



# Freelance BUSINESS BOOTCAMP

How to Launch, Earn, and Grow  
into a Well-Paid Freelancer



By Carol Tice & Neil Tortorella

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# Why did we write this book?

In my Freelance Writers Den community for freelance writers, I repeatedly saw both newbie and veteran freelancers build their businesses by trial and error, expose themselves to financial risk, and waste time struggling to run a profitable solopreneur enterprise.

So I got together with Neil Tortorella, author of the *[Freelance Writer's Business Book](#)* and *[Starting Your Career As A Freelance Web Designer](#)*. We put on a 4-week course for Den members on how to launch and run a successful freelance business. This e-book captures all the training sessions from our Freelance Business Bootcamp, and takes you step-by-step through setting up and running a thriving freelance writing business designed to earn well from the start.

Our Den members asked a lot of great questions during each session, so we've included their questions and our answers, as well.

I hope *The Freelance Business Bootcamp e-book* helps you realize more income from your writing. – Carol Tice

## Legal disclaimer

In this book, Carol and Neil speak from their own long experience and extensive research about legal and tax matters. But we are not lawyers or accountants, and rules may vary depending on where you set up your business. Do not rely on our advice in these areas as definitive, and please consult a professional if you have any doubts or questions.

# About the Authors

**Neil Tortorella**



I'm a veteran writer, graphic designer, speaker, trainer, and marketing consultant. I've presented on business topics for SCORE, IndieConf, HOW Design Conference, and many others. My latest book, *The Freelancer Writer's Business Book*, covers the business of freelancing — from launching your business to planning for retirement, and everything in between.

**Carol Tice**



I'm a nonfiction book author, and writer of the award-winning [Make a Living Writing](#) blog (recently named a [Top 10 Blogs for Writers](#) winner for the third time). I founded [Freelance Writers Den](#), the community where writers learn how to grow their freelance income — fast.

I've been a full-time freelance writer since 2005. For 12 years before that, I was a staff writer, and I freelanced for several years at the beginning of my career, too.

My mission is to do all I can to help freelance writers discover how to earn more from their writing.



## Chapter 2: How to Negotiate Great Rates

### What To Know Before You Negotiate

**CAROL:** If you're going to be successful at running a freelance business, negotiating is a super-important skill. And it's one I see so many freelance writers run from.

Before you find yourself in a negotiation, it's good to figure out what you need to earn. I often hear this from new writers: "I have no idea what to charge!" You should never have "no idea" what to charge. If you're taking this business seriously, you need to do two kinds of research to get at least a dim sense of what to charge. The first thing is to figure out what you need to earn to pay your bills.



**NEIL:** Your base rate is imperative. Just because Joe Blow Writer is charging this much and another writer is charging that much doesn't take your specific circumstances into consideration. You need to figure it out, because your estimating process will be based on



your needs – your target income, how much you want to make, your overhead expenses, and your profit margin.

If you don't have a profit margin, your business won't grow. You might break even, but you're not making a profit, and that profit is the funny money that lets you grow and do stuff. Without knowing exactly what your profit point is, you're either pulling numbers out of the air or charging "the going rate." Instead, know what rate works for you.

**CAROL:** Also, while you're prepping to negotiate, make sure you have a good prospect. Identify the kind of client where you *can* negotiate. If it's some content mill website, and their policy is, "All articles pay \$15," obviously, no negotiating is going to be possible. These are fixed-price clients.

And that makes me so sick, because many mill writers have told me, "I spend extra time on my articles to make them awesome." Which is a complete waste of time, because you'll never be rewarded for that, ever. You're just giving them extra value for free.

It's the same with the revenue-share world. If you don't get clicks, you don't get paid. Their formula is set, and you'll never get a better deal.

Develop a nose for loser clients and don't bother with them, because you can spend a lot of time in back-and-forth with a prospect, and taking meetings. Don't waste your time. Try to qualify clients quickly.

There are some common red flags we see from low-paying prospects. Their ads say things like: "You'll get lots of recognition."

Or, when you get them on the phone and quote a professional rate, they'll say, "I could get the same thing done online for next to nothing." "I could use Fiverr." "It's a contest. You might get paid if you win." When you're a new writer, it seems so scary to turn anything down, but these are not people you want to work with.

What ends up happening to so many writers is they'll get trapped in a cycle of being fully booked with crummy, low-paying clients. They have no time to market and find better clients, and never earn enough to get rid of any of these clients. It's like being stuck on a gerbil wheel.

Also, watch out for boundary pushers who contact you at weird times – 10 p.m. on Wednesday night, 6 a.m. on Saturday morning.

If a client wants you to show up at their workplace and work set hours, or even just work set hours at your house, watch out. In the eyes of the IRS, that defines you as an

employee. If they're saying, "I need you from 9:00 to 4:00, three days a week," that throws your independent contractor relationship into a gray area.

They should not be able to ask that of you, as a freelancer. So, feel free to say, "That's outside the scope of a contractor relationship."

Once you've got a contract, if there are unreasonable demands outside its scope, it's time to renegotiate. Always remember -- you have a right to say "no."

Here is my philosophy on negotiating. I had this formative experience early in my career, where I was a secretary at MGM Studios. I worked for an attorney who negotiated actor deals. If an actor wanted to test for a TV pilot, the night before his test, we made the entire deal for his earnings for the next seven years, which is the maximum legal length of a TV contract. That actor could not set foot on that sound stage to do a test without a signed deal.

And that's the way it should go. Don't start writing before you have a deal. And yes, that means countersigned by them, not just that you signed the contract and sent it back.

My motto is, "Your signed contract and upfront deposit payment start me writing."

If the client asks, "Are you working on that yet?" I say, "No. You haven't sent me a contract yet," or, "You haven't signed it. So, I haven't started yet."

Here's a big tip: Before that signed contract and deposit happen, don't consider them your client yet.

Continue marketing. Don't make room for them in your schedule, don't tell other prospects "no," until the moment the client gives you a deposit and a signed contract, or a magazine editor gives you a signed contract. Assume this prospect will flake out, and this is not going to happen -- until it does.

Now that we've cleared up *when* to negotiate, let's talk about *what* to negotiate.

The correct answer is: everything. Everything in the contract is negotiable. I have negotiated how much I will get paid, when I will get paid, what rights I am keeping, whether I'll get a byline; you name it. Any aspect of the relationship is negotiable.

**NEIL:** When you're negotiating blog posts or Web articles, most sites give you a little author bio at the end of your piece. Think about what you want in there, what URL people can click on. That's negotiable, too. Don't let them tell you exactly what it needs to be.

This might sound like you're being difficult to work with, but you're not. You're simply being professional. Consider doctors and lawyers. They typically won't talk to a new client unless there is some palm-greasing. For example, my mother cut her shin the other day. When I took her to the new specialist for a followup, he wouldn't even look at her until I forked over the co-pay. You have a business just like those professionals do, and you need to get paid for your time.

**CAROL:** Another thing to think about is how you bill your time. One writer told me, "I've never billed for client meetings, and it finally dawned on me that I'm getting ripped off." Remember, if an hourly rate client asks you to drive into town and come to a meeting, they pay for that.

I used to charge \$95 an hour. I didn't charge for the travel time, but it was my policy to charge for the actual meeting time. It helps cut down on meetings, when you charge for the time. If you're working on a project-fee basis, which you hopefully are, you still want to get a sense of how many meetings they're thinking of holding, and figure that into your mental calculation before you give them your bid.

If there's a lot of travel time, think about charging for it. I personally resist all attempts to make me physically go somewhere these days, because being out of the office wastes so much billable time. If there are spots like these, where your business is leaking money, maybe you've been giving clients a freebie. Create policies about this stuff.

**NEIL:** Back in the '80s, when I was first starting out, at one point, I sat down and looked at my timesheets. Yes, I did keep timesheets. I thought it might be a good idea to look at what I was doing. I found out I was spending a load of time — 20 or 30 hours a month — in meetings. And I wasn't charging for that time.

I was leaking money, big time. So, I started billing for meetings. My clients never had any problem with it. Generally, there's a lot of brain time in meetings, where they're tapping your knowledge. You're consulting, and that's valuable. I started charging portal-to-portal, because a lot of my clients were an hour or 90 minutes away, and that was dead time I needed to charge for.

Portal-to-portal means from the time I leave my place to the time I get back to my place. I charge for all that time. And nobody said "boo" to me about it.

Consider where your leaks are, so you can plug them.

# 12 Ways to Negotiate Like a Pro

## 1. *Make them blink first.*

**CAROL:** Once a prospect has described their project, the first thing to say is, “Okay, it sounds like you need a five-page case study. What’s your budget for that?” Don’t say, “Oh, that sounds like \$1,500 to me,” or \$300, or whatever you’re thinking.

See if they’ll throw out a figure, or even a range. Sometimes, that can earn you a lot more money, because the figure they’ve got in their heads is bigger than the one you’ve got.



My rule is, I try to arrive at this budget question within about 30 minutes of getting on the phone, or sitting down with the prospect.

I say, “Okay, tell me about your project.” Many business owners just can’t shut up about their business. They want to tell you their whole life story.

But you need to bring them around to, “Yes, but I’m here because you want to hire me to write something. And it sounds like the project is X. What’s your budget for that? What kind of figure were you thinking?”

Sometimes, they’ll say they don’t know. “This is my first time using a freelancer, ever.” Or, “I haven’t done this in 10 years, and I don’t know what prices are now,” or “I’ve never done this kind of project.”

They'll give you a lot of excuses, or they just don't want to tell you. They'll say, "No, I'm looking for a rate quote from you." Then, you've got to be able to throw out a number.

"I've done similar things on a range of \$X to \$X, depending on how many interviews are needed. That five-page case study needs three interviews, and you need it in a week flat. I don't know. I'm thinking \$1,500. Does that sound good to you?"

Give them a ballpark figure right away, because, if they were thinking \$100, you don't want to spend any more time with this prospect. Graciously bow out, and move on.

**NEIL:** Exactly. If you're not doing it right now, keep timesheets to help you develop an idea of what to bid. Timesheets are invaluable for figuring out how long something takes. If somebody proposes a gig, look at your timesheets, your history. Then, you can ascertain how much time you spend on this kind of project, so you've got something realistic to talk about. This is very important — even if you don't bill hourly, track your time.

Carol is completely correct – avoid tossing out a number before you're ready and know all the project information. The thing is, prospects and clients often have more money than you might think.

I know a guy who owns several businesses. He's one of the wealthiest guys I know. Years back, he told me, "Whoever talks about money first, loses." That advice has always worked for me.

## ***2. Take your time.***

**CAROL:** If you don't know what to charge, or they won't tell you a number, ask around. Also, don't feel like you have to throw out a number right away, if you don't have one in mind. Say, "Okay, well, then, let me go home, and I'll think about this a little bit and send you a bid tomorrow."

Then ask around. Look in *The Writers Market's* "What to Charge" guide. Ask in a LinkedIn writers' group, or a forum like the [Freelance Writers Den](#). Ask around your own network of writers to get an idea. See if anyone has worked for that client before. Get a sense of what they might accept.

For instance, I recently got a reach-out from a past client who referred me to a client he was advising. They described the project, which was complex *and* rush work. I threw out a figure of \$1,000, and he said, "No, no, it's at least \$2,000 of work."

So, I bid \$2,000 to his client, who accepted it without a blink. Find somebody who knows that prospect, and bounce your fee idea off them. That was \$1,000 I would have left on the table if I hadn't asked around.

Resist all pressure to answer in a big hurry. Anyone who says, "Oh, I'm making a decision now," is not someone you want as a client. It's someone dysfunctional, if they can't wait 12 hours to hear your bid.

### ***3. Use silence.***

**CAROL:** I use this technique a lot in interviews, but it also works in negotiating. There's a human dynamic that people don't like silences in conversation. If you just stay quiet, they will say more.

If they throw out a number, you might simply not say anything right away. I've had clients who then raise their number, just because I didn't respond immediately. It makes them nervous.

They said, "Well, it sounds like \$200 a blog post." And I just left this long silence, and then said, "I don't know. It's rush work," and they immediately responded with, "Oh yeah, you're right. How about \$300?" Silence can help you get information, and get a better rate.

### ***4. Delay if you're not feeling great.***

**CAROL:** If you're not feeling well or you didn't get a good night's sleep, feel free to delay a little.

I love using this little script: "Thanks for contacting me about your project. I'm currently wrapping something else, but I'm interested in learning more. Can we set an appointment to chat about this, maybe tomorrow or Thursday? Here's when I'm available. How do those times look to you?"

Feel free to play it cool and wait until you're in a better head-space to evaluate the prospective project.

## ***5. Don't cave to pressure.***

**CAROL:** Resist all pressure from prospective clients who tell you, “I need to decide today.” You want to sleep on it. You don't want to look desperate. That high-pressure tactic can also be a red flag of needy, dysfunctional clients who can't plan well. And, as Neil says, of clients who want the world for \$1.25. So, watch out.



**NEIL:** It sounds totally counterproductive, but if I'm in negotiations with a client, I look for every reason why I shouldn't be working with this person. Maybe that's just from being burned a couple times, but that's my acid test. If they pass it, then we continue. But there're a lot of nut cases out there.

As a freelancer, especially a new one, you'll feel an urge to take whatever comes through the door. Train yourself to resist and not collapse under the pressure. Contrary to popular belief, there will be other prospects, clients, and projects.

## ***6. Don't submit a "blind" bid.***

**CAROL:** If you're looking at online job ads, you'll see this a lot: “We're looking for article writers. Please send us your best rates.” No information on the length of that article, or how many they want. Is it ongoing work? What is the topic? You have no information. Almost all of these offers are crummy. They end up not being good-paying clients, because that isn't how a functional person hires a freelancer.

Good clients tell you about their business and their project before asking, “What would you charge me for that?”



So, always be on your guard. My stock reply when I used to [answer online job ads](#) that maybe mentioned my expertise but were still vague was, “Once you’ve described your project in detail, I’ll be able to give you an exact quote.”

If compelled to name a rate, I would give them a laughably broad range. “I have done projects ranging from \$.30 to over \$1.00 a word,” which is basically every possible price that’s remotely professional. “And once you tell me more, I’ll be able to tell you where you fall in there.”

Whatever you do, don’t say, “Oh, my price for articles is \$100.” You have no idea what you’re getting into. That’s just crazy.

**NEIL:** The bottom line is that the client wants to get the best price possible, and you want to get the most money. That’s always a negotiating situation. I have a buddy who’s a pretty well-known designer out of Los Angeles. He told me about a situation where he went into a client meeting with a vague idea of what the project would need. He was thinking maybe a \$3,000 to \$5,000 gig. Keeping his mouth shut and letting the prospect talk, the guy spilled his guts about the budget. It turned out he had budgeted \$15,000 to \$20,000.

So, sit back and let them do the talking, whenever possible. You might find there’s more money on the table than you think.

**CAROL:** I’ve heard so many stories like that, where a writer’s got a number in their head, but if you wait and hear the client’s number first, it’s two to three times your number. Writers tend to undervalue themselves – that’s something I’ve seen a thousand times. They tend not to think of the value their writing delivers for the client.



I hear writers say, “I’m going to write a landing page for \$50.” And it just kills me, because that’s a marketing tool worth at least \$2,000. A landing page sells a product for them, and they can use it forever. For businesses, remember that, in the great scheme of their marketing budget, the writing fee is pin money, and you’re delivering so much value. So, don’t sell yourself short.

**NEIL:** If you’re in a situation like that and it’s for a landing page where they’re selling a product, your words are going to make \$1 million for them. And you’re getting what, \$125 to write copy? That’s baloney. It needs to align to the value of what you’re doing.

If there’s one thought I want you to come away with after reading this e-book, it’s this – *You’re worth more than you think*. Your words make money for people. It might be a direct-response sales piece, it might be a magazine article, or maybe a case study for a corporation. That direct-response project can bring in big bucks for your client. A magazine article might increase circulation and, ultimately, ad revenue. A case study can easily bring in new customers for a corporation. You deserve your piece of that pie.

## ***7. Raise objections.***

**CAROL:** When prospects throw out their rate, one of the things I look for is ways to raise objections and point out why the price should be more. This can often pave the way to a higher rate.

Is it rush work? Does it need a specialized skill? Am I writing to a sophisticated audience of only CEOs of enterprise software companies? Is it a complex topic like microbiology and how new biotech products are being created? Or, do I need to interview eight people for this?

I find that, if you calmly and professionally bring up these kinds of issues, clients are receptive to the idea that they need to pay more. The key is tone. This is a business deal, and this is a negotiation. It’s normal that they’re trying to get as low a rate as they can, and I’m trying to get as high a rate as I can.

If you have a good client on the hook, they understand this process is normal. If you keep it calm, people get it. Point out the degree of difficulty that maybe they weren’t thinking about because they’re not a writer, and you’ll get more.

## ***8. Stand firm...***

**CAROL:** If you love your bid and don't want to do the project for any less, this is the method [Sean Platt](#) taught me: "Here's my quote." The end, boom, final offer. You give them your figure, and tell them to let you know if they accept it. That puts out a strong confidence vibe, and conveys a lot of professionalism.

## ***9. Or, leave the door open.***

**CAROL:** If it's a scenario where you badly want this client and you're not sure if your bid is in the ballpark, use this strategy. I used to do this a lot when I first started out and responding to vague online job ads. I'd say my bid and close with, "If you're considering another provider purely based on price, I'd appreciate a chance to revisit my bid."

A couple of times that did happen, where they'd come back and say, "Oh, well, we have this other writer who wants to do it for this much." Maybe you're only a tiny bit different, and it's something that would really rock your portfolio, and you want it. This strategy still conveys confidence but also says, "I really want this project, and I want to stay in a conversation with you about it." So, choose between these two approaches.

## ***10. Bid by the project.***

**CAROL:** In general, you want to bid by the project, not by the hour. For some things, it's impossible to do a project bid – for example, editing work is tough. But you'll usually end up earning more if you can bid project rates.

Why? It's hard to successfully quote someone \$200 an hour, but you can quote a project rate that might well make you that hourly fee because it's a type of writing or an industry you know very well. And my point of view is, it's none of their business how long it takes me to do it.

As you do projects for an ongoing client, you'll get better and faster at the work. If you've locked in five-page white papers at \$2,500, that might be getting you \$50 an hour when you start, but \$125 an hour by the fifth white paper. Because you're working more and more efficiently, your hourly rate is going up, and the client never needs to know.

The good news is that business clients like bidding by the project, too. I sell it as, "You know what to budget now. There will not be any additional charges for writing this white paper. You can stick that \$2,500 in your budget line, and you're set."

**NEIL:** It's like anything else. Clients want to know what something is going to cost. They don't care about your hourly rate. They want to know the bottom line. And the more you do something, the better and faster you get, and your hourly rate will increase.

**CAROL:** You'll also want to include the scope of that work in your project bid. I know many copywriters include two revisions in their rate, and then charge an hourly fee.

My policy is, "I write till you're ecstatic."

In fact, I have never written more than two revisions for anybody. I know how to get the information I need from clients to execute their project so they'll love it.

But when I bid, I want them to hear that I'm in it to win it. "You will be happy – I will continue until you are." The fact is, I get so much information out of the client that they usually take the first draft.

And I highly recommend that – get a ton of information so that you can kill it, and you don't end up trapped in a bunch of revisions. Then you can more confidently bid by the project without worrying that maybe you're going to end up not making a good hourly rate.

**NEIL:** Getting the particulars on a project is so important. It's one of those things you just have to do. It's not unreasonable; it's not unprofessional. In fact, it *is* professional.

**CAROL:** Neil and I are just crazy-passionate about writers finding ways to get what they're worth. It makes me nuts when I see people getting hosed because they don't have these negotiating skills.

## ***11. Get it in writing.***

**CAROL:** Understand that if you don't have something in writing, there is no obligation to pay you. Ever.

Get a document that outlines what you will be paid, how they can use your work, when you have to turn it in, and – most important, in my personal viewpoint – *when* you will get paid. A lot of people go wrong with payment clauses.

**NEIL:** Something that happens with freelancers is, you get excited and give away the store because you got the client. Then you look at it and realize, "Oh, jeez, I got screwed on that deal." So, make sure you outline what you're providing and what you'll be paid.

As you get used to doing this, it becomes easy. Get details on everything. If you've got a client you're going to be doing a lot of projects for, get an overview contract that covers

your schedule, your payment schedule, what you'll get, what you'll use, all that. Do it once, it's done, and then define individual projects or extra work as you go.

## ***12. Know your rights.***

**CAROL:** As a freelance writer, it pays to have a working knowledge of copyright and usage rights. Then, when you're negotiating, see if you can retain some resale rights, so you can potentially make more money from that piece of writing.

**NEIL:** Once, I sold a bunch of writing I did for one client to another client. You need to retain your rights to be able to do that.

**CAROL:** One warning: Don't get sucked into business owners' personal stories. So often writers will tell me, "Oh, my God, I love the owner of this business. I quoted her a low rate because she just survived cancer, and... blah, blah, blah, I love this organization's mission."

No. Don't drink the Kool-Aid.

**NEIL:** Absolutely. You're not a nonprofit. You're in business to earn a living, and you've got to get that mindset. And you have to do it right. What if you sold widgets? You'd need to make money on each widget, and being a writer is no different. You need to do the things that'll make your business profitable.

Making money isn't evil. I know a lot of creative types who think it is. They're also the ones with terminal anxiety, wondering how to make ends meet. There's nothing fun about having more month than money. If a writer's always worried they can't do their best work, that's no good.

**CAROL:** As you're working on your initial agreement, think about how you'll ask for a raise. Do a contract that has a 60- to 90-day initial term with an option to renew. That way, you have a natural conversation point two or three months out. "Oh hey, our contract's coming up for renewal. In these past few months, I've gotten to know everything you want me to do, and I've learned tons about your business. Here are my rates if you'd like to renew our contract and continue." You've become more valuable to your client, because they wouldn't want to have to train someone over again, given everything you now know.



Another great time to negotiate a raise is six-to-eight weeks before the end of the year, around November 15th. That's one of my favorite times to tell my clients I need a raise. The secret is to give them lots of notice. On November 15th, you say, "As of next year, my rates will be \$X."

Give them some lead time. It's not going up tomorrow, it's going up six weeks from now, or 60 days from now. I find that's the frog-in-the-hot-water technique, where they back-burner that because they're busy businesspeople. They don't have to act on it immediately, so it can just go off their radar. Later, they decide not to care about it, since finding your replacement would be too much hassle.

The other thing when you ask for a raise is to not shoot too high. I do know writers who have doubled their rates with super-low-paying clients, but that's rare. In general, if you go for a 10- or 15-percent raise, you won't get a lot of pushback. The smaller you go with the raise, the more likely they're just going to say, "Yeah, okay, fine."

A six-month or one-year anniversary is also a good point for talking raises. Or maybe you've worked for this client for ages, and you've never asked for a raise. If so, it's time to ask!

One thing to consider when you bring up a raise is, you have to be ready to walk if they say "no." If they say, "No, we're only willing to pay the old rate," you'll be their dog forever if you agree. Now, they know you have no self-esteem, and you're clearly not doing enough marketing and finding enough good clients where you can pick and choose your best ones. They know you're totally desperate. So, you can't be in that scenario.

How do you avoid this? Be realistic. Don't ask for the raise unless you're ready to leave if you don't get it. Then have a call to action. This is my stock script:

“As you know, it’s been X months since I started writing your newsletter. In that time, my rates have risen for other clients but I’ve kept yours stable, due to our established relationship.

“But, at this point, I won’t be doing client work at this rate in the future. Starting on [date that’s 6-to-8 weeks from now], my new rate will be \$X. Please let me know you agree by sending me your signed copy of the attached, updated contract.”

This is business. Keep it professional. The cost of living keeps going up. You deserve raises.

**NEIL:** Most freelancers seem to forget that milk prices have gone up, and gas prices have gone up – and the price of these items rarely goes down. You should be entitled to a rate that covers your expenses as a freelancer. Don’t be shy about asking for more.

One thing I like to do, as Carol mentioned, is to get with my clients in November or December for an account review. I take them out to lunch or dinner, and we review the year. What went well, I ask, and what can I do better?

Scary? Sure. But, ultimately, it strengthens the relationship. It’s a lot easier to ask for more money when there’s a strong relationship. Plus, if you play your cards right, you can book work for the coming year ... months in advance. How nice is that?

## Q&A

*How do I negotiate rates with an established customer? It’s a publication that pays me \$.09 a word. Do you ask for an increase in percentage, or cents-per-word? I’m also thinking of asking for ad space in a partial barter.*

**CAROL:** The bad news is that publications have a rate they’ll pay. It’s usually a range, so maybe you could get a little more but they’re not going to start paying you \$.50 a word. My reaction is, if they give you a particularly complicated article assignment, I’d ask if I could get more for it.

If they’ve been paying per-word, I’d ask for it per-word, because that’s what they relate to.

The ad-space barter idea is kind of an odd one. It's not a deal I'd ever make. But if you think their ad space would get you in front of potential clients, it may be something to think about. But, in general, this is just a low-paying market, and likely the better answer is to find another market.

*I quoted a project price for brochure copy, and the client responded that he should be able to swing that price but will need me to include some Web copy, as well. Naturally, I said, "Okay." How would you have countered that?*

**CAROL:** Why naturally? What's natural about doing extra work for the same fee? Just refuse to do it. Say, "Yeah, I'd love to do your Web content, and since we're doing the brochure already, I'll do that for you at the discounted rate of \$X."

**NEIL:** Bingo.

**CAROL:** I just did that, with that client I talked about earlier – the one where I was advised to double my bid. They did a tack-on assignment, where they wanted me to do four one-page case studies out of the interviews I did for the big project. I gave them an affordable price on it, since the interviews were already done. But certainly not for free!

The secret is, I made close to \$400 an hour writing them. It was so easy, because I already knew the interviews well, as I had done them so recently. So, I was able to give them a low price, but earned well. When you see an opportunity to do that, do it. You look like a hero, and you're still getting a good rate.

*I'm going through the "I don't have a contract" problem with a client. He keeps telling me what he expects me to do, and I keep saying, "I need it in writing."*

**CAROL:** Just keep saying that until you have a contract. Some people think if they wait long enough, you'll start writing. Or, they're simply disorganized and not getting around to it. Just don't start their project without a signed contract.

**NEIL:** It's a "wearing-down" tactic.

**CAROL:** They're hoping you'll ignore the need for a contract and start writing, and then the door's open for them to forget to pay you. And you'll have no legal recourse if they don't. It's not a good idea.

**NEIL:** Look at these things from an outsider's point of view. Is this reasonable? I'm not sure. Is that reasonable? It may be okay. As freelancers, we tend to get a little too close to our business, and we need to step away a little bit.

### ***How big of an upfront deposit do you ask for?***

**CAROL:** Fifty percent's good. I did 30- or 40-percent on my last one, because I thought they were cool.

### ***What do you figure your taxes?***

**CAROL:** Look at your tax form from last year, figure out what your tax bracket was, and use that as a rough estimate for now.

When you figure taxes into your rate, remember to consider your overhead. A lot of writers don't think in terms of net income. They're thinking, "I'm grossing \$2,000," when, really, they're netting \$1,200. Try to guesstimate the net income figure for federal taxes. State taxes are often figured on gross income, though.

**NEIL:** Everybody makes this mistake when they get into freelancing. They think, "Oh, I've got a \$5,000 gig." But you're not going to net anywhere near that. You've got all this stuff you have to pay for, and then you're left with what? \$2,000? Look at things as a business with income and expenses.

### ***Do you charge for the initial meeting?***

**CAROL:** No. Everybody gets a free half-hour consult with me to get acquainted and define the project. Beyond that, if they want to go on and on about their business, at about 45 minutes in – or an hour, tops – I say, "You know, I would love to brainstorm with you about your branding and positioning and which copywriting projects you should prioritize. I charge \$100 an hour for that. I'm happy to set up a time to come back and do that. But right now, we're here to define this initial project."

Don't let them milk you for hours of free advice in that initial call or meeting. You have to guide them to focus on defining the project they want you to write. You might give them a couple little pieces of your wisdom, to give them a sense of the brainpower you'd



bring to their marketing, but that's it. Then it's time to bring it around to, "What is the project, and what could you pay for it?" The end.

It's often hard to make business clients focus, but you need to control that meeting, or they'll waste hours of your time. I know too many writers who take two-hour initial meetings, only to report that they still don't know what the project is – and now they need to hold *another* meeting! The longer this drags on, the more pregnant you get with this client. When you take four hours of meetings and then they finally reveal they want you to redo their 15-page website for \$200, you're loathe to say no, because you've already invested so much time. Focus on getting to a price conversation quickly, so you can qualify this prospect and move on if they don't have the money to hire a professional writer.

### ***What do you mean by a "call-to-action" on raising rates?***

**CAROL:** Once you tell them your rates are going up on X date, then you need an answer to whether or not they accept that proposed raise. You need to know whether you're dropping this client or keeping them, so you know if you need to be marketing harder and finding a replacement client, if you haven't yet. You want to know your schedule and what your income is going to be.

You don't want to just give them the news that your rates are going up, and then you're left wondering what to do – do I stop working on their account? Do I keep working and bill at the new amount now? Did they agree? That's why you're getting a new signed contract, or an "I agree" on an email, at the least.

### ***If a client signs a contract but hasn't paid me the upfront deposit yet, do I contact them, or let it go?***

**CAROL:** Don't start writing until the payment arrives. Assume it's not going to happen, and that they're flaking out. I would definitely get in touch and remind them that you will begin work as soon as that payment clears your bank account. Meanwhile, keep marketing.

### ***What if a company has a set rate for articles?***

**CAROL:** They're the wrong kind of client.

We don't like clients who only ever pay one price. You can still ask for a raise after working for them for a while. With some publications, you can get a bit more, once you're writing for them regularly. But it probably won't be a lot.

***What if you ask for something upfront and they say, "No," and they only want to pay on completion?***

**CAROL:** Then you have to decide if you're willing to take that client. Many freelance writers have a policy of not taking new business clients without an upfront deposit. Publications have a set pay schedule and don't pay upfront. It's hard to get them to pay other than on acceptance or on publication.

But I've negotiated that, too. I had one super-slow-paying magazine. They took six-to-eight months from when I turned it in, and that's if my article didn't get bounced from the planned issue to a future issue. It was absurd. I liked to call it the "half-past when the Messiah comes" payment plan.

I finally negotiated to get 50-percent of the article fee when I turned in the draft. That way, I was only waiting forever for half the fee. That's something you can do with annoying publications. But we consider it a real red flag if a business client will not pay anything upfront. It means they don't "get" how freelancing works.

**NEIL:** Often, they're not going to pay on the back end, or at best, they're going to be a headache to collect from.

**CAROL:** It's so much risk for you. You're putting in 100-percent of the risk. You're going to write the whole project and then hope they pay you? That's not a sane approach for running a successful, profitable freelance business, because, often as not, they're going to screw you. Some clients who say they'll only pay on completion are going to screw you. Just trust us.

When we did our survey for the Freelance Business Bootcamp live course, roughly 40-percent of the writers surveyed said they've had a client fail to pay them. It's common. We find that getting an upfront deposit screens out the kind of clients who are most likely to stiff you.

**NEIL:** Sarah Horowitz is the founder and executive director of the [Freelancer's Union](#) – they're a great resource on fair treatment of freelancers. You would not believe how many people have been screwed over by their clients. They have legal advice and sample

contracts – even some healthcare, retirement, and dental plans for freelancers, depending on where you're located.

### ***Any tips for keeping a client on schedule, to keep the original budget workable?***

**CAROL:** I wish I could talk to your client and make them be less dysfunctional, but I can't. What you can do is build precise terms into your contract that define your project and who is required to do what, so that, if they don't fulfill their end of it, you don't have to fulfill your end of it.

**NEIL:** Then, once you have that contract, stick to it.

**CAROL:** As a matter of fact, that \$2,000 rush contract I mentioned had a term limit. It said, "By Friday, I will deliver X. If you don't get your act together and I can't write it by then, this contract's over." And they had given me an \$800 deposit. So, they were motivated to get their background materials to me, and be available for the interviews I needed.

What I tend to do with clients who don't keep to the contract schedule is present them with options. I say, "You know, that expert you required me to talk to is not getting back to me, so I'm doubtful about meeting your deadline. Do you want to put me with someone else, or do you maybe want to ding the guy and get him to respond to me? Or does this deadline need to move out a week? Let me know how you'd like to move forward."

One tip is to give them a lot of notice that it's not working. Don't wait until the deadline and then complain that you didn't get what you needed.

### ***What about clients who expect to have access to me all the time?***

**CAROL:** If you have clients who are boundary pushers who want you 24/7, stop responding. Don't be available. Don't answer your phone. Don't answer your email.

Let them know you pick up email three times a day, and you'll get back to them at 9:00, noon, and 4:00, and that's all. Don't be on Skype with them, or set your status there to "away." You can train clients about when you're available. They may not like it, but they will figure it out. Also, if they're the kind who wants you 24/7 and you don't want that, decide if you want to keep that client.

**NEIL:** We tend to get absorbed with the client's life, and maybe we feel they're nice people. So we bend our rules about our availability, and then it generally ends up biting us in the butt. Don't do that.

*I work odd hours but don't want to give my clients the impression I'm always available.*

**CAROL:** That's a good instinct. You've got to watch out about responding to emails at 9:00 p.m., or on Saturday. Because that trains your clients to expect a response from you at 9:00 p.m., or on Saturday or Sunday...and then they want a response 24/7 and get cranky if it's two hours until you do. You want to avoid this.

The fact is, there are a lot of pushy, needy people in this world who will take advantage if you don't define working hours. Run your business the way you want it to operate, and define your policies and how you operate.

**NEIL:** That doesn't mean they're bad people or bad clients. It's just that you need to have boundaries.

**CAROL:** A lot of people don't have appropriate, professional boundaries. They have unhealthy boundaries, and they just want to get-get-get from you. They want to see what-all they can get for their money.

**NEIL:** Usually, they're not even aware of it. Say, "I'm available Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (or whatever it is), period." If they call at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, you're not going to answer the phone.

**CAROL:** Don't be paranoid that you have to be available to clients all the time or they'll drop you. On that \$2,000 rush project I was doing, there was a lot of pressure on, and when we hit that Friday, a few things were still outstanding. I said, "I'm willing to let this hang over and work on it Monday, but I need to tell you that I'm shomer Shabbos. That means I'm an observant Jew, and I don't work on Saturday. You will not be able to reach me at all. I'm off the computer, off the phone. I don't conduct business." And they said, "Okay, we'll get it to you Sunday."

You can train people about when you're available. It's best to get a feel for how the relationship will work in terms of your availability during initial conversations with clients. At this point, I have a rule that I automatically say "no" to any new prospect who emails me at a bizarre time. If they email me at 10:00 p.m. on Saturday night to ask if I

could write for them, I already know they're not a client I want. They're going to want me 24/7, and I don't want to do client work nights and weekends.

**NEIL:** There's nothing wrong with saying, "These are my boundaries." That's okay. Carol and I are giving you express permission. Because they will push you for everything they can get.

### ***It seems really different from car-sales negotiating. Can you explain how?***

**NEIL:** There's a difference between selling a physical product and selling consulting or services. Those are two different things. The traditional car-sales model is aggressive and pushy. It's where the salesman tells the client what happens.

Consultative selling is a win-win model. That's what we need to do as freelancers. We come up with something that works for us and for the client. You sit down and hash it out.

### ***Do you take competing clients?***

**CAROL:** If my contract allows me to do so, absolutely. At one point, I was writing for both *Forbes* and *Entrepreneur*, for instance, and I've written for competing trade publications, too.

Generally, your freelance clients don't own you, like they would if you were an employee. They can't control where else you can work, unless you let them do that, contractually, with a "non-compete" clause. If your client does want a non-compete, try your best to define it narrowly – ideally, with names of specific competitors you can't write for, so that you're free to write for everyone else but their archrivals.

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