

SERVICE DELIVERY | QUICK CARD SD-03

The hidden hours check

Fifteen minutes, ten clients, and the questions a good coach would ask you.



The practice

Scope creep rarely arrives as a big request. It arrives as “while you’re here”, “just a quick one” and “could you have a look at this”, each perfectly reasonable on its own and each done by someone who wanted to be helpful. Nobody decided to give the work away. It simply turned out, at the end of the year, that a good part of it had been.

You are not alone. In the Project Management Institute’s global survey, 52% of projects had seen scope creep or uncontrolled changes, up from 43% five years earlier. The answer is not to stop being helpful. It is to be helpful on purpose: write down what is in and out of scope, make sure your team knows the line, and agree any change, and its cost, before doing the work.

Your hidden hours

Client or project	Hours paid for (a month)	Hours actually spent	Value of the difference (hours × your rate)
Total for these clients			

An agency with six retainers each running 12 hours a month over, at £80 an hour, gives away about £69,120 a year. Work through your ten largest clients, not just the rows above.

Try this this week

Compare the hours spent on your three largest retainers or projects last month with the hours they pay for. Then ask yourself which of the extra work 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 business?

R

REALITY

Which clients get the most free work, and who in the team 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

Which client hears about this first, and who will report hours against scope each month?

If you catch yourself saying...

You hear yourself say	Try asking instead
<i>“I can’t say no to them”</i>	What would a yes with a price sound like?
<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

Would I agree to my most demanding client’s arrangement if a new client asked?

Keep it going

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

When to get help

Changing contract terms, or a dispute about what was agreed, is one for a solicitor. If your team is worn out by constant extra work, deal with that 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.