FREE CHAPTER · THE SQUEEGEE IS THE EASY PART

Chapter 8

Think in Man-Days

If there's one habit that turns you from a guy guessing at numbers into an owner who prices like a machine, it's this: **stop thinking in jobs and start thinking in man-days.**

The unit that runs everything

A **man-day** is one person working one day. That's it. Two people for half a day is one man-day. One person for two days is two man-days. It's the universal unit of your business, and once you start seeing every job as "how many man-days will this take," estimating gets fast, consistent, and honest.

Why this unit and not hours? Because it's how the work actually flows and how you'll schedule it (Chapter 19), and because it keeps you from getting lost in the weeds. You'll *calculate* in minutes and hours when you're counting panes and square footage, but you'll *think*, *price*, and *plan* in man-days. A man-day is 8 hours of one person's labor on paper, though you'll find real productive field time is less once you account for setup, breaks, moving, and travel, which is exactly why the production benchmarks in the next chapters already bake in a realistic pace instead of a fantasy one.

Building your day rate

Here's the number that makes the whole system work: your day rate, the price you charge for one man-day. And it is *not* what you'd like to make. It's built up from reality:

Start with the **labor cost** of one person for a day, what you actually pay (including the true cost of an employee, which is more than their wage once you count taxes, comp, and the rest). Add a fair share of your overhead: that monthly cost from Chapter 3, divided across the days you actually expect to bill. Then add your profit: a deliberate margin on top, because you're running a business, not a charity. That total is your man-day rate: the all-in sell price for one man-day, covering labor, overhead, and profit.

Set this number carefully and *write it down*, because it's the multiplier behind every bid you'll ever make. Get it right and every job you price is automatically covering everything it needs to cover. Most markets land a commercial cleaning day rate in the several-hundred-dollars range; dense, high-cost metros run higher; rural and out-of-the-way work runs lower. There's no universal "right" number. There's the right number *for your costs in your market*, and now you know how to build it.

Adjust the rate for the conditions

Your base day rate is for normal, daytime, straightforward work. Real jobs aren't always that, so you'll carry a few standard adjustments, premiums you add to the rate, not discounts you give away:

After-hours and weekend work carries a premium, because office and retail glass often has to be done before tenants arrive or after they leave, and your time outside normal hours is worth more. **Holidays** more still. **Out-of-town work** picks up travel and per diem on top. You'll apply these in Chapter 11; for now, just know your day rate flexes *up* for tougher conditions and you should never eat that cost silently.

The sanity check that saves you

Last thing, and it's a gift from every estimator who's been doing this a while: after you build a number, *stop and gut-check it.* Does the total make sense for the building in front of you? Does the price-per-pane or price-per-square-foot land where your experience says it should? If your math spits out a number that feels wildly low for a four-story building, you probably forgot to double for two sides, or dropped the rigging, or skipped the equipment line. The math is only as good as the inputs, and the sanity check is how you catch a bad input before it becomes a contract you regret. Trust the system, but verify the answer.

With your day rate built and man-days in your bones, you're ready to price the actual work. Windows first.