them, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it that you get this fixed in the next three months?" And if they say anything less than an 8, maybe a 7, maybe, but definitely you are looking for an 8, 9, 10, or some people say 25, you are looking for something in the 8, 9 and 10 because anything else, that can be kicked down the road. That is a problem that, "One day I want to get it solved, but man, I've got some other eight and nine problems here today."

"What's your appetite for addressing this problem?"

"What makes you say this?"

"And how important is solving X in your overall list of priorities?"

Around this stage, you may look down at where you are carefully taking notes because you will be carefully taking notes. You can't just remember all of this stuff. Probably you're going to have to write up a proposal at the end, so do take notes. You're going to look down and go, "Okay, they've just told me they want to do eight different things. There's no way that they're going to sign off on doing eight different things all at once. Maybe we only do three of them and those three things we end up sequencing them. Maybe two of them go together, but probably these are the things we're going to finish first." And so you want to make sure you've got those things in the right priorities.

So by the end of this initial part of the conversation, you should have qualified them as hot or not. Is this matching up with where your area of genius and brilliance is? Does that match with the help they need? Do they sound like a client that you want to work with? Now, I know that every now and then you think that any client is a good client, but it's not actually true. There are some clients that are the PITAs, P-I-T-A, and you can Google that online later. But you can find out if you don't know whether or not this is a prospective client that wants to get going or is just kicking the tyres, you might say... Ask yourself this question. So you're not going to be asking them out now. Do they know what they want? If they have rambled all over the place and they've done that in your initial meeting, you'll have to have the patience job to stay with them for the next five years.

If you look at it and you think, "I don't really think they know what they want," you might say, "So for you, success would look like... Blah." So you might put something out there and they will validate whether that's right or not. "I believe you're interested in making significant improvements in this area. Did I hear that correctly?" And again, they'll say, "You are the first person who's ever really understood me" or, "No. No, that's not actually what I meant. Let me tell you what I meant."

Okay. You also want to be asking yourself the question, "Can they afford me?" You can ask, "On average, how much have you spent on this in the last few years?" If it's something that has been an ongoing expense for them or investment for them. You can also say, "You haven't really invested in this area before. What makes you think that this is the right time to start investing?" If they've spent absolutely nothing and they've got no good reason for why now is the right time, chances are they haven't really budgeted for it and it's probably a two or three on the list of, "Is this going to come?"

Do they know what their timing is? When you are looking to engage someone or a new firm, how much of a priority is it for you to make a change? Sorry, the question is, when are you looking to engage someone? If you say, "Are the stars aligned?" Let's say that we all decide that it is great for us to work together, "When would you like to begin work on this with the new service provider?" And are they actually the person who can make the decision on this?

It used to be this concept of delegated authority was a thing. Somebody was delegated the ability to make a decision. You could say to one of the people who works for you, "Jack, I want you to go out, talk to three or four different lawyers, find the best one in XYZ area." And Jack would come back and say, "I've engaged this firm." These days, Jack has to bring back a seven-page memo on why Jack wants to recognise that. And then that goes to possibly a single person but probably a committee. So you want to know if they're the stakeholder and decision maker.

Now if you just ask straight out, "Are you allowed to make decisions?" They will get offended, I promise. Instead you might say, "Do we need to get anyone else involved in deciding to go ahead?" The other question is, "If we decide to go ahead, if we, you and I, decide to go ahead, how soon could we get started?" And that's when they'll say, "Well, actually, by the way, you and I can have a great talk and we can agree in principle, but we won't be able to get started until this other person has signed off on it. And that meeting only happens every two months, and so I'll be taking it to that board meeting.

So what else have they tried? This is where you find out whether they're truly those pain in the asses, which is that PITA that I told you to Google.

"So have you looked for a new service provider previously? How did you come across us?" If it was the website, "What attracted you about our website?" Now this is obviously useful marketing information, what is it that we say that makes people call. But also you want to find out whether you've got the word affordable written on there three times and they say, "I really like the way you said you were affordable." It means that they might be looking for the cheapest [inaudible 00:30:42] in town.

"Are you speaking with many other providers? Are you calling me because this was a referral or are you going out to canvas 10 providers?" So then you want to summarise and educate. This is still at the end of this discovery period. Ideally, you, but more importantly your client, has got a new understanding of their problem, what the problem is costing them and the importance of fixing it properly. Your role here is to provide a new perspective on their problem. So you'll go back over what the prospective client has told you and you'll summarise it in three minutes or less. If you've never done this before, the first time you try to make a synthesis like this, it's going to feel a little clunky, but I promise it gets easier as you get the ability to incorporate all of the different elements and tie it into a cohesive narrative for them. Try to use their words as much as possible.

The example I've got here is you mentioned that this paused your problem and you'd need a solution. I'd also suggest beyond that we also look at X, Y, and Z to make sure you're addressing all of the contributing factors. We don't want to give you a superficial solution to the situation where you end up with some unintended consequences. This is a situation where I've definitely seen people being penny wise and pound foolish. If you don't fix the underlying root cause, it's going to happen again.

We're now going to go into one of my favourite areas, which is the compelling narrative. So this is why we're going to use a case study of a different client to demonstrate your capability. And the reason we're doing this is because stories are powerful and we want to position your prospective client in as the hero, the hero that we're going to tell them a story and they're going to identify with that hero in the story. They're going to become the hero and they're going to see that that narrative is going to happen to them.

Now don't lie. If you don't have a case study that's similar enough, don't make one up on the spot. It won't ring true. And also it's not the right thing to do. So use a case study of a client who achieved a successful outcome. This is inspiring for others who are considering making the change. They hear the story and they start to wonder, "Perhaps I can make this change and achieve this outcome too. Perhaps this is the person I need in order to make that change and achieve that outcome."

So let's take our prospective client along as the protagonist. So I'm going to give you sort of an example story, and the most important bit is the setup. You start with a situation, you make a start, you get some hope, you realise that actually you're still in the prison and then you break free and achieve the goal. It's pretty cool, huh? It's just like Star Wars. In fact, what you're doing is more exciting than Star Wars.

"So your situation is very similar to a client we helped recently. It was a small business with a dozen staff. They weren't happy with their existing provider. They really wanted to get a better handle on their cashflow forecasting so they could manage their budgets, inventory and cost of finance better, but they weren't sure if they would get a better outcome if they changed." You can feel it, the hesitation.

"After we sat together and mapped out their current situation, we anticipated that we could save them considerable dollars throughout the business, not just in the inventory but in consolidation of their range and prioritisation of key customers. We ended up partnering with them as virtual CFOs, a position they'd never had before. Their margin has grown by 300 basis points and they've freed up an extra million dollars in working capital." And the person who's listening to this is thinking, "I wonder if I could have an extra million dollars in working capital." Again, don't make it up on the spot because it won't ring true.

So you want to check the perceived benefits. Even though you've gone through that story and you've said it out loud, you now need your perspective client to say the benefits to you back out loud. You need them to say out loud, "I want that million dollars in extra working capital." Sorry, I've got here, "Don't worry if it feels redundant." It will feel redundant. You'll think it's bloody obvious what the benefits are, but just trust me on this one. It's like new neural pathways get formed in the brain as they say this out loud.

"If we were to go ahead and get similar results for you, what benefits do you see?" Or, "What benefits can you imagine if we were to implement a similar process here for you?" Part of this is about allowing them to figure out what their upside is. You don't know whether they are small thinkers, medium thinkers, big thinkers. You don't know what the size of their vision is. You don't know how they're thinking about their problem yet. You've got a couple of clues because you've already sat with them for a period of time, but you don't know them inside out like you do after you've worked with someone for five years.

You also want to share your philosophy. This is what you believe. It's a point of view so you can share things like how you are different, why you believe this work is important, and what you hate about seeing this work not being done well. Because if you are to achieve a premium in the marketplace, you have to be and think about the game in the best way. It really is. Enrolling people through a conversation like this is 40%, 60% of the work that needs to be done to get this client and then keep them over a period of time.

So for example, you might say, "The way I work with my very best clients is proactively. I build in time each month, each week to do X, Y and Z." And this is important because this is how you get the visibility that you said you wanted. However, in order to do this, it has to be a partnership. I'm going to rely on you to provide these inputs or these resources in a timely manner. Who is the right person in your business to do this work each month? You then need to recommend a way forward. So they've told you, "This is my situation. This is the help I need." You've said, "I've helped someone just like this and my golly gosh, were they happy?" And the other person has said, "Yes, they appear to be happy and I want that happiness too." Now you're going to recommend a way that they can get there. But before I do that, Susannah, one more poll.

CCH Learning:

That's all right, Abbie. So how do you sell your services? Is it A, by six minute increments? B, by the hour? C, fixed price packages? D, a combination of time and packages? Or, E, I just make up what I think they'll pay? So I'm just going to launch that poll and if you could please put a click in the radio button that best describes your situation, that would be wonderful.

Once again, just a reminder that if you do have any questions, to please put them into the questions pane and we'll get to those questions in the Q&A session at the end of the presentation. I'll just give you about five more seconds to get your votes in and then we'll close the vote. Okay.

Dr Abbie Widin:

Oh, that's good. And I really do love questions.

CCH Learning:

I'm going to close that vote and let's have a little look. So 69% say D, a combination of time and packages, with 19% saying fixed priced packages, and then 6% each for six minute increments and by the hour. Back to you, Abbie.

Dr Abbie Widin:

Oh, that's super interesting. Thank you for that. If you are part of the Wolters Kluwer's Netflix for professionals, there's a couple of previous webinars we've done around creating packages for your clients, or if you do charge by the hour, how do you take up your fees? So I do encourage you to go back and have a look in the archives for that.

Charging by the hour is fine, but there is a slight disincentive mismatching goals. Your client wants you to get it done as quickly as you can and you want to get it done as robustly as you can. There's no real value advantage in getting it done quicker. Excuse me. So when we're looking... So I'm just going to cough. Sorry about that. Don't talk about your fees too early. There's nothing worse than starting... They sit down and they say, "How do much stay charged?" You don't want to get yourself in a situation like that. You say, "Look, I'm happy to talk about fees very specifically towards the end. I just want to make sure first I understand what it is that you're after and that I'm able to help."

So let's say that we've gotten all the way through the thing, we now need to recommend a way forward because you understand where they are, they think you're great, we still need to actually invite them into the engagement. So your situation, when you are looking for this A, B, C outcome, I'm going to recommend that we start with whatever your process is.

So an example would be, "Given your biggest challenges around cashflow forecasting, which is going to be especially important as the macroeconomic environment tightens, I suspect you're going to need better processes to give you that visibility. What I'd like to do is have my lead accountant, me, somebody else, whoever it is that spend two to three hours with you looking at what you've currently got in place and how you use it. We can do that online by sharing screens. We can come to your place. You can bring your laptop over. We'll then give you a firm recommendation on how to proceed. There is a small fee for that. However, we can take it off the work if you do decide to go ahead. Now, if you're comfortable with that, we should book in a date."

Now I just want to highlight the most important elements there. "So given what your problem is, this is what I recommend and why. Here's how we're going to do it. So we're going to spend two to three hours assessing your situation in detail. The next thing that's so important, we take it off the work. If you decide to go ahead with us, this is free. You've made it." Obviously they've got to invest their time, you've got to invest your time. You get paid for the time because you are going to charge a fee for it, but in their mind they think it's free. Now you are still going to add it to the final bill. There's nothing for free, but in their mind it feels free.

"So if you are comfortable with that, we should book in a date." Oh, that's it, sorry. The final thing to point out about that is you've given them a stepping stone. They don't have to fully commit to changing providers until they can assess the value that you provide. It would be weird for them to come and spend two to three hours with you, take your recommendations and go back to their current provider and say, "I've just spent money with these other people. Can you do this?" That would feel like cheating when people just don't do that. So don't worry about giving away your secret source to the enemy. It's very, very unlikely to happen.

Now, you also just want to sense check the price range, and the way you do that is you share a... If something's small enough in a fee, you might just say, "This is what the price is, take it or leave it." Well maybe not the words take it or leave it, but you just give the price and then you leave it. As the numbers get bigger, you want to give them a range and just check that they're comfortable at least with the range.

So if you're selling a very defined service, small business bookkeeping, you would share an absolute price. So the investment for the bookkeeping service is \$495 plus GST per month. And yeah, it could be \$100, it could be a thousand dollars. I've just chosen a number.

If you're selling a body of work with an ambiguous scope, now this might be responding to an audit, having a look at something where there is still a fixed outcome but at the moment you don't know what that is, you might suggest starting with that road mapping session. This is the thing where you spend a bit of time but it ends up becoming free. So you start with a explore and scope session. Now I've also seen these called a blueprint, a roadmap, a discovery journey, a XYZ strategy, but you got to understand the range of depth of your available data and see what you've done in the past. It could be a strategic game plan where you say, "I'm going to get a variety of other inputs from you and we're going to see if we can come up with a strategic approach that is going to make sense. We're going to look at three or four different options. And together, based on your situation and more of the details than I have today, we're going to come up with a more concrete version. This is going to cost \$1,250 plus GST."

And don't forget, if you're selling to a very large business, if you're selling something for \$1,250, it is too low to be taken seriously. I've worked at Fortune 50 companies where I was an expat in Geneva and literally they would take proposals that were too small and they would say, "Throw those \$44,000 proposals out because they don't understand the importance of what we are trying to do here." Don't underdo it if it is a large enough client and the impact is significant.

You can also say, "We offer a number of advisory packages." This might be your virtual CFO, your fractional legal counsel or something. "We offer a number of packages which range from 3,000 to 18,000 a month." What I normally suggest is to start with a road mapping session at a thousand dollars. This gives you a good view of what's going to suit you best. "Now, if you decide to go ahead with the monthly package, we do take that road mapping investment off the first month." Again, you've made it free. So powerful.

Okay, so we're going to sense check the price range. If it's really undefined, like a family's group tax returns, they've got four family trusts, they're doing development on three sites, they're doing distributions to half a dozen cousins and all sorts of people and you don't currently have a roadmapping offer, you can give a broad range based on an hourly fee.

"So generally for someone in your situation, we've got two companies. Your wife has a sole trader ABN, you hold a family trust and two investment properties. Look, your initial tax return might range from 6,000 to 12,000 bucks plus GST. The difference really comes down to how clean the data is and how complex your affairs are. But we have a reputation in the market. We are well known and our clients stay with us year after year because they know that we capture every deduction. We are going to look at every angle to deliver the right result for you. And we are going to start to plan out how you can structure your affairs in an even better way in the future. In order to do this, we send across a great questionnaire to help draw out all the information that we need. We make it super easy for you."

You then want to make an offer. Don't worry about this whole concept of closing. It just has to be an offer. It should be clear as the waiter in the restaurant, "Do you want to have a coffee with your dessert?" Yet some people will go up proactively and say, "Excuse me, can we get some coffees over here?" Most of the time, 70% of the time, the reason that they sell a coffee at the end of the meal is because the waiter has said, "Would you like one?" They'll be, "Oh yes, coffee. That might be nice. May I have one of those?"

"So given what you've just told me about needing a new provider and for all the reasons you've mentioned," you would specify those, not just say all of the reasons, "it sounds as if this would be super useful for you. Now, I've suggested that we start with the mid-tier bookkeeping package to start with. You wouldn't say to start with twice. And we can see if it needs to be changed up or down. Would you like to go ahead? Or when would you like to get started?" And then you've got to be very quiet. You don't say anything. You just wait and you find out what they say. There will be some tension in this silence. Do not succumb to the temptation to fill it yourself. The prospective client has to do it. Stay strong.

So there is an old maxim that buyers buy an emotion and follow through based on logic. You want to secure a formal agreement quickly, so if they send yes, know what comes next. "Great! In that case, we should get started." Don't look surprised. "I'm really looking forward to taking care of this for you. Now, I'm going to send through a checklist of what we'll need for example to be invited into your accounting software, ERP, shoebox. It'll also need you pass those assessment and group tax returns." And schedule the next meeting now. Even if you know that it's likely to change, pencil it in. If for some reason you think that this advice is not good advice and you want to wait for some reason, you say, "Set the expectation. So if you can send back confirmation by next Friday, I'd appreciate it. If I haven't heard back from you by Friday, I hope you don't mind if I reach out on Monday."

Be very specific. You've just spent X amount of time with this person. You've got to do what you say you're going to do. When you call and you say, "I didn't hear from you. And so as promised, I'm calling you to get your feedback to get advice or your input." Not advice, but you get your feedback, that is super powerful because you've shown, "I'm calling as promised. I am going to be the one looking out for you" is the implied message. If for whatever reason they say no, you need to find out why. Don't just say, "Oh, that's a pity" and "see you later." You've just invested a good amount of time, you've shared your operating framework and you want to know. You want to get better. And also it might not be lost yet. There might be a reason that you can overcome really quickly.

"Ah, I hear you say that this isn't for you just now. What makes you say that? Ah, so it's not a priority just now. Would you mind if I ask you about that? Because before, I heard you say that this was super important for you and it would make a big difference to you to have it fixed. And in fact, actually when I asked you about the priority, you said, 'Well, the urgency, you said this is 10 out of 10 because if I don't find a way to solve this, everything else turns to muck.' And now it sounds like it's not a priority for you. Where are you really at on this? It sounds like you're going to find this valuable." Might not be lost.

Thank you very much everyone. I do hope that was useful and go out there and get more clients, please. Get more clients.

CCH Learning:

Thank you very much for that, Abbie. So I'll just take that back. So thank you for that presentation, Abbie. We will be spending the next few minutes taking questions, so just a reminder to please type them into the questions pane.

To give you some time to type those up, I will mention our upcoming webinars. So coming up, we'll be looking at the practical issues with the main residence exemption. We've got our bimonthly cybersecurity update coming up for April. And the next in our FBT 2024 series with FBT update essentials. We'll be looking at how to work with difficult people and maintain your professionalism. We'll also be looking into property and income tax and also looking at Show me the Money and Superannuation withdrawals. If you have any interest in those or any of our sessions, please head to our website, have a look and see what is right for you.

So let's have a little look at our questions. So I have a question from Mary. Mary was asking, "I saw you recommended packages, but I generally charge an hourly fee. How do I create packages?"

Dr Abbie Widin:

Excellent. So first of all, you try to figure out what outcome the person really wants. In general, if you are selling your services by the hour, they don't really care how long it takes you. They'd like you to take a shorter amount of time, and as I said, you are not incentivized to try to make it a longer time. And so you really want to figure out, get time out of the equation. How do I figure out what this person really wants and then say, "I will deliver XYZ against that outcome" so that they can then go off and have a great life afterwards.

You figure out what the steps are that you need to do. Each of those is going to have some piece of work component. You're going to make sure that that work, when you add it all up, you're not undercutting yourself in terms of hours, but you're going to make sure that the sum of each of those work elements and the things you can add to it, the collateral, the things that give a little bit of sizzle with the stake are exquisitely suited to deliver that outcome. You want to make it either deeper if they want a more comprehensive approach. You want to do more of it for them if they want a faster done-for-me approach. And you want to figure out how to make it experiential if they want to learn how to do it themselves. As I said, if you're in the Netflix for professionals, I think it's a pretty good webinar, but there's a good understanding of when and when packages are and aren't suitable, and I would encourage you to have a listen to that. Thank you.

CCH Learning:

Thank you for that, Abbie. I hope that helps you there, Mary. I have a question from Jack. Jack was asking, "What are your thoughts on using forms to qualify clients? I like to put these so that the meeting time can be valuable and proactive, but does it prevent clients completing and booking in? What's your opinion?"

Dr Abbie Widin:

Well, forms can be useful in that if the person's not really interested, they're not going to go through the effort of filling out a form. And if they are very interested, you're going to get some valuable information. The first thing I'd do is try to figure out whether your form is any good. So if you've already got a form, have a look at, I've now sent out 10 forms, three of them have come back in. I would probably say there's something wrong with the form. There's got to be a little bit of speed to it as well. Like if somebody says, "I want to book in," you want to get that form over to them immediately. You really want to make sure that somewhere in the next 10 to 15 minutes that lands in their inbox. You don't want to do it three days later. Whatever it was that made them get in contact with you, that urgency is now gone and they've moved on to one of their other 20 problems.

Depending on how straightforward your particular practise matter is, you can make the form as simple as you can, like, "These are the areas that I need help with" and not a narrative. As soon as somebody's got to spend more than about 10 minutes on an enrolment form, they're not going to do it. People are just too busy and they've got to get back to their scrolling and they've got so many other things they've got to do that they think are more important than this. Even five minute form is probably the max that you're going to get out of people these days.

I hope that's useful. Try it. And if it's not working, try to improve it.

CCH Learning:

Thank you for that, Abbie. And I hope that does help you there, Jack. Jack's just made a further comment. "Yes, automate this. They hit website inquiry, they're invited to book a meeting. Once they do, they'll automatically issue a form. And then when they're completed it, he's automatically emailed a PDF summary."

Dr Abbie Widin:

Great. Yeah, great. Okay, excellent.

CCH Learning:

Okay, I have a question from Gabby. "What is a reasonable time to send out the scope for them to sign? Sometimes it is hard to make sure we aren't setting two quick timelines that can't be met. But what would keep the prospective client engaged?"

Dr Abbie Widin:

Sorry, and I'll just clarify this. This is when you've finished the meeting, you've had a great meeting and this is you getting the proposal and scope out to them after that great meeting. If that's the case, ideally you want to do it within a day. If you know that you can't get to it within a day, you might be in court, you just know that you're not available, you'll say, "In general, I like to get these done very quickly, but looking at my calendar, the first time I'm going to be able to get this is on Thursday. Do you need it before Thursday?"

And if they say yes, I'm awfully sorry Gary, but you're just going to have to figure out how to get it in. But let's say they've got a meeting on Wednesday that they need to present it to, but you talk about it with them. Everything is setting expectations and trying to balance your needs, your needs and their needs. And so just talk to them about it. But in general, 48 hours would be an upper limit. 24 hours is better. Nobody's expecting it as an 8-page document half an hour later. A week is probably too long if you haven't already spoken to them about. Either way, it's going to be a week. I hope that helps.

CCH Learning:

Thank you. Excuse me. Thank you for that, Abbie. And Gabby says, "Yes, thank you."

So that seems to bring us to the end of our questions for today. But Abbie's details are there on the screen, so please, if you have any other questions, please reach out and I'm sure that Abbie will be able to help you.

Dr Abbie Widin:

Please [inaudible 01:00:25].

CCH Learning:

So in terms of next steps, I would like to remind you all to please take a moment to provide your feedback when exiting. We've asked you a couple of questions about today's webinar, so it's really important for us to hear your opinions. It's also a reminder that shortly after today's session, you will be emailed when you're enrolled into the e-learning recording, which can be watched multiple times. And you'll have access to the PowerPoint, the transcript, the supplementary documentation, and of course your CPD certificate.

I would very much like to thank Abbie for the session today, and to you, the audience for joining us. We hope to see you back online for another CCH Learning Webinar very soon. Please enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you very much.

Dr Abbie Widin:

Thank you.