A SHORT GUIDE FROM THE BILLING COACH | CLIOCON 2026

Pricing with Confidence

4 Steps to Charging What Your Work Is Worth

The mindset behind every fee your firm sets.

You will hear a lot this week about flat fees, subscriptions, and value pricing - because work is getting faster, and if you sell time that is shrinking, your revenue shrinks with it. Most of that advice is good. But every one of those models rests on an assumption nobody says out loud: that your firm already knows what its work is worth, and that the people in your firm can say it - out loud, to a client, without discounting it.

If you don't have that, a new fee structure won't save you. You'll just charge a flat fee you don't believe in - and discount that too.

The problem isn't your prices

Three offices, same floor, same afternoon.

Flat fee: a partner types the number she's quoted a hundred times, thinks *they'll never go for that,* and knocks a little off before she sends it. The discount happened in the proposal.

Subscription: a client on a monthly plan starts calling more than planned, and the lawyer thinks *I'll just throw in the extra calls.* The work grows and the price doesn't. The discount happened in the scope.

Billable hour: an associate finishes a 34-minute client call, thinks *they won't want to pay for that,* and never bills it. The discount happened in the time entry.

> *Three different pricing models. The model changed. The discount didn't.*

In all three offices, the lawyer answered a question the client was never asked. That is not a pricing problem. It is a **Value Articulation Problem** - the people inside the firm cannot clearly explain what their work is worth, to the client or to themselves. You cannot fix that with a new fee structure. And confidence is a feeling. It comes from a thought. Luckily, all thoughts are optional.

The seven quiet discounts

Those three are just the ones you'd notice. Here are seven ways a law firm gives money away. Two look like discounts. Five look like modesty, good service, or "just this once." Which ones are you doing?

- Throwing in extras for free
- Dropping the number at the first sign of pushback
- Trimming the invoice after the work is done
- Quoting below your set price before the client has objected to anything
- Bills never collected
- Time never entered, or entered and written off
- Absorbing extra work without repricing it

Nobody decided this. A discount you can see gets discussed - somebody owns it. A discount that looks like being nice never gets discussed at all. It's failing ahead of time: losing a negotiation the other side never got to have.

The one rule: never discount your price once it's set. A price you decided on ahead of time - even a lower one - is a price. A price you drop in the moment because of an uncomfortable feeling is a discount.

Where the discount actually comes from

There is a mechanism underneath it, and once you can see it, you can change it. Run it on the billable hour:

- **Circumstance.** A neutral fact. Your hourly rate: $450. "Too much" isn't in the number.
- **Thought.** "That's too much to charge." It sounds like a fact about the price. It's an opinion.
- **Feeling.** Insecure. Doubtful. Apologetic. And uncomfortable feelings want relief.
- **Action.** You set the rate at $350. You never even say $450 out loud.
- **Result.** You charge $350 - and now you have proof $450 was too much. The loop runs again next year.

Run it again with a flat fee in the circumstance box: you'd quote $7,500, think *they'll never pay that,* feel anxious, quote $5,000, and get a thin margin fifty times a year - plus proof that flat fees don't work at your firm. Run it on a subscription: $1,500 a month becomes $900 plus free calls, discounted twice, and proof that subscriptions don't work either. Three prices. Same engine.

> *The price didn't create the discount. The sentence in your mind did. Your results will always prove the thought you have about the circumstance.*

So here are the four steps that shut the engine off: **Know it. Price it. Quote it. Hold it.**

Step one - Know it

Most firms start with pricing. Start one step back - with knowing the value of what you're about to offer. Only then can you put a price on it.

> *Value is what the solved problem is worth to the client - not what the work cost you.*

Hourly or flat fee, same definition, different container. An attorney who thinks of their work as time spent will always feel a little apologetic about the number. An attorney who thinks of it as problems solved can say the number and mean it. Culture before calculator: you and your team can't charge more than you believe the work is worth.

You don't need to feel it. You need to see it. You've never had your client's problem - and you don't need to have. Your doctor has never had cancer. What you need is to believe

three things about their problem: it's real, it's costly, and it's urgent. Belief comes from evidence, and the evidence is already in your practice, in four places:

- **You, as a buyer** (you've paid a plumber and a dentist - you were buying the problem gone, not hours)
- **The needy client** (the 11pm email isn't a nuisance, it's the want showing up - every check-in is pricing data);
- **Intake** (ask: what happens if this isn't solved? what has it already cost you? what does done look like? - that third answer is your R before a single entry is written); and **what it's costing them right now** (money, time, sleep - your reviews don't say "efficient," they say "she helped me sleep again").

Three things to do: ask it, write it, read it back. Ask the three intake questions every time and put one line at the top of the matter in the client's words.

Write every entry in ATVR with the Value and Result pointed at that line - and if you own the firm, assign work the same way. Read it back at the end of the matter and ask the client one question: what did this mean for you? That's your Value File, and where the value concentrated is your pricing data for the next one.

ATVR - four letters, every entry, every price

A - Action. What are you doing? Review, analyze, draft, negotiate.

T - Task. What are you focused on? The motion. The agreement.

V - Value. Why does it matter? The risk you found. The exposure you closed.

R - Result. Where are you taking the client? The closing. The ruling. The line from intake.

About ninety percent of entries stop at A and T. Action and Task are the job description. Value and Result are the offer - and where confidence lives. You cannot charge with conviction for something you have never once written down.

Same four letters, any fee model. Flat fee: the client never sees an entry - write them in ATVR anyway, for you. Read ten estate plans back and the value is in the design conversation, not the drafting. Subscription: the quick calls never hit an invoice - write them anyway, read ninety days back, and you can see what the plan is worth. Hourly: you're already writing the entries. Finish them, then read them back. You don't write the narrative so the client knows the value. You write it so *you* do.

Step two - Price it

Now you know what they're buying. Put a number on it - ahead of time - and like your reasons. This is the step that gets skipped: most attorneys go straight from "what am I selling" to "say a number," and the number gets decided in the room, under pressure, with nothing behind it.

Two things that get tangled. What you are worth as a person. What this work is worth to this client. Your fee is about the second thing - it was never about the first - but in the moment, lawyers hear the number as a grade on themselves. Your worth is not for sale. Your work is. The value of the work, and the demand for it, sets the price. Untangle those two things and the price gets a lot easier to decide and say out loud.

Two questions that set the price:

- **One: What are they buying?** You already know - that's Step One. The Action and Task tell you what the work takes. The Value and Result tell you what it's worth. Price from the second pair, hourly or flat. That's the AI answer too: what's getting faster is the A and the T. The V and the R didn't get faster or cheaper. Price from the pair that didn't shrink. A faster hour that delivers the same result is a more valuable hour, not a cheaper one.
- **Two: What's my price, and why do I like it?** Decide the number ahead of time - never in the room. Write down your reasons and make sure you actually like them: "It reflects the results I deliver." "It reflects what's at stake for this client." "It's a price that takes into account my expertise." One test: would you pay it?

Write both answers down, in full sentences, before you ever say a price out loud. That's not extra work. That's the work - the difference between a number you're defending and a number you're stating. And don't crowdsource your price: "other firms charge that" is the worst reason there is, and everyone you ask is carrying their own pricing doubts. Decide once, ahead of time, and have your own back. The confidence is in the deciding.

Step three - Quote it

This is the shortest step, because there's nothing to figure out. You've done the work. Now open your mouth and say it.

- "I can't charge that" is a comfortable thought - it means you never have to articulate the value.
- "They'll never pay that" is comfortable too - it means you never have to sit through the silence after you say the price. Discounting feels like being reasonable. It is always, every single time, a way to get relief from your own discomfort.

Here is what will happen: the number will be on its way out of your mouth, and your brain will offer you a discount before anyone has objected to anything. That is the moment you have your own back. You already decided.

You already like your reasons. Say the number you chose, and let the silence be silent. The confident version of you isn't louder or pushier - just willing to sit with that discomfort without discounting out of it.

> *Feel the cringe. Say the number anyway.*

How change actually happens. Firms move through four stages of pricing belief: Impossibility ("clients won't pay that"), Possibility ("maybe, for some of our work"), Probability ("it's working - the evidence is stacking up"), Identity ("this is just what our work is worth"). The belief moves first and the evidence follows.

The most dangerous moment is the full-effort attempt that gets one unwanted result - a partner quotes the full number, the client walks, and the firm declares the price too high. That's one cringe that didn't pay off. Don't change the price. Change the delivery. A client will say yes, then another, and then it's just what you charge.

Step four - Hold it

Quoting it once is not the finish line. **Every fee gets tested twice,** and both times the job is the same: you already decided this fee. Don't decide it again.

- **When they hear it, stop talking.** The client pushes back - the second cringe. The instinct is to explain. Don't. The more you explain a price, the less confident it sounds. Acknowledge it ("I understand, it's a significant investment"), restate the result they're buying, and stop talking.
- **When the matter grows, let the letter talk.** New parties, a counterclaim, the third round of revisions - this is where most fees actually get discounted, because the scope got fuzzy and you absorbed the work. You don't do the talking here. Your engagement letter already says three things: what's included (scope as an ATVR sentence, per phase), what reopens the fee, and when they'll hear from you. When the matter outgrows that sentence, the fee reopens - a scheduled conversation, and you wrote the schedule.

You do not argue a fee. You state it. You hold positions for clients all day long - you've just never pointed that skill at your own invoice.

It's your time.

Make it count.

~Molly

Know it. Price it. Quote it. Hold it.

Know what the client is actually buying. Decide your price ahead of time, and like your reasons. Cringe and quote it. Hold the price throughout the matter - you decided it once, don't decide it again.

Flat fees, subscriptions, hourly rates are containers. What goes in the container is a belief about what your work is worth. Build the belief first and any container holds. Skip it and every one leaks.

Your clients were never the problem. Your prices were never the problem. It was always the sentence. Change the sentence, and the number takes care of itself.