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POWERHOUSE
planner

Seasoned Event Planner Reveals How to Always Get Paid for Your Time and Exactly How to Position Yourself to Get Clients to Eagerly Pay an Initial Consultation Fee

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Become a Powerhouse Planner by Charging for Consultations

Ok—we all know that in our line of business our “get to know you” consultation always turns into a brain picking session. So, as much as potential clients want to get a feel for whether or not we’re a good fit, they are going to walk away with a substantial amount of value and actionable steps to make their event or planning process better. Am I right?

If we’re lucky, we’ll get a signed contract and an event on our calendar, which then makes up for it. But, if we’re not. We get the gas bill, the latte or lunch bill, and a loss of our valuable time.

I absolutely believe in leading with value and giving away something of value for lead generation, but often we waste a lot of time on people who are just sussing us out or who want a bunch of help for free.

You can totally pre-sell clients on the fact that you’re going to be the perfect fit by putting the right content, your unique selling point, and your sparkling personality on display on your website, social media, in your email responses, and in your welcome packet.

Before we tackle how to always get paid for your time and exactly how to position yourself so clients eagerly pay your consultation fee, let’s address the #1 issue that’s holding many talented creative professionals back from putting a fee on their time: knowing your true worth.



Believing in the Value You Provide

Dear Novice Planner

If you’re a novice planner, you might be building up your portfolio and have a hard enough time charging higher prices for your actual services, let alone your “free” consultation. In fact, the thought of charging for the initial consultation might seem craaaazzy to you.

First of all, let’s address the cost of your services before we talk about the initial consultation. We have all been where you are. It’s ok if you want to charge a lesser fee for your services, so you can build up your portfolio, but when you come onto the scene 2 weeks out of certification school and charge \$150 for month of coordination, day of coordination, wedding management (or whatever you refer to it as), you’re discrediting the industry and confusing brides. When experienced planners are charging \$1,800+ for wedding management, month of wedding management, day of wedding services... whatever you want to call it, brides wonder why we’re so expensive or think you must not be very good because you’re so cheap.

We’ve all been where you are. Believe in your value. Join one of the many Facebook groups where you can ask questions and get support or find a mentor. There are plenty of seasoned event planners and coaches who would love to help you. Your time is everything and **even as a new planner, you have more knowledge and experience about event planning than the bride or client does, so don’t be afraid to put a dollar amount on everything you’re going to be doing.**

Chances are, you’re going to be the planner, the counselor, the accountant, the firewoman (puttin’ out a ton of potential catastrophes), so don’t sell yourself short. I’m not going to tell you what to charge, but you need to take a serious look at your fixed costs, your variable costs, and how much profit you want to make off of each wedding.

One of the best things I’ve done as a planner is attend industry conferences consistently. It’s helped me get the extra business education I’ve needed to create a respectable company. If you’re unsure what to charge or how to tackle the business side of doing business and creating a respectable company, I definitely recommend you attend some creative professional conferences in your industry. Just do some research and ask other professionals for the names of some great ones.

Now, keep reading under the “Dear All” section so we can address how you can see the value you provide in that initial consultation.

Dear Experienced Planner

You might be thinking how dare I charge for my initial consultations or I could never do that. To which I reply, "Get it, girl!" It's all about how you position the value you're already giving away 'fo FREE.

Now, keep reading under the "Dear All" section, so we can take this a sexy tango step further....

Dear All

Consultants in every other industry charge for their time. People come to them already wanting to book time with them, so they can access their knowledge, experience, and insight and benefit from it.

The creative industry doesn't get the respect it deserves, because we often don't value ourselves and think if we put a price on our time to begin with, we won't be able to seal the deal. If you don't put a value on your time from the get-go, people will run all over it and not have any boundaries.

Let's be honest with ourselves—when we have a consult with potential clients, we're doing a lot more than just having a "discovery meeting" or "discovery call." We're already giving valuable information away for free, so all we need to do is tweak how we position our initial consults, so brides see it as a 1-hour consultation where they walk away with a ton of value.

Nine times out of ten, brides will book with me afterwards, because they're already invested in my brand. If they don't, they still walk away with some great tips and resources.

One way that I've intentionally elevated my status as a wedding planner is that I've written and published a book on Amazon for brides. Staying true to my brand and personality, I published a fun and conversational no-nonsense wedding planning book called "A Girlfriend's Guide to a Crystal Clear Bride: No-nonsense Wedding Planning Tips from a Seasoned Wedding Planner." This has given me more "social proof" and increased the way others perceive my expertise and business.

find something that isn't necessarily being done in your industry

I recommend you find something that isn't necessarily being done in your industry. If there is something that's being done that you would love to do, make it your own, so if you eventually want to start mentoring others, people will want to attend your workshops, conferences, e-courses, or join your mentor group.

It's important that you see you can take your initial consultation from a matchmaking session to a paid strategy session that clients pay for and book from.

Going from Brain-Picking Matchmaking to Paid Consultation Sessions that Book Clients

For these steps and tips, I'm going to use brides as an example. In my own business, my time is split fairly evenly between event planning and wedding planning and the approach is the same whether you're talking to a bride or a potential client who wants to plan a birthday party. In all of these examples, whenever I talk about brides or weddings, simply think through your clients and your events.

1. Don't Blame the Client for Wanting "Free"

The first thing you should understand is that clients are naturally going to want your time for free. If you have a choice between paying for something or getting something for free by picking someone's brain, you'll probably also choose the free option.

Everyone likes free things. I mean, look at us when we get to the free food samples at Costco or Whole Foods. How many free downloads are filed on our computers from Facebook Ads? We love free and who can blame us? It is FREE, after all.

2. Clearly Communicate the Value in Your Initial Consultation

Now, see this secret kicker: If someone is asking for your time for free, it means that to some degree they're already "sold" on you and see you as valuable.

Chaching! Winning!

Your brides will want free if all they think they're going to get during your meeting is to know you. You want to clearly communicate what they're going to get in your initial consultation. They need to have already "met you" and, for the most part, fallen in love with you from your website, emails, social media, or the person who referred them. I use pre-booking forms or consultation forms to gather as much information as possible to tailor the experience for the brides (or couples) and give the value I know they need.

If you don't like tons of people coming to you and asking you for things for free, but you don't have anything to offer them in place of your free time, then girlfriend—get to it! Create the offer and put a price on it. Then, when someone wants your time, present the offer clearly.

3. Decide What Value You're Going to Give Away During Your Initial Consultation and Position it "Valuably" With Great Messaging

Alrighty, so we know that at your initial consultation, you're going to go over any questions the bride has, share a little more about you, and learn more about the couple's wedding vision—that's a given. But, this consultation is about allowing them to talk about themselves and how they want their day and to already start giving them tips and ideas. I give my clients general and practical tips, but I do save any particular unique ideas and expert tips for when they book (because, ya can't be givin' everything fantastic away - even here).

I don't make the initial consultation about "selling." I go in with the confidence and assumption that they're already sold. This is where your overall branding plays a big part. From your website to your social media to your blogging to your newsletter, etc., you want them to fall in love with you beforehand.

I use information from my lead form to start building rapport, so brides trust me and see that I listen.



You should also pick about 3 valuable things your bride will walk away with. The examples below are things you're probably already giving away to your bride, but they're positioned offers and I've nailed the messaging on them, so that brides can clearly see the value.

Here are 7 examples of what you can give your brides in each consult to make it a no brainer for them to pay your initial consultation fee. Pick 3 to 5 to all 7 (or create your own), really nail your messaging on those items, and clearly communicate the value you already provide for free. If you're using these for event clients, simply swap out some of the terminology.

In another section, I give you sample emails that you can use, but you can say something like this in the beginning:

In your 1-hour consultation, we'll discuss your wedding vision (feel free to bring your vision board), you can ask any questions you have, and I'll personally show you:

- The incredible planner secret that helps you hone in on your wedding style even if you feel all over the place and want to incorporate various different designs
- How to maximize your wedding investment throughout the planning process (do this and you can almost guarantee you'll get everything you want for your wedding without going over budget)
- How to quickly and easily select your dream vendors (and how to locate the good ones)
- A 10-point checklist for how to graciously and confidently narrow down your guest list
- The stress-proof approach every wedding planner uses to plan an Instagram-worthy wedding
- The #1 worst mistake you can make when planning your wedding (even if you do everything else right, this can wreak havoc)
- How to create a wedding experience that guests talk about without feeling like you need to give each person a unicorn as a wedding favor

This is just a deeper dive into the kind of stuff they can pull together online or from various free wedding websites, but they're getting it straight from the mouth of a professional planner, peppered with your expertise, and 1:1 time for one WHOLE hour with you without wasting hours and hours trying to find the information themselves.

You can take each of those bullet points or make up your own and create your talking points or 1-page printables around them. So, for example, you can share the unique way YOU help clients hone in on their style or what you believe the #1 worst mistake they could make would be.

Tailor these ideas to you and position your initial consultation as a valuable strategy session as opposed to being a "get to know you" session where you give a ton of value away for free and then they don't book you.

If someone keeps trying to get you on the phone to ask some questions, just keep taking them back to the fact that you'll cover all of those things in your initial consultation.

4. Match or Exceed What The Bride Sees Online

This should be pretty self-explanatory, but it's really important that the same brand image, personality, and experience you portray on social media is the exact same experience (or better) you provide your clients.

In real life, when I meet during the consult, I match or exceed what potential clients see on Facebook or Instagram. I match my online persona and brand to my in-person brand. They've already seen what I can do, my branding is consistent online, so I don't feel the pressure to have to sell my professionalism, design skills, or unique personality and creativity. If your brand aligns with who you are, you shouldn't feel the pressure to sell either.

I can't stress this enough, but you do not want them to be surprised or shocked when they meet you in person, because who you are online is not who they're sitting in front of.

A client of mine actually told me that she “stalked me on Instagram.” When I hear that, I try to get as much information as possible about what caught her eye, so I know going forward for future clients. This will obviously vary, but it’s great insight to have.

So when she said she stalked me, I replied with, “Ohhhh, what did you like best? What brought you in?” She mentioned a specific birthday party and a wedding with lights on the stage. Whether potential clients tell me they’ve stalked me or not, I always try to ask, “So what pictures did you like from Instagram or Facebook?” and 9 times out of 10 they remember, which already tells me the kind of things they’re looking for. The insights I gather help me pull out what my clients are attracted to, so I can highlight things like that and tailor their consultation to speak directly to them.

For a bride who mentions she loves a particular floral arrangement that’s in my pictures, I might highlight how the recommended floral vendors I work with are top notch.

The bottom line is “look the part” and match what you portray on social media. Then use what you share on social media to identify what specifically has resonated with each bride, so you can better speak her language and highlight things that you offer that she values most.

“look the part” and match what you portray on social media

The Exact Steps to Take to Always Get Paid for Your Time

Speak to all of your potential clients as if they’re already your clients.

In the email example I provide, you’ll see how I send this information to every bride and how I approach it, but here is every step of the process:

1. Someone reaches out to me via email or phone call.
2. I reply with my welcome email or return the call and get an email address, so I can send a welcome email (I keep the phone call quick and try not to “get on the phone” at this point, because inevitably a bride will start to pick your brain or won’t get the full experience necessary to secure the booking).
3. In my welcome email, I ask if the bride has had a chance to look at my website and review my packages and pricing. This way I already know my potential clients have seen my starting prices and are not wasting my time or theirs.
4. Then I say, “Great, the next step is to schedule a consultation. Would you like to schedule your consultation?” You want to put the ball in your clients’ courts and give them as many opportunities as possible to say “yes” to you. Then, I include what we’ll cover like I detailed above and give them a few options and times to meet with me.
5. In the consultation email, I let them know that there’s a fee and how much it is.
6. I send an invoice and let the bride know that payment confirms the appointment.
7. When I send the invoice, I also let the bride know this is a non-refundable deposit.

From here, I make sure I set up the entire experience, so my potential clients are wooed, wowed, and in awe during and after our meeting.



How to Create a Valuable Experience that Sells Clients the Moment They Meet You

Creating the experience is what it's all about. If you're charging, you have to bring the value—like you're probably already doing—but you may need to step it up a notch (or 10).

When you meet with clients, you should pick a place that isn't too noisy or that doesn't have too much activity. I've invested in a co-working space and I create the experience at my office. If you have a location or an office, that's fabulous. If you don't, I'm not saying you can't meet at a coffee shop, but to cut out the noise, I would recommend a hotel lobby or library where you have access to study rooms you can book for an hour (most local libraries are free to residents).

If you have to meet in a coffee shop, you might consider charging a lower fee for your initial consultation, because there are other people around, there is additional noise, etc. We all start somewhere and when I started off, I was meeting at coffee shops, too, so just make sure you pay attention to the atmosphere and that it's conducive for easy conversation and few interruptions.

If you're meeting in the evening, serve a glass of wine or champagne. Offer coffee or tea and nibbles. If you're meeting at a coffee shop or café, make sure to foot the bill (this is one reason why you have a fee—in case they don't book, you don't have to absorb the cost each time).

Your bride will typically forget she paid for your consultation and think, "oh wow! She just bought me coffee" or "Oh wow! She served me wine and chocolate."

Also, make sure that you have your talking points, printables, or tablet and that you actually cover and share what you've said you're going to. You want your potential clients to feel like they just had a professional consultation with a professional — hello—and not like they just paid for an introduction to who you are and what you do.



A few Creative Things You Can Do to Elevate the Experience to Make You and Paying Your fee Seem More Valuable

If you are charging a fee and you want to use that fee to do something special for your bride, make sure you price it into your packages otherwise there's no point in charging an initial consult fee. You're essentially then not getting paid for the value and time you provide in the initial consultation.

For brides who don't book, the fee covers the cost of your time, transport, and expenses. For a bride who books, if you feel like the full price of your services cover your time and costs for an initial consultation, just use that initial consultation fee to do something special for your bride.

If you want to use the initial consultation fee to give something special to a bride who books to really elevate your bride's experience, here are some things you can give:

- A certain dollar amount off the package of choice by "applying" the consult fee to a package
- A nice welcome gift valued at the cost of your consult price
 - Amazon gift card
 - Local gift card to dinner

You can give each bride something standard or you can really tailor the experience based on who your bride is. I personally love tailoring my gifts and approach to the bride's personality. So, if you pick up that your bride is a really budget-conscious bride, take the dollar amount off the service package. If you feel like your bride is all about glitz and glam, send a studded "Mrs-to-be" tank top or something else that fits your bride's personality.

If your only point in charging an initial consultation fee is to cover the time you spend with the brides who don't book your services, then you have more leeway to play with and you don't have to be too consumed about giving a discount or gift equivalent to the initial consultation fee.

Sample Emails for Setting Up the Paid Consultation

Alright, here are three sample emails that you can tweak and use to send to brides when you're asking them to pay an initial consultation fee:

Sample Email 1

Subject: shall we schedule a meeting?

Hi **insert first name**,

Congratulations on your engagement! Thanks so much for your interest in **insert business name** where we **insert your unique selling point**.

Let's EEEK- out again...YOU'RE GETTING MARRIED! And we would LOVE to be a part of your wedding day.

Your date is one of the last we have available in **insert month**.

Shall we go ahead and schedule your initial consultation?

At your initial consultation, it'll be me and you talking about your ideas, hashing out wedding plans, and mapping out your next steps. It's a no pitch, no strings consultation where you get to tell me all about your wedding dreams AND you'll walk away with:

- The incredible planner secret that helps you hone in on your wedding style even if you feel all over the place and want to incorporate various different designs
- How to maximize your wedding investment throughout the planning process (do this and you can almost guarantee you'll get everything you want for your wedding without going over budget)
- How to quickly and easily select your dream vendors (and how to locate the good ones)
- A 10-point checklist for how to graciously and confidently narrow down your guest list
- The stress-proof approach every wedding planner uses to plan an Instagram-worthy wedding
- How to create a wedding experience that guests talk about without blowing your budget or feeling like you need to give each person a pony as a wedding favor



The consultation fee is **insert fee**. It is a non-refundable deposit and can be paid via **insert payment method**.

We have several dates available for a consultation:

Insert day, insert date, insert time
Insert day, insert date, insert time
Insert day, insert date, insert time

What day and time works best?

If none of these work, hit reply with 2-3 date and time suggestions, and we'll see if we have an opening.

You are absolutely welcome to bring your fiance or a family member or friend to your initial consultation. You can also bring any inspiration you've collected to this point, but we'll cover that in more detail in your appointment confirmation email.

Insert your signature signoff,

Insert your name and details

Sample Email 2

Subject: next steps for your planning consultation

Hi **insert first name,**

I've noted you would like to schedule your initial consultation for **insert day, date, and time**. Wonderful!

Please go ahead and pay your **insert fee** initial consultation fee via **insert payment method** using the email address **insert email address**.

If you would rather pay by debit or credit card, please kindly reply and I will email you an invoice.

Once I receive notification of payment, I will send over the consultation form in another email.

Please note that an initial consultation appointment isn't confirmed until payment is made and after 24 hours your date and time selection will be made available again to the next inquiring bride.

We are delighted you reached out and look forward to connecting with you.

Insert your signature signoff,

Insert your signature and details



Sample Email 3

Subject: your appt confirmation and consultation form to fill out

Hi **first name**,

Yay! You're booked! Secured. In. We got your payment and we have your appointment written in smudge-free glitter in our diary.

Here it is again for your records:

Insert day, date, and time for a 60 minute consultation at insert place, address, and any other detailed directions or parking instructions.

Please fill out the attached consultation form and return it to us by **insert day, date, and time.**

So that this consultation can be all about you and less about us, make sure to check out these links and get all the deets about what we do, how we do it, and what you can expect:

- Learn more about The Crystal Marie Event Experience here: <http://crystalmarieevents.com/about-crystal-marie/>
- Save our packages and starting prices for your records: <http://crystalmarieevents.com/the-collections/>
- Have questions? We have answers in our Q&A: <http://crystalmarieevents.com/qa/>
- See how our clients rave about us: <http://crystalmarieevents.com/the-runway/>

(sample note: insert your own links and bullets as necessary OR your welcome packet and then highlight which "page numbers" your potential client can find important information you want to note, but let this serve as an example as to what we share)

Feel free to bring along any resources you have been using to help you plan, such as pictures, notes, vendor agreements, or anything you feel would be helpful in sharing your vision.

Of course, you are also welcome to bring your fiancé and/or whoever is dishing out the dollars to give you your one-of-a-kind day.

Again, before your consultation, we ask that you read the pages linked above so that we can focus on you and your needs.

If you are unable to do so before your appointment, please let us know and we will gladly reschedule.

Please do me a favor and send me a quick reply to let me know you received this.

Insert your signature signoff,

Insert your signature and details

There you have it—everything you need to know to position yourself, so that you can quickly start charging for your initial consultation and start attracting your ideal client—the one who will easily pay your fee and then go on to book you. Charging for your consultations is a practice that will draw you closer to your ideal client, because those who are just window shopping and wasting your time will almost always be weeded out.

You're well on your way!

Please excuse the glitter,

Crystal Marie



