

# **Small But Mighty Agency Podcast**

## **Episode 139: Why Overdelivering Isn't the Trust Signal You Think It Is**

### **Speakers: Audrey Joy Kwan**

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Have you ever second guessed raising your prices because the market feels too shaky? Maybe you thought, what if clients push back? Or what if this is the worst possible time to increase fees? You're not alone. Those questions run through the minds of almost every agency owner when uncertainty hits. What I've seen is this.

Even in disrupted markets, agencies are raising their prices and clients are saying yes.

So what makes the difference? What allows one agency to hold pricing power while another gets squeezed?

That's exactly what we're diving into today. I'll walk you through five levers that help you protect and even grow your pricing power in a disrupted market. From positioning and packaging offers to financial leadership, value-based pricing and client relationships. By the end of this episode, you'll see not, uh, just if you can raise prices, but how to do it with clarity and confidence. Let's get started.

#### **Audrey Joy Kwan**

Welcome to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you want to grow an agency to seven figures and beyond without working more hours in your business, you're in the right place. I'm your host, Audrey Joy Kwan. I know what it takes to build an agency, including supporting an agency owner in selling and exiting. I also have a Masters degree in Communications specializing in organizational development. My team and I have worked behind the scenes of multiple seven figure agencies and have coached and consulted with over 150 agency owners. All this to say when you join us on the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast you get real world experience and practical tips that help you work less, earn more, and lead with integrity. So let's go.

Hi friends, welcome back to the Small But Mighty Agency podcast.

One theme I keep coming back to in conversations with agency owners, it's this: trust is

the growth engine. Agencies that design for it don't just land clients — they keep them, attract more of them, and build stronger businesses in the process.

But the ways trust is built aren't always obvious.

I see it every day inside Agency Together, the community I run for agency owners who want to grow without the ick. They're not chasing vanity metrics or playing the old-school "bro-marketing" game. They're building businesses rooted in values and in strong, lasting relationships — with their clients, with peers, and with each other.

They're leaning into hidden levers of trust that help them stand out without having to chase leads. And the result? Growth that feels sustainable, aligned, and authentic.

So today, I want to share five of those hidden ways. These are things I've seen in my clients' businesses, in my own agency experience, and inside Agency Together. I think at least one will resonate with you right where you are.

Let's get into it.

## **1. Start Small to Build Big Trust**

Most agencies go straight for the retainer. They want the big monthly recurring revenue contract upfront. And yes, recurring revenue is the goal — but right now, with budgets under scrutiny and clients more cautious, leading with a micro-offer — sometimes called an "in-the-door offer" — can actually get you further, faster.

Here's why: it lowers the barrier to entry. It gives a potential client a way to experience how you think and the value you bring without requiring a big leap of faith.

And I know — micro-offers aren't a brand-new concept. You may have heard of them before. But here's what's important right now: in this market, in this season, clients are far more conservative about how they're spending money on marketing. They're more cautious, more selective, and more skeptical. If we're not meeting the market where it's at, we're missing opportunities to build trust.

That's why micro-offers matter today in a way they might not have three years from now. Even though we all know that monthly recurring revenue is critical for agency growth, getting there isn't always about asking for the big leap upfront. Think of it like a ladder: most agencies are asking clients to jump straight to the third or fourth rung. But trust is built when you give them the first rung — the first small, paid step that lets them see what's possible with you.

So what does that look like?

- A strategy blueprint that maps out the next 90 days.

- A 90-minute intensive that produces a clear roadmap.
- A diagnostic audit that shows gap
- A short sprint that delivers a clear outcome

The key is that it's **paid**. You're not giving your work away for free — you're packaging something that delivers real value while making it easy for clients to step into your world.

And once they've taken that first rung and experienced what you can do, moving into a larger engagement becomes natural.

Trust doesn't always start with a leap. Sometimes it starts with a step.

## **2. Be the Guide Who Sees Around Corners**

Clients don't hire you just to do tasks. And honestly, as an agency owner or service provider, that's not what you want either. Every agency owner I know is building a business because they want long-term clients who look to them for higher-level, strategic thinking. No one sets out to be just the hands.

But if we're not intentional about how we approach client relationships, it's easy to slip into that order-taker role — the one who simply implements, executes, and checks the box, instead of being the partner who helps the client think differently.

The truth is, clients trust you more when you show them what's around the bend. Your job as a partner, as a strategist, is to see what they cannot see.

And that can take different forms:

- Maybe it's because you know their industry deeply — in ways they don't — and you can give them an advantage.
- Maybe it's because you've got your finger on the pulse of what's happening in the market and you can help them anticipate shifts before they hit.

Think about it from the other side. When *you* hire someone, how valuable is it when they point out things you couldn't see coming? It's a relief. It lets you lean back, knowing someone else has their finger on the pulse so you don't have to always be on high alert. Who doesn't want that as a client? That's what it feels like to work with a guide who sees around corners.

Now, here's another layer of this: sometimes "seeing around the corner" means saying no. Not in a harsh way, but gently and firmly steering your client away from a path that won't serve them and giving the reasoning behind it.

As a business owner, it's often easier for you to do this — because you're closer to the client and you feel the responsibility. But it gets trickier when you're empowering your team. Take account managers as an example: their KPI is usually retention. And when your job performance is measured by keeping the client happy, saying no feels risky. What if the client pushes back? What if they leave?

That's why part of being the guide is building the skill of saying no well — and training your team to do the same. It's a communication skill, not a personality trait. It's about delivering a no that's rooted in care, context, and strategy.

I like to put it this way: yes builds comfort, but no builds trust.

And when you position yourself — and your team — as the guide who sees around corners, clients stop treating you like a vendor. They start treating you like a partner. That's when trust deepens.

### **3. Make Clients Smarter Along the Way**

Here's something most agencies overlook: trust isn't just built by doing the work. It's built when clients see that the way you work makes their lives easier, and they can walk away smarter because of it.

The challenge is, as agency owners, we're so used to doing things that feel second nature to us, we forget how much value there is in the process itself. We quietly go about our work, creating little systems, shortcuts, and frameworks — but we don't always stop to show them to clients.

Sometimes it's simple things: reusable templates, frameworks, or a checklist that streamlines their internal process.

Sometimes it's bigger: maybe over the years you've worked with a client, you've spotted patterns and built an internal decision tree that helps you deliver work more efficiently and strategically.

I had a client in this exact situation. They'd been working with one of their accounts for several years and wanted to justify both retaining that account longer and raising their fees. Over time, they'd built an internal process — almost like a decision tree — to predict how that client would think about campaigns and requests. They had essentially captured the client's preferences in a structured way that helped them move faster and make better decisions.

The catch? They'd never shared it with the client.

And that's the missed opportunity. Because when you bring that kind of framework out into the open, two powerful things happen:

1. You show the client the *why* behind your work. They see that you're not just executing — you're thinking strategically on their behalf.
2. You make them smarter. They now understand their own tendencies and decision-making process more clearly, and they can carry that insight into other areas of their business.

And here's the kicker: when you do this, you create stickiness. Imagine that client trying to replace you with another provider. It would be almost impossible, because your process has captured and clarified things even *they* couldn't articulate.

That's what "making clients smarter" looks like. It's not about lecturing or overwhelming them with detail. It's about surfacing the insights, systems, and frameworks you've naturally built, and showing them the thinking that makes their lives easier.

And when clients feel smarter because of you, this one thing always happens:

- They trust your expertise more, because they can see the depth of your thinking.

When you make a client look good in their company, trust skyrockets. They'll want to keep you around — and yes, that often leads to new opportunities opening up.

#### **4. Define What Winning Looks Like**

Here's the thing: clients often come into a relationship with their own idea of success — but it's usually either too vague ("more leads"), too narrow ("we just need this campaign to work"), or anchored to the wrong benchmark. If you don't help shape and define what winning really looks like, they'll default to measuring you against whatever number or outcome stands out most.

That's a dangerous place to be as an agency, because it means the high point becomes the benchmark. If you hit an exceptional result once, that suddenly becomes the new "normal" in your client's mind — and everything else feels like a letdown, even if the results are objectively strong.

I'll give you an example. A client of mine worked with a brand that hit an 18-to-1 return on ad spend. Incredible, right? That's the kind of result you celebrate. But here's where things get tricky: once that number was hit, the client naturally wanted to hold it.

Anything less started to feel like a dip, even though performance between 6-to-1 and 10-to-1 was still strong and sustainable for the long term.

This is where defining what winning looks like becomes so important. It's not about lowering expectations — it's about tying your work to what matters most to the client and showing them you have the proof points to back it up.

the biggest missed opportunity shows up: the sales or discovery call. Most agencies ask, "What are your goals?" and leave it there. But the better questions — the ones that actually help you define what a win looks like for each client — sound more like:

- "What are you hoping to achieve?"
- "Who have you worked with before to try to get there?"
- "What were you expecting from that relationship, and what actually happened?"
- "How much did you invest, and how did that investment perform for you?"

These questions give you insight into not just the client's goals, but also their expectations, their past disappointments, and what "winning" really means to them.

When you define success this way — with proof points, a range of outcomes, and context from the very first conversation — you avoid the trap of having to re-sell your value month after month. Instead, you set the stage for a healthier, more trusting relationship.

And here's the bigger truth: defining what winning looks like gives your clients confidence and stability. It gives them clarity, and it gives them the language to explain success inside their own business — and that's what makes you indispensable.

So remember: trust isn't only built in the highs. It's built in how you frame those wins from the beginning, how you prepare your clients for the dips, and how you guide them through it.

## **5. Demystify AI**

If there's one area where trust can quickly be lost — or gained — right now, it's how you talk about AI.

The reality is, AI is already woven into the way most marketing agencies operate. Whether it's streamlining research, supporting content workflows, or helping with data

analysis, it's here. But here's the catch: your clients know that too. They're reading about it, experimenting with it themselves, and wondering how much of what they're paying for is being touched by AI.

And that's why silence around AI erodes trust. If you don't talk about how you're using it, your clients will fill in the blanks on their own — and usually not in your favor.

Here's where the opportunity is: demystify it. Show your clients *where* you're using AI, *why* you're using it, and *how* you're protecting quality. Be clear about where your team's expertise comes in — the strategy, the creativity, the judgment — and how AI supports that work instead of replacing it.

For example, imagine walking a client through your process:

- “We use AI to speed up the first draft of keyword research so we can cover more ground quickly.”  
“Then our strategists step in to analyze the context, weigh priorities, and make the calls AI can't — like what matters most for your specific market.”  
“From there, our writers take the insights and shape them into messaging that matches your brand voice — because AI alone can't capture the nuance of tone or strategy that resonates with your audience.”

This level of openness is powerful because it shows two things: you're efficient enough to use modern tools but discerning enough to apply human expertise where it really counts.

Think of it this way: if you keep sweeping AI under the rug, eventually the pile gets so big someone will trip over it. Better to name it, explain it, and position it as part of your process.

And this is the piece that changes everything: when you're transparent about your use of AI, you actually strengthen your value proposition. You show clients that you're not afraid of the tools shaping the industry, and that you know how to use them responsibly. That combination — openness plus expertise — is what builds trust.

Keep this in mind, your clients aren't paying you to *avoid* AI. They're paying you to help them navigate a world where AI exists. And if you can explain how you use it to elevate their outcomes, you're not just future-proofing your agency — you're deepening the trust that keeps clients coming back.

Alright, before we wrap up, let me quickly run through the five hidden ways you can build more trust right now.

First, start small to build big trust — use micro offers that make it easier for clients to take that first step with you.

Second, be the guide who sees around corners — don't just do the tasks, bring the foresight and courage your clients need.

Third, make your clients smarter along the way — share the thinking, the frameworks, the little systems that make their lives easier.

Fourth, define what winning looks like — set clear expectations so clients know what success really means with you.

And fifth, demystify AI — be open about where you use it, why it matters, and how your expertise makes the difference.

The reality is, in this economy, with budgets under pressure and clients more cautious than ever, trust is the real growth engine. Agencies that build it don't just survive — they thrive. They land clients, they keep them, and they build stronger, more resilient businesses.

And trust isn't built in big, flashy gestures. Sending gifts or remembering birthdays is thoughtful — but it's not what keeps clients with you for years. Trust is built in the daily, often hidden ways you show up: how you set expectations, how you guide, how you teach, and how you connect.

That's also why spaces like the Agency Together Mixer exist. If you've never been to one, here's what it looks like: you'll meet other agency owners in interactive breakout rooms, you'll hear from a panel of five agency owners navigating what's happening on the ground right now, and most importantly — you'll have the chance to spark conversations that can turn into collaborations or opportunities down the road.

Because as Small But Mighty agency owners, we're not meant to do this alone. We're often too close to our own challenges to see the opportunities right in front of us. The mixer gives you that space to step back, get perspective, and uncover ideas and partnerships you can't always see on your own.

So grab your spot — the link is in the show notes. I'd love to see you there.

Thanks for tuning in, and I'll see you next time.

**Audrey Joy Kwan**

Hey, thanks for hanging out with me at the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean the world to me if you hit the Follow or Subscribe button in your podcast app and share it with a friend. I'll see you on the next one.