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FREE PRINTABLE DIAGNOSTIC CHECKLIST

Overcoming Underearning: A Diagnostic Checklist and First Steps

Underearning is a learned pattern, not just a low paycheck. A behavioral checklist and concrete first steps to start closing the gap.

FREE • NO SIGNUP | 12 PAGES | 12 ITEMS

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About this resource

Underearning is not the same thing as having a low income. A low income can come from real, external limits, a depressed local job market, a disability, caregiving hours that cap availability. Underearning is a pattern of accepting less than your actual market value even when the external limits loosen, and the two get confused constantly.

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Underearning vs Just Having a Low Income

8 items

1

The Behavioral Markers

Three behaviors show up often enough to work as a rough self-check, not a diagnosis. Undercharging, avoiding negotiation, and deflecting compliments about the value of your own work all point toward the same underlying pattern.

2. You set your rate or asked for a salary below what comparable people in your field or market typically charge

3. You discounted a rate before anyone objected to it, softening the number before you even said it out loud

4. You accepted the first offer in a negotiation, telling yourself the number was probably fine

5. You haven't asked for a raise or a rate increase in longer than feels reasonable, even when your workload or results grew

6. You deflect or minimize it when someone compliments your skill or the value of your work, rather than simply accepting the compliment

7. You absorb scope creep on a project or role without adjusting your pay to match the added work

8. **Why the Pattern Is Easy to Miss**

   Underearning hides well because most of its markers look like virtues from the outside. Undercharging looks like generosity, avoiding negotiation looks like being easygoing, and absorbing extra scope looks like being a team player. Coworkers, clients, and even the underearner themselves tend to read the behavior as a personality trait rather than a financial pattern with a real cost attached to it.

First Steps to Address It

4 items

1. **Run a Rate Audit**

   Compare your current rate or salary against real market data for your specific role, experience level, and location, not a guess. Write the gap down as a number, not a feeling, a specific dollar figure is far harder to rationalize away than a vague sense that you're probably underpaid.

2

Run One Real Negotiation

Pick a single upcoming moment, a renewal, a new client quote, an annual review, and negotiate that one instance deliberately. The goal isn't to fix every past undercharge at once, it's to practice the specific discomfort of asking, one time, on purpose.

3

Trace the Belief Behind the Number

When you catch yourself about to discount a rate preemptively, pause and ask what you were taught about asking for money before anyone objected. The belief driving the discount is usually older than the current job or client, and naming it out loud tends to loosen its hold faster than willpower alone.

4

Expect the Pattern to Resist the First Attempt

A single successful negotiation rarely feels like relief the first time. It's common to feel a spike of guilt right after asking for more, even when the request was reasonable and the answer was yes. That discomfort is the pattern reacting to a change, not evidence that the ask itself was wrong, and it usually fades with repetition rather than with a single act of willpower.

How to Use This Workbook

Underearning is a pattern, and patterns can be changed in small steps. This workbook helps you see yours and act on it.

Steps

1. Take the diagnostic scale to see which behaviors apply.
2. Reframe two or three money beliefs.
3. Complete the value and pricing worksheet.
4. Write your income-raise plan.
5. Track weekly money actions for a month.

This is a self-reflection tool, not financial advice, and no outcome or income is guaranteed. Your results depend on your skills, market and circumstances.

Underearning Diagnostic Scale

Circle how true each statement is for you. Be honest, nobody sees this but you.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I set my rate before checking what others charge	○	○	○	○	○
I discount before anyone objects	○	○	○	○	○
I accept the first offer	○	○	○	○	○
I avoid asking for raises or rate increases	○	○	○	○	○
I brush off compliments about my work	○	○	○	○	○
I do extra work for free to feel worthy	○	○	○	○	○
I feel uncomfortable talking about money	○	○	○	○	○
I hide my prices or avoid stating them	○	○	○	○	○
I compare myself to others and assume I deserve less	○	○	○	○	○

More 4s and 5s suggest a stronger pattern. A low income can also have real external causes, so this is a prompt for reflection only.

Money-Belief Reframing

Write the belief as you hear it in your head, then a more accurate replacement.

Old belief 1
For example: Asking for more is greedy

New belief 1

Old belief 2

New belief 2

Old belief 3

New belief 3

Value and Pricing Worksheet

Pricing starts with what you provide, not with how you feel about asking.

What I do and who it helps

Results or outcomes I have delivered
Specific, honest examples

Skills, experience and training I bring

What comparable people in my field typically charge
Research at least three real sources

My current rate

A rate that fits my value and market

My Income-Raise Plan

A plan is a set of small, specific actions. Aim for one raise attempt at a time.

Where I want to raise my income
Rate, salary, new clients, new offer

Why now
What has grown or changed

The ask, written out
Exact words and number

Who I will ask and by when

A likely objection and my response

What I will do if the answer is no

Weekly Money Actions

One or two small actions a week add up. Examples: research rates, update a portfolio, send an invoice, ask for feedback.

Week	Action planned	Done? (Y / N)	What I learned
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

Say It Out Loud Cards

Practice these until saying a number feels ordinary.

My rate for this is...

That is outside my current budget for this scope.

I have taken on more, so I am updating my rate.

I would like to discuss my compensation.

Thank you. I worked hard on that.

Let me get back to you on that offer.

What is the range for this role?

I will not discount this work.

Cut along the dashed lines.

A Note on Limits and Support

Changing money patterns takes time, and some obstacles are structural, not personal.

- Your market, industry and circumstances shape what is possible
- Small steady changes beat dramatic leaps
- Do not borrow, invest or take financial risks on the strength of this workbook

> For decisions about taxes, investments or debt, speak to a qualified financial professional. If money worry is affecting your mental health, a licensed counselor can help.

Want more like this?

This printable is the companion to our guide "Overcoming Underearning: A Diagnostic Checklist and First Steps".

Read more at concentratedwisdom.com

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