

Should I lower my fee at a client's request?

EXPERT GUIDANCE ON CRITICAL COACHING MOMENTS. THIS SITUATION DEALS WITH THE ISSUE OF FEES.

the situation

“I have a client who has been with me for several months and is making great progress. He made it clear from the beginning that his financial situation was tight, but he saw the value in investing in himself and his future through coaching. Now he's asked for 'a break' on my fees. I really want to support him, but on the other hand I don't want to give the wrong message or devalue myself or my services, either to my client or in my own mind. How should I handle this?”

Are you grappling with a sticky situation? You don't have to go it alone. Let our senior coaches give you some different perspectives to consider. Email your situations to: editor@choice-online.com and put "sticky situations" in the subject line.



Carol Adrienne, PhD, is an internationally-known author, intuitive counselor and life coach whose books have been translated into over 15 languages. As a master numerologist, workshop leader and life coach, she has helped thousands of people eliminate negative patterns, providing them with life-long tools for creating the life they want to live.

My impression is that this situation is a little bit about co-dependency. He's asking for you to make the financial adjustment, not him. If you drop your fee to "help" him, are you really empowering him? I'd say, no. To drop your fees simply because he feels in a tight situation is playing into his "victim" mentality (I don't wish to sound harsh, but you are giving a good service from which he is benefiting).

The other issue is that his commitment might slack off in direct relation to his paying less. If people get something for free or at a very low price, they often tend not to value it much. Their own commitment lessens, which in your client's case could seriously undermine his work with you.

He's feeling anxious about money. Use that as a session topic. Explore with him what's going on that's making him feel scared about money. Is this a familiar pattern of feeling worried and trying to elicit sympathy? If he still angles for a reduction, ask him if he wants to commit to just one or two

more sessions (at the full price) until he sees his way clear to start again. Like a good parent you set some boundaries and offer options.

I have a sliding scale for clients in a compromised situation. For example, I have given discounts to women in abusive situations or going through a divorce who have little money. I am also receptive if someone has been unemployed for six months or more, or if someone is in the midst of a health crisis. I also give student discounts to young people with little income.

It doesn't sound as if your client has had a severe downturn, but if this is the case, you could offer a sliding scale fee for a limited amount of sessions. For example, with unemployed people, I can do a sliding scale until they get a job and can pay the full price. Listen to your intuition.

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Craig Carr, PCC, is a senior trainer for the Coaches Training Institute (CTI) and a coach committed to the conscious development of personal potential. Craig's specialty is working with entrepreneurs and investors who are designing new relationships with their businesses or jobs.

Many coaches struggle with negotiation and the value of their work. It is always important to listen to the language that is being used because your task at a moment like this is to determine if the request is authentic or a default to an old and tired pattern. Typically, a natural first response would be in the affirmative: you'd set a time limit and there would be more focus on coaching him to get his finances un-tight. I don't think anyone would fault you for managing this client in that manner.

Three things, however, pop out in your description of the situation. First, it was clear at the coaching start that finances were a concern. Did you track this with him over the months you've been working together? I only ask because it is far too easy to step over money issues as the coaching gets going. If the concern has been stepped over, this could be his way of

bringing it to your attention. Celebrate. Second, what is the energy behind "break on your fees"? Listen for whether your client is feeling like a victim to your fees, thinks they're too high and it would take a miracle to afford you, or if he respects them and authentically expects to meet you at your number. If it is the former you have some work to do, which very specifically may be to get gritty with him and NOT lower your price. And third, is it possible you are concerned with protecting the value of your services because you already believe you are charging too little? This may not be your case but for someone else reading this article it might be very true.

Do pay close attention to your gut feelings and be willing to act on them. If it doesn't feel right, trust that. But if you feel he's focused, working and will pay your fee when he's flush, give him the benefit of the doubt and be glad you did.



Victoria Trabosh, CDC®, is an international speaker, trainer and facilitator with 30 years of large corporate and start-up business experience, in addition to coaching top executives worldwide. She is also president of the Itafari Foundation, which helps the people of Rwanda.

Handle this issue the way you want your client to handle this issue. Be courageous in what you ask for from him and know you're worth what you charge. It is difficult to get clients past the cost of your services if money is a complicated issue for them. This can be caused by budgetary concerns or long-held beliefs that they can't afford or don't deserve to invest in themselves. Try these steps: **1.** Decide if offering your services at a lower price devalues you. If it does, decide if you want to be devalued. **2.** Describe the value of your coaching in monetary terms for him. Has his investment of \$X brought him a return of \$XX? Quantify, don't defend, the value of your services. **3.** Ask yourself if you are willing to offer your services at a discount for a specified time period. If he has financial issues and you're not coaching him to improve that situation, it's easy to see why he's backpedaling. Work with

him in a non-confrontational but direct manner to coach him around getting clear on what he wants and if he is willing to pay you your rate to help him reach his goals. **4.** Make sure YOU believe you're worth what you're charging.

I have two rates: My regular rate and free. Nothing in between. And it's for a reason. I can't say that two people should pay me but qualify for different rates. But I can say I will coach someone for free with no expectation of anything in return. Have a conversation with your client and find out if he believes he (and you) are worth the cost of coaching. If not, consider ending the coaching relationship. Not everyone can afford the gift of coaching. Not everyone wants to afford a coach. It's okay – find clients who can and will pay you. Be the best coach you can be so that no one (including yourself) questions your worth from a financial perspective. •