

The practice

You are not alone. In a 2026 survey for Sage, 81% of accountants and bookkeepers said they do work outside their formal scope, and 70% said their fees no longer reflect the support they give. The answer is not to stop being helpful. It is to be helpful on purpose: write down what the fee covers, make sure your team knows the line, and agree any extra work, and its price, before you do it.

Your hidden hours

Client	Extra work done this year	Hours (estimate)	Value at your hourly rate
Total for these clients			

A practice doing eight unbilled hours a year for each of its 20 largest clients, at £90 an hour, gives away £14,400 a year. Work through all twenty, not just the rows above.

Pick your five largest fixed-fee clients and list everything you did for them last year that is not in the engagement letter. Then ask yourself which of it the client would have agreed to, at a price, if you had asked first.

Coach yourself

Set aside fifteen minutes where nobody can interrupt you, and answer in writing. An answer looks surprisingly different once it is on paper.

G

GOAL

If every piece of work I chose to do were paid for, what would that change for me and for the practice?

R

REALITY

Which clients get the most free work, and who in the practice usually says yes?

O

OPTIONS

What would "yes, and here is what it costs" sound like, and which client would I start with?

W

WILL

What will I change at the next engagement letter renewal, and who will track hours against fees?

If you catch yourself saying...

You hear yourself say	Try asking instead
<i>"It's only a quick question"</i>	How long did the last three actually take?
<i>"They'd leave if we charged"</i>	How could I find out without guessing?
<i>"We pride ourselves on going the extra mile"</i>	Which extra miles do I choose to go, and which just happen?

ONE HARDER QUESTION

Which client have I been doing free work for so long that charging for it now feels like a betrayal?

Keep it going

Free work creeps back with old clients first. Give one person the job of comparing hours with fees for your largest clients each month, and put three check dates in the diary: 3, 6 and 12 months from today.

When to get help

Changing your engagement letter terms is one to check against your professional body's guidance, and with a solicitor where needed. If a client disputes what was agreed, take advice first.

What a coach adds

This card gives you the questions. What it cannot do is notice which one you avoided. It is one of the SMARTer practice cards, covering the ten key areas of a business that sells expertise.



Talk yours through with me: book a Discovery Call at smarterentrepreneurs.co.uk

No pitch, no pressure, and you'll leave with something useful either way.