

Are you still asking your client for their budget? Beginner's mistake

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Asking a client for their budget can make you lose the initiative from the start of the negotiation. Learn how to manage anchoring to defend the value of your offer and frame the exchange.

If you are in the habit of directly asking your client for their budget, it's time to rethink your strategy. This question, which seems rather smart at the time, can actually cause you to lose control of the negotiation.

If you are a Business Manager of a consulting firm or a recruiter from a recruitment agency, mastering the art of anchoring is essential to steer discussions towards win-win solutions, without compromising the value of your work or that of your consultants or candidates.

Let's explore together the pitfalls of this classic mistake and the solutions to regain control.

Asking for the budget: an approach that puts you in a weak position

When you ask the client: *"What is your budget for this mission?"*, you immediately give up part of your negotiating power. The number they give you, whether realistic or not, becomes the psychological anchor around which the entire discussion will revolve.

Let's take a classic example: you are a Business Manager of a consulting firm and a client contacts you for a senior consultant on a priority project. You ask for their budget, and they reply: *"500 euros per*

day." What happens then? This figure becomes the reference, even if it is far from what would be more the norm for this type of service, for example, 700 euros. And you find yourself trying to bridge the gap between the request and the budget. Good luck!

Of course, it happens that the budget announced by the client corresponds roughly to your forecasts. In this case, the anchoring plays less of a problematic role. For example, if the client declares a budget of 650 euros per day and you were planning to offer a consultant at 700 euros, the discussion remains smooth. You can then justify your slightly higher rate by highlighting the added value of your profile: their expertise, sector experience, or the tangible benefits they will bring to the project.

But let's be honest: this ideal situation is rare. Most of the time, the announced budget is far from what you were aiming for.

How to manage the budget question?

So, how do you get the budget if you can't ask for it? Here are two approaches to prioritize:

First case: even though you haven't asked for it, **the client states their budget first** (the clever person likely knows the anchoring technique). Analyze it objectively. Do not take this figure as an unchangeable constraint, but as simple information to be integrated into your thinking, from which you will evaluate its relevance, like the case where a client asked me for a consultant with five years of experience on a technology that's only two years old!

Also compare it to the expectations expressed by the client. If the budget is too low compared to the required profile, explain calmly that adjustments are necessary, either on the sought profile or the budget, and sometimes both. For example:

- *"With this budget, we would need to look at a consultant with a little less experience or less specialized skills.", or*
- *"For a profile that exactly matches your expectations, we would be more around fees of 750 euros per day."*

If you don't do it right away, the client will assume you agree. And if they refuse to revise their expectations or budget, be firm, courteous, and open:

"In this case, I will unfortunately not be able to meet your need. I am, of course, at your disposal if your criteria change."

This may seem hard, but it's better to pass up an ill-sized opportunity than to devalue your offer or waste your time in vain. By doing so, you adopt a partner attitude towards your client by telling them when something is not possible, where a subcontractor would simply disappear.

Second case: **set the anchor yourself** by proposing a rate from the outset and before the client. This approach requires a good knowledge of your market (which is a basis in negotiation anyway), but it allows you to keep the initiative. If you know that a senior consultant in such a field is worth between 700 and 800 euros per day, position yourself directly with a justified and transparent rate. For example, after thoroughly qualifying your client's needs:

"For this type of mission, I would be looking at an investment of 750 euros per day for a consultant with confirmed experience on similar projects and who can bring you quick results. Is this roughly what you

had in mind?"

And even if they say "no", the anchorage is set and you force your client to adjust their perception around your proposal, rather than forcing you to align with their initial, often biased expectations.

Conclusion: Master your role as a negotiator

By asking your client for the budget, you let them take over a discussion where you should be the one setting the framework since you are on the "resources" side. By knowing your market and mastering the art of anchoring, you can steer your negotiations towards a ground that truly values the quality of your services.

Remember that the next time you feel like asking the killer question.