

The culture of female service

Why do so many businesswomen and entrepreneurs not have a robust sense of their financial value?

By **Rosjke Hasseldine**

Many women entrepreneurs and small business owners struggle to admit their top hourly rates. Instead they end up giving their time and skills free or for much less than they're worth.

The *Greater Return on Women's Enterprise* (GROWE) report, published in November last year, suggests women need practical support to overcome these confidence issues. It cites last July's *Myths and Realities of Women's Access to Finance* report by the Women's Enterprise Task Force (WETF) that suggested, amongst other things, that schools should teach financial skills to help women feel confident about money.

But reports such as these will not uncover the issue because of how they get their information. Women need to feel safe and heard within a trusted relationship before they will share what feels very personal to them. The secrecy surrounding this issue means many do not realise that they are very definitely not alone.

Facilitating my Women's Power Circles makes me realise how many women lack any sense of entitlement about being paid well for their time and skills. It is also obvious that the more men there are within a service or profession, the more confident women are about asking to be paid well.

An example: a self-employed woman counsellor - an extremely female-dominated service industry - tends to have more difficulty putting forward her hourly rate than a self-employed IT consultant. Another example, this time within more comparable industries: a self-employed counsellor is more likely to "choke" when saying her hourly rate than a life coach, especially a business coach.

Life and business coaching attract far more men than counselling. Counsellors tend to

charge much less than coaches and, as a study in New Zealand suggests, male counsellors on average charge \$10 more an hour than their female colleagues – something that I am believe also happens in the UK.

The GROWE report gives positive statistics on how much women contribute to the economy, but it fails to discover just why women do not have a robust sense of their financial value. The path to answering this lies in what I call “the culture of female service”.

For generations, women’s nurturing has been treated as something they should want to do free. And now that women are building much-needed businesses based on their nurturing skills, society hasn’t caught up with how fundamentally sexist it is to expect them to give their skills and time free or for less pay, even though their jobs require the same investment in training. The banking industry, for example, is seen as “deserving” a higher hourly return than teaching, when both require an undergraduate degree. Why?

If the economy is going to really value all its contributors, Government policy and resources need to address this imbalance, sexism and historical undervaluing of women’s contribution.

Many businesswomen need to explore how they have internalised this ages-old attitude, taught how to value their time and skills and to think in terms of having a return on their investment alongside the nuts and bolts of financial management.

www.womenspowercircles.com and www.thesilentfemalescream.com

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