

[SCENE 1: Sarah's Home Office - Morning]

[Interior monologue while Sarah reviews her calendar on her laptop]

Sarah (thinking): Okay, 9:15 AM. Forty-five minutes until my first real client meeting. First potential client, I should say. Deep breath. I've done a million corporate strategy meetings... just never as the consultant they're paying. Or hoping to pay. God, the pricing...

[Sarah opens Chrome, types "management consultant hourly rates independent"]

Sarah (muttering): "Rates vary widely based on experience..." Great. Super helpful. "Top firms charge..." No, that's not relevant anymore. Come on, give me something concrete...

[Email notification pops up from john.williams@williamsmanufacturing.com]
Subject: Re: Virtual Meeting Confirmation - 10:00 AM

Sarah (reading aloud): "Looking forward to our discussion about optimizing our operations. I've invited my brother Mike, our Production Manager, to join as well."

[Sarah sits back, runs hands through hair]

Sarah (thinking): Perfect. Another stakeholder I didn't know about. Classic family business dynamics. Stay focused, Sarah. You've handled tougher situations at McKinley Corp. But there I had a whole team... and a clear mandate... and set pricing...

[Sarah opens her preparation document]

Sarah (typing and muttering): "Key Points for Williams Manufacturing Discussion:

- 35-year-old family business
- Revenue: \$5M annually
- Employees: 45
- Main challenge: Inefficient operations, unclear reporting structures
- Opportunity: Streamline processes, improve communication"

[Sarah's phone buzzes - text from Susan Chen, former colleague]

Susan: "Hey stranger! How's the consulting adventure? Survived jumping off the corporate ship yet? 😊"

[Sarah picks up phone, types reply]

Sarah: "About to have my first real client meeting! Scared but excited. You were right about the pricing research being a nightmare 🤯"

Susan: "You got this! Remember - they reached out to YOU. That means they already see value. Don't undersell yourself like I did with my first client!"

Sarah: "Thanks! How's your business going?"

Susan: "Up and down. Just lost a deal because I didn't set clear boundaries early. Learning the hard way! Gotta run - client meeting. Call you later?"

Sarah: "Definitely need to compare notes. Good luck!"

[Sarah returns to computer, opens pricing spreadsheet]

Sarah (thinking): Susan's right. They reached out after seeing my LinkedIn post about leaving McKinley. That means something. Okay, pricing tiers:

- Option A: \$125/hour - No, too low for my experience
- Option B: \$175/hour - Better, but still...
- Option C: \$225/hour - Terrifying, but maybe...

[Sarah opens Zoom, checks settings]

Sarah (talking to herself): "Video on, good lighting, professional background... Why does my stomach feel like it's full of bees? I've done this a million times before. Just... not for myself."

[Zoom notification: "John Williams waiting to enter meeting"]

Sarah (thinking): Ten minutes early? Okay, game time. Remember: You're the expert. You've done this before. Just... differently.

[Sarah clicks "Admit to Meeting"]

[SCENE 2: Zoom Meeting]

Sarah: "Good morning, Mr. Williams! I see we're both fans of starting early."

John Williams [60s, casual business attire]: "Please, call me John. And yes, in manufacturing, if you're not early, you're late! Hope you don't mind - my brother Mike will be joining us shortly."

Sarah: "Not at all! Actually, having both of you will be valuable for understanding the full scope of operations."

John: "Great. While we wait - I looked at your LinkedIn. Impressive work at McKinley Corp. What made you decide to go independent?"

Sarah [maintaining professional smile]: "After twelve years in corporate consulting, I saw an opportunity to work more directly with businesses like yours - companies with real potential for transformation. At McKinley, we typically worked with much larger corporations, but I found the most rewarding projects were always with growing companies where we could make a real, immediate impact."

[New participant joins: Mike Williams]

Mike [40s, shop floor in background]: "Sorry I'm a few minutes late. Production line issue."

Sarah: "No problem at all, Mike. Actually, that might be a good place to start our discussion. John, in your email, you mentioned concerns about operational efficiency. Could you both tell me more about what you're seeing?"

John: "Well, we've been in business 35 years. Started in our dad's garage, now we have 45 employees. Revenue's good - about \$5 million annually. But..."

Mike [interrupting]: "But we're still running things like it's dad's garage sometimes. No offense, John."

John [slight tension]: "None taken. Mike's not wrong. We've grown, but our processes haven't really kept up."

Sarah: "Could you give me a specific example?"

Mike: "Take this morning. We had a rush order come in. Should be simple, right? But it took me an hour just to figure out if we had the materials because purchasing and inventory don't talk to each other. And when I finally found the materials..."

John: "They were already allocated to another order, but nobody had updated the system."

Sarah [taking notes]: "I see. And how often do these kinds of communication breakdowns happen?"

Mike: "Daily."

John: "Weekly, I'd say."

Sarah [noting the disagreement]: "Interesting. It sounds like there might be different perspectives on the frequency. Could you walk me through your current reporting structure?"

John: "Well, officially everyone reports up through their department heads to me. But unofficially..."

Mike: "Unofficially, people come to whoever they think can solve their problem fastest. Sometimes that's me, sometimes it's John, sometimes it's Sandra in accounting..."

Sarah: "And this creates confusion about who's responsible for what?"

John & Mike [simultaneously]: "Exactly."

Sarah: "Based on what you're describing, I see several areas where we could make significant improvements. Before we dive deeper, could you tell me what success would look like for you? Say, six months from now?"

John: "I want clear processes. When an order comes in, everyone knows exactly what to do, who's responsible, and where to find the information they need."

Mike: "And I want our technology to actually help instead of create more work. We've got three different systems that don't talk to each other."

Sarah: "Those are exactly the kind of concrete goals we can build a plan around. I have experience with similar situations, particularly in family-owned manufacturing businesses. Would it be helpful if I shared a brief example?"

John: "Please."

Sarah: "At my previous firm, I worked with a manufacturing company about your size. They were having similar challenges with communication and systems integration. We implemented a structured change management program that increased their operational efficiency by 34% within four months. The key was starting with clear process mapping and getting buy-in from all stakeholders before making any system changes."

[Sarah notices John checking his phone]

John: "Sorry, Sarah. Actually, while you mention stakeholders - would it be possible to have Sandra, our accounting head, join these discussions? She's been with us twenty years and really knows where the bodies are buried, so to speak."

Sarah [maintaining composure]: "Of course. Having key stakeholders involved early is crucial. Before we expand the discussion though, I'd like to outline a clear scope of work. Based on what we've discussed, I'm envisioning a phased approach..."

Mike [interrupting]: "Actually, while we're talking scope - we've also been having some issues with our supplier management. Would that be something we could include?"

Sarah [moment of internal panic, but voice steady]: "Let's start by focusing on the internal operational issues you identified. Once we have those running smoothly, we can assess if supplier management should be phase two. In my experience, trying to tackle too many areas at once can dilute the impact."

John: "Makes sense. So what would be the next steps?"

Sarah: "I'll put together a detailed proposal outlining the scope, phases, deliverables, and investment required. I can have that to you by end of day tomorrow. Would you like me to include some specific examples of the process mapping deliverables?"

John: "That would be helpful. And Sarah? We do have a board meeting next week. Any chance we could get the proposal before then? Maybe by tomorrow morning?"

Sarah [brief pause]: "Let me check my schedule... I could have it to you by 9 AM tomorrow. Would that work?"

John: "Perfect. Mike, anything else?"

Mike: "Just eager to get started. This is long overdue."

Sarah: "Excellent. I'll get started on the proposal right away. Thank you both for your time this morning."

[End Zoom call]

[Sarah exhales deeply, slumps in chair]

Sarah (thinking): Okay. Okay. They're interested. They need help. I can help them. But that scope... and the timeline... and I still haven't figured out pricing. Come on, Thompson. Focus. You've got about 20 hours to create the perfect proposal. No pressure.

[Sarah opens new document, starts typing]

Sarah (muttering): "Phase One: Operational Efficiency Improvement... Timeline: 12 weeks... Deliverables..."

[Her phone buzzes - text from John Williams]

John: "Great meeting! Quick question - any chance you could include a ballpark budget estimate in a reply to this text? Board likes to have numbers to think about over the weekend."

[Sarah stares at phone, stomach churning]

[SCENE 3: Sarah's Home Office - Late Morning]

[Sarah staring at the text message from John]

Sarah (thinking): Breathe. Don't rush. This is where deals go wrong. Susan was right about boundaries.

[Sarah types response]

Sarah: "Thanks, John. While I understand the board's interest in numbers, I'd prefer to provide pricing as part of the complete proposal. This ensures the budget aligns properly with the detailed scope and deliverables we'll define. I'll have everything to you by 9 AM tomorrow."

[Sarah puts phone down, opens Chrome again]

Sarah (muttering): "Okay, let's do this systematically. Twelve weeks... Three phases... Process mapping, systems integration, training and handoff..."

[Phone buzzes - another text from John]

John: "Understood. Looking forward to the proposal."

Sarah (exhaling): "Small victories."

[Sarah opens LinkedIn, scrolls through feed]

Sarah (reading): "Consultant needed for short-term manufacturing project... \$75/hour... No MBA required..."

Sarah (thinking): "That's not my market anymore. I'm not competing on price. I'm competing on experience. But God, seeing those numbers makes me nervous..."

[Sarah opens Excel, creates new spreadsheet]

Sarah (typing and talking to herself): "Phase 1: Process Mapping and Analysis - 3 weeks

- Stakeholder interviews: 20 hours
- Process documentation: 30 hours
- Analysis and recommendations: 25 hours

Phase 2: Systems Integration Planning - 4 weeks

- Systems audit: 25 hours
- Integration strategy: 30 hours
- Implementation roadmap: 20 hours

Phase 3: Implementation Support - 5 weeks

- Change management: 40 hours
- Training development: 30 hours
- Handoff and documentation: 20 hours

Total Hours: 240"

[Sarah's phone rings - Susan calling]

Sarah: "Hey, perfect timing. I'm drowning in proposal planning."

Susan: "How'd the meeting go?"

Sarah: "Good, I think. But they're already trying to expand scope, and they want pricing before the proposal."

Susan: "Classic. Remember that software implementation project I told you about? Same thing happened. Client kept adding 'just one more thing' until I was doing three people's jobs."

Sarah: "How'd you handle it?"

Susan: "Honestly? Badly. I said yes to everything because I was scared of losing the deal. Ended up working twice the hours for half the rate I should have charged. Never again."

Sarah: "That's what I'm afraid of. I just got a text asking for 'ballpark numbers' before the proposal."

Susan: "Let me guess - you said no?"

Sarah: "I did! Small victory."

Susan: "Not small at all. That's exactly what you should have done. Hey, I've got another call coming in..."

Sarah: "No problem, I should get back to this proposal anyway. Thanks for the pep talk."

Susan: "Anytime. Remember - you're not desperate, you're selective."

[Sarah ends call, returns to spreadsheet]

Sarah (talking to herself): "Selective, not desperate. Okay. At \$225 per hour... that's... \$54,000 total. God, saying it out loud is terrifying. But broken down into phases... with clear deliverables... over three months..."

[Email notification - from Mike Williams] Subject: Quick Question

Sarah (reading aloud): "Sarah, Great meeting this morning. While you're working on the proposal, could you include some thoughts on our supplier management issues? Nothing detailed, just a paragraph or two? Thanks!"

Sarah (thinking): And there it is. The scope creep begins before the contract's even signed.

[Sarah drafts response]

Sarah (typing): "Hi Mike, Thank you for the follow-up. I understand the supplier management challenges are significant. However, I believe it's crucial to focus our initial engagement on the internal operational issues we discussed. This will create a strong foundation for addressing supplier relationships in a potential future phase. I'll include a brief note in the proposal about how the process improvements we implement will positively impact supplier management, while keeping our primary focus on the core deliverables we discussed. Best regards, Sarah"

[Sarah clicks send, then opens proposal document]

Sarah: "Executive Summary... Williams Manufacturing is facing operational challenges that significantly impact efficiency and scalability. Through a structured three-phase approach..."

[Phone notification - email from potential client #2]

Sarah (reading): "Dear Ms. Thompson, We found your profile on LinkedIn and would like to discuss our upcoming reorganization project..."

Sarah (thinking): Focus. One thing at a time. Do this proposal right, set the right precedents, establish the right boundaries.

[Sarah creates new email folder labeled "Future Opportunities"]

Sarah (typing proposal): "Phase One Deliverables:

1. Comprehensive process map of current operations
2. Stakeholder interview findings report
3. Critical gaps analysis
4. Preliminary recommendations report

Timeline: Weeks 1-3 Investment: \$18,000"

[Sarah pauses, cursor hovering over the number]

Sarah (thinking): That's more than I made in two months at my first job. But for what they're getting... for what I know... for what I can help them achieve...

[Sarah sits up straighter, continues typing]

Sarah: "Phase Two Deliverables:

1. Systems integration assessment
2. Technical requirements documentation
3. Implementation roadmap
4. Vendor evaluation criteria

Timeline: Weeks 4-7 Investment: \$16,875"

[Email notification from John Williams] Subject: Re: Meeting Follow-up

Sarah (reading): "Sarah, Just wanted to say I appreciate your professional approach to the proposal and pricing. Looking forward to reviewing everything tomorrow. -John"

[Sarah smiles, returns to proposal with renewed confidence]

Sarah (typing): "Phase Three Deliverables:

1. Change management strategy
2. Training materials and documentation
3. Implementation support
4. Success metrics and monitoring plan

Timeline: Weeks 8-12 Investment: \$19,125

Total Investment: \$54,000"

[Sarah reviews the numbers again]

Sarah (thinking): Clear phases. Clear deliverables. Clear boundaries. Clear value. I can do this. I HAVE done this. The only difference is now I'm betting on myself.

[A calendar reminder pops up: "Business License Renewal Due Next Week"]

Sarah (laughing softly): "Right. Because I'm not just a consultant now. I'm a business owner. Better get used to it."

[Sarah saves proposal draft, opens new tab to research license renewal process]

[SCENE 4: Sarah's Home Office - Early Evening]

[Sarah reviewing final proposal draft]

Sarah (reading aloud): "By implementing these recommendations, Williams Manufacturing can expect:

- 30-40% reduction in process inefficiencies
- Improved interdepartmental communication
- Clear reporting structures and accountability
- Streamlined inventory management
- Foundation for scalable growth"

[Phone notification - text from Susan]

Susan: "Survived proposal hell yet? 😊"

Sarah: "Almost done. Just quadruple-checking everything. When did we become the kind of people who write six-figure proposals?"

Susan: "When we decided to bet on ourselves! Send it before you overthink it!"

[Sarah returns to proposal]

Sarah (muttering): "Professional liability insurance information... check. Payment terms... check. Phase gate reviews... check."

[Email notification from Mike Williams] Subject: One More Thing

Sarah (sighing): "Here we go..."

Mike (email): "Sarah, Just had a quick meeting with our quality control team. They'd love to be involved in the process mapping phase. Could definitely use your expertise there too. Nothing major, just wanted to make sure they're included. -Mike"

[Sarah takes a deep breath, types response]

Sarah: "Hi Mike, Thank you for this input. You're absolutely right - Quality Control's perspective will be valuable. I've already factored cross-departmental participation into the process mapping phase, including QC. Looking forward to working with the entire team. Best, Sarah"

[Sarah adds note to proposal] "Stakeholder engagement will include representatives from all key departments, including Production, Quality Control, Accounting, and Inventory Management."

[Phone rings - Unknown Number]

Sarah (hesitant): "Hello, this is Sarah Thompson."

Male Voice: "Ms. Thompson? Bob Chen from Chen Manufacturing. Got your name from John Williams. Heard you might be helping them sort out their operations. We've got similar issues. Any chance you're taking on new clients?"

Sarah (professional tone): "Thank you for reaching out, Mr. Chen. I'm currently focusing on existing commitments to ensure I deliver maximum value. However, I'd be happy to schedule a preliminary discussion for next month."

Bob: "Next month? John made it sound like you were just starting out..."

Sarah: "That's correct, but I believe in giving each client my full attention. Would you like me to send you some information about my services and schedule a call for the 15th?"

Bob: "Sure, why not. Appreciate the professional approach. My email is..."

[Sarah adds contact to CRM while talking]

[After call ends]

Sarah (thinking): Two months ago, I would have dropped everything to take that call. Progress.

[Returns to proposal, adds final touches]

Sarah: "Appendix A: Detailed Timeline Appendix B: Risk Mitigation Strategy Appendix C: Communication Plan"

[Sarah's phone buzzes - text from John Williams]

John: "Sarah, just checking - still on track for 9 AM?"

Sarah: "Yes, absolutely. You'll have the complete proposal in your inbox by 9 AM sharp."

John: "Perfect. Board's looking forward to it."

[Sarah reviews proposal one final time]

Sarah (thinking): No hedging, no underpricing, no scope creep. Clear boundaries, clear value, clear expertise. This is who I am now.

[Sarah sets up email to send at 8:45 AM tomorrow]

Sarah (typing): "Dear John and Mike, Thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal for Williams Manufacturing's operational improvement initiative. I'm confident that together we can transform your operations and create a foundation for sustainable growth..."

[Sarah schedules email]

[Looking at her desk calendar - upcoming week]

Sarah (thinking): Business license renewal Monday. Networking event Wednesday. Two more potential client meetings Thursday. Maybe I should raise my rates for new clients next month...

[Phone notification - LinkedIn message]

Message: "Sarah, saw you've started your own consulting practice. Would love to pick your brain about going independent over coffee..."

Sarah (laughing): "And there it is. The 'pick your brain' coffee invite."

[Sarah types response]

Sarah: "Thanks for reaching out! I offer introductory consulting sessions at my standard rate. Would you like me to send you my service overview?"

[Sarah closes laptop]

Sarah (thinking): A month ago, I wouldn't have had the confidence to send that response. A week ago, I might have hesitated on the proposal pricing. Today... today I'm a business owner.

[Sarah starts packing up desk]

Sarah (talking to herself): "Okay, Thompson. Proposal's ready. Pricing's set. Boundaries are clear. Now all you have to do is sleep... somehow..."

[Final email notification of the day - from Susan]

Subject: CELEBRATE THE WINS

Message: "Don't forget - sending your first big proposal is a milestone! Treat yourself to something nice tonight. You're doing the thing most people only talk about doing! Proud of you! 🎉"

[Sarah smiles, closes email]

Sarah (thinking): From corporate employee to business owner. From team member to CEO. From taking orders to setting boundaries. One proposal, one client, one day at a time.

[Sarah glances at proposal one last time before shutting down]

Sarah (softly): "Fifty-four thousand dollars. Clear phases. Clear boundaries. Clear value. This is just the beginning."

[END SIMULATION]