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**WHAT GOT YOU HERE
WON'T GET YOU THERE —
ESPECIALLY IN YOUR PRICING CAREER**

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ABSTRACT

Many pricing professionals feel stuck. Despite years of experience and technical mastery, they're not getting the recognition, influence, or career growth they expected. They work harder, take on more projects, even upskill on AI or analytics - yet progress stalls.

The problem isn't competence. It's perception. Too often, brilliant pricing experts are still seen as “the numbers person” rather than a trusted leader. And upgrading communication skills alone isn't the full answer.

So what is? This article explores the overlooked shift that turns expertise into influence - and why it might be the key to your next career breakthrough.



WHAT GOT YOU HERE WON'T GET YOU THERE — ESPECIALLY IN YOUR PRICING CAREER AND IT'S MORE THAN JUST UPGRADING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

“Claire, if you want a promotion, you need to be more like George.”

My boss looked at me as if he had just revealed the biggest career secret.

It was 2013. I'd been a senior pricing analyst for more than two years and felt ready to move up. When a manager role opened, I nominated myself. I knew the business inside out. I had a reputation for being helpful. I thought I had a real shot.

It turns out I didn't. The role went to George. He had only joined from a competitor a few months earlier. He didn't know the business as deeply as I did. He didn't even have the same technical grounding. And yet, he got the job.

That feedback — “be more like George” — stayed with me. I didn't know what it meant. So I watched him closely.

George was likeable. People enjoyed talking to him; I would even have coffee with him a few times a month just to chat. He could joke with anyone, including senior leaders. He never tried to impress with technical jargon. Instead, he often focused more on explaining the why behind the pricing models.

But what stood out the most for me was this: he didn't always say yes. When a stakeholder asked for a report — say, average revenue per user over time — he didn't immediately deliver. Instead, he'd call them up and ask good questions, like: “What's behind this request? How are you planning to use it?”

In contrast, I didn't know it was possible to ask these questions. I kept doing what I thought was right: saying yes, working late, delivering exactly what was asked. I prided myself on being the person who never let anyone down. Reliable. Helpful. Always available.

And that's exactly how people saw me. Reliable. Helpful. Available. But not a leader.

HAVE YOU LIVED A VERSION OF THIS?

Far too many talented pricing people get tripped up by this same trap. They tried to get up by working harder, delivering faster, and mastering new tools. But all the effort only pigeon-holed them into service, not leadership. “Perhaps I need an MBA?” some think. But let's pause it for a moment and see if this is truly a solution.

When you look up, do all the senior executives have an MBA? Do they all possess deep technical expertise and are familiar with the latest AI tools? I bet the answer is no. Now, when you look around, among your pricing peers, how many have an MBA or a higher degree? The answer is probably many. Yet just like you, their career also doesn't move. They remain the “numbers person.” The go-to for last-minute requests. The one who can be relied on, but not the one shaping the conversation.



The irony is that despite their ability, intelligence, and qualifications, pricing people remain stuck. And when you look closer — especially through the lens of communication — you see this isn't about office politics. It's about perception.

When colleagues only experience you as the person who says yes, who always delivers what's asked, they don't see you as someone who leads. And until that perception changes, no amount of competence will break the ceiling.

HOW CAN WE CHANGE THE PERCEPTION?

Escaping the limitations of the "numbers person" label isn't about working harder or learning the latest tool: it is about learning to be a clear communicator who solves the right problems.

That journey begins with how you see yourself: you must view yourself as a leader before anyone gives you the title. It continues with challenging requests to uncover the real problem, instead of simply reacting to what stakeholders ask for. And finally, your recommendation comes to life when you present it in a way that drives real change.

SEE YOURSELF AS A LEADER BEFORE THE TITLE ARRIVES

Think about actors at an audition. They don't say, "I'll act like the character once I get the role." Instead, they had to play the part before anyone gave them the title. Now, you might say, "Well, that's just the nature of acting."

True. But isn't the corporate world the same? Promotions rarely go to those who feel 100% ready. They go to those already showing up as if they are. Now, you might worry: If I start acting like a leader, will it look like overstepping? In practice, thoughtful initiative is rarely read as arrogance or overstepping; instead, leaders welcome that, and see it as a sign of maturity — provided it raises the quality of decisions. Offering context, proposing options, and inviting challenges shows that you are stepping up, not stepping on toes.

So, how do you practice this every day so that it becomes a habit, not just a corporate slogan? You have to think like a leader before you are one. So, how can we actually do that — ideally, on a daily basis, because this is not just a mindset shift, but a habit formation? **Here are three daily habits you can start trying:**

1. Speak the outcome, not the analysis.

The purpose of any analysis is to drive an outcome, and the ability to deliver an outcome is what sets you apart from other people. Hence, when delivering, focus more on the action your work will deliver, not the work itself.

2. Say no with a purpose.

Don't default to a yes. Carefully assess all the requests that land on your lap, and question the reason behind them. Act on the ones that make sense, and provide alternatives to those that don't. A purposeful no not only protects your time, but signals judgment.



3. Focus on the action.

Too many meetings end with “good discussion.” But real leaders create momentum. If the meeting host didn't do their job, be bold and take the lead by closing with a crisp recap and an ask: “So what's the next step?”

These small habits train you to show up not just as the person who runs the numbers, but as someone who shapes outcomes and drives momentum. And it helps you to act like a leader before the title arrives.

YOU DECIDE THE REAL PROBLEM TO SOLVE

Here's the reality: stakeholders often don't know what the real problem is. Worse, they think they do. This becomes a problem for pricing professionals because most of them are great problem-solvers. Give them a clearly defined issue, and they'll generate a solution. That's rarely the challenge.

The real trap is solving the wrong problem. If we simply follow stakeholder instructions — “Run a simulation on the revenue impact if we drop 20 basis points” or “Bundle product A and B and give me some pricing options” — we risk going down the wrong track.

Two outcomes usually follow:

1. The stakeholder implements our advice, but the results disappoint because the underlying issue wasn't addressed.
2. Stakeholders eventually realise they were chasing the wrong problem, which means our carefully crafted solution, no matter how good, was wasted effort.

The way out is simple in principle, harder in practice: resist the urge to jump into solution mode.

Instead, pause. Ask questions. Probe for what sits behind the request. *What decision are you trying to make? What outcome are you worried about?*

We must learn that often, the surface request (a report, a simulation, a discount model) is just a symptom of a larger business problem.

The real issue might be margin leakage from sales behaviour, portfolio cannibalisation, or misaligned incentives. Ask questions to find out what the real issue is.

By spending time identifying the *right* problem, you ensure your solution has impact — and you stop being seen as a task-taker, and start being valued as a decision partner.



COMMUNICATE SO DECISIONS ACTUALLY MOVE FORWARD

Now that we've cleared the first two hurdles — seeing yourself as a leader and identifying the right problem — we still have one last mile to go: presenting the recommendation in a way that leads to action.

To achieve this, we must first capture the attention of our stakeholders. Think about how you scroll through LinkedIn. Do you read every post in your feed? My guess is not. You skim, and only stop to read more when the first two lines of a post grab you. Stakeholders are no different. They're busy, distracted, and often impatient. If you don't capture attention quickly, your message disappears into the noise.

This is why many pricing presentations fail. Analysts build up to the “big reveal,” saving their recommendation for the end. By then, leaders have checked out. The solution is simple: reverse the order:

1. **Start with your recommendation.** Put the conclusion upfront.
2. **Support with insights.** Share only the evidence that makes the case, not every calculation.
3. **Close with a call to action.** Never assume the next step is obvious. Spell it out.

A clear recommendation is what drives action. But clarity isn't about dumbing things down. It's about cutting through the noise so the real issue comes to the surface. As Blaise Pascal once wrote: *“I would have written a shorter letter, but I did not have the time.”*

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

You might wonder what happened after that missed promotion. I never did become a pricing manager that year. Instead, I was sent overseas to work on a new telco partnership in the Philippines. I was the most junior person at the table, surrounded by leaders with far bigger titles. But I was the only one carrying the pricing flag — and I knew I had to step up.

A few weeks in, the GM of Mergers and Acquisitions pulled me aside. “Claire, for months, I couldn't get anyone to tell me what the pricing would be or what the impact was. Since you joined, the problem has been solved.”

That's when I realised something important: leadership isn't about having the title. It's about the impact you create. And once I saw myself that way, everything else started to shift.

No matter where you sit in the corporate hierarchy, the lesson is the same. If you want to step up, start by thinking like you're already there. That mindset shift changes everything. It helps you spot opportunities you might otherwise miss and put forward recommendations you might have once held back.



What got you here won't get you there. It's not about more technical mastery, and it's not about office politics. It's about stepping into the identity of a trusted leader: thinking at the level above your title, tackling the problems that really matter, and communicating so your message drives action.



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