

# EARN MORE IN LESS TIME

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THE PROVEN MINDSET,  
STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO

**PROSPER AS A  
FREELANCE WRITER**

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# Earn More in Less Time:

## The Proven Mindset, Strategies and Actions to Prosper as a Freelance Writer

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# Introduction

Freelancing can be one of the most rewarding professional paths you could ever take as a writer or copywriter.

It can enable you to earn a very handsome income doing work you love for clients who value your expertise.

It can also give you a level of freedom you never had as an employee: the ability to set your own schedule, take time off, make adjustments to match your changing needs, and do work that's creatively rewarding and pays well.

But freelancing can also become a nightmare. When left unchecked, it can quickly turn into a 60-hour-per-week "job" with no flexibility, vacations or creative freedom.

What separates writers who enjoy a lucrative and fulfilling business from those who struggle and burn out?

It boils down to three things. It's about:

- 1) Adopting the right mindset
- 2) Following the right strategies
- 3) Taking the right actions consistently

Mindset is the foundation. It's how you think about yourself, your value, your clients, the work you do and the opportunities available to you.

Strategies set the course for your business. Some strategies enable you to get 10x the results from the same effort. Others will only lead to frustration and burnout, regardless of how hard you work.

Action is where the rubber meets the road. You can have the best mindset and strategies. But if you don't take the right actions consistently, you won't get positive results.

In the pages that follow, I'll share some of the mindset shifts you'll need to make, the strategies you'll want to adopt, and the actions you'll need to take consistently to prosper as a freelance writer or copywriter. This is some of the same material I use when coaching six-figure writers on how to earn more in less time.

Which brings me to my last point. You'll notice that the intent of this book is **not** to show you how to earn a six-figure income or how to grow that income further, if you're already at that level. If that's your goal, wonderful.

The key to achieving real prosperity as a freelance writer is **learning how to earn more in less time**. It's the ability to maximize what you earn for every unit of effort you put into your business.

Because when you know how to do that, you'll be able to dial things up or down so they work optimally for YOU as your life and your goals change. You'll be able to create a business that enables you to live the lifestyle YOU want.

That, to me, is the real definition of prosperity. *That's* real freedom.

# Part One: Mindset

I talk a lot about mindset in my coaching programs, with good reason.

It's not about improving performance (although that's part of it). It's about recognizing the latent value that already exists inside of you.

You have more to give than you know. And when you address mindset head-on — repeatedly — you start to recognize that value.

I'm not immune to underestimating my value, which is another reason why I talk about it so much. It's a way to remind myself while also reminding others.

So as you read through this section on mindset, know that I'm not trying to make you "better" than you are. I'm not trying to transform or fundamentally change you.

What I'm trying to do is help you uncover your hidden potential — to help you see what you're leaving on the table every day and every week.

Because when you start to uncover your value . . . little by little . . . you'll deliver more value to clients.

And (more importantly) you'll have a better life and business.

## What Are You Saying About Your Business?

Watch what you say about your business. Because what you say can become your reality.

Say you hit a rough patch, and you keep saying to your friends, family, peers — and to yourself — that business is drying up.

When you say this, you're training your brain to look for signs that it is true.

And guess what happens? You find lots of evidence.

But here's the problem: having this focus blinds you to solutions! It stops you from seeing ways out of this rough patch because you've instructed your subconscious to keep confirming your current state.

You might find this idea a bit “woo-woo.” I get that. But what’s the risk of changing your internal script? What do you have to lose by switching from “business has dried up” to “I’m working my way out of a rough patch”?

I’m not saying you should ignore reality. I’m merely suggesting that it can’t hurt to shift your focus from the problem to the solution.

Because one thing’s for sure: dwelling on the problem alone is not going to solve anything.

## Micro Gratitude Moments

Having your own business is the best self-improvement program on earth.

Freelancing (in whatever form you do it) has self-improvement baked into it. Because everything is up to you. There’s no one there to pick up the slack. In order for your business to improve, you have to improve.

One of the areas in which I feel I’ve improved tremendously since being out on my own is gratitude. There’s something about being a business owner that makes you much more aware of all the blessings in your life.

You don’t take as much for granted as others do. You’re more grateful and you express that gratitude more often. (At least that’s been my experience.)

At the same time, we’re often so busy running our business that we forget to appreciate the little things, such as:

- A roof over our heads
- Clean water
- Living in a safe neighborhood
- Our health
- Not having to worry about where our next meal will come from
- Money in the bank
- Not having to report to a boss we can’t stand
- Fresh air
- The ability to take the afternoon off because it’s finally nice outside

We have so many things to be grateful for!

So here’s what I urge you to do. Close your eyes and think of three things you’re grateful for, even if they’re small. Feel the gratitude.

And then as you go about your day, catch yourself doing things that you probably take for granted. Take two seconds to give thanks.

Give thanks when you open the fridge. When you set the thermostat. When you get a drink of clean water. When you hug your children, your partner or a friend. When you send off an email to someone on the other side of the country. When you turn on the ignition in your car.

The more you're grateful, the happier you'll be. You'll experience less stress. And you'll be more aware of what's going right in your world, rather than what's not going the way you'd want.

## The Cost of Perfection

You're ambitious.

You want to do the best you can.

And you want a great business and a great life.

But that kind of ambition also typically comes with a certain degree of perfectionism. You want to do great work – always.

And you expect a lot from yourself. It's hard to let go of a project, a bit of copy or an idea that doesn't feel like it's 100% there.

But sometimes that's just what you need to do. Because there's a big difference between the pursuit of excellence and perfectionism.

Pursuing excellence is a process of continuous improvement. You understand that you never really "arrive." You're always striving to be and to do a little better.

It's the pursuit itself that brings joy. You're on a journey full of adventure and unexpected twists and turns, which makes you happy.

In other words, your happiness isn't tied to reaching a certain metric or destination. It's baked into the journey.

Perfectionism, on the other hand, is a hopeless pursuit. You'll only be happy once you get to a specific (and usually arbitrary) goal or outcome.

When you strip perfectionism down, you can see it's a form of fear. You tell yourself that you're worthy only when you achieve some arbitrary outcome.

If you don't measure up, then something about you is broken. And the only way to fix it is to strive for even more perfection in your work.

But this only makes it worse.

The first step to fixing something is awareness. Which is why understanding where perfectionism comes from is important.

There's a huge cost to perfectionism. And it's not worth it.

## Your Anthem

2004 was a pivotal year in my writing business. That's when I made a serious effort to get the business off the ground and start prospecting for clients.

It wasn't easy. I was working 55- and 60-hour weeks in my day job. I was a new dad. And I was doing my best to keep it all together.

Looking back at that difficult year, I often wonder how I was able to stay focused and motivated despite all the obstacles.

There were several factors that helped. For one, I wanted desperately to get out of the corporate sales cycle (never-ending sales quotas, increased travel, high stress).

I also yearned to have my own business. It was one of my big five-year goals.

My wife was also incredibly patient and supportive. She continued to encourage me and give me the space and flexibility I needed to get things moving.

But there was something else that kept me going, especially during the late nights and weekend work sessions.

It was John Meyer's song, "Bigger Than My Body." And it was my "anthem" during those challenging first years.

Here's the chorus:

Someday I'll fly, someday I'll soar

Someday I'll be so damn much more

Cause I'm bigger than my body gives me credit for

Cause I'm bigger than my body now

I felt as if Meyer was talking about me.



I had big dreams. Big goals. And I was working my tail off. But my results weren't (yet) as big as my aspirations.

And I wanted to tell the world, "You just wait and see!"

That song really kept me going those first few years. I listened to it three or four times a week. Especially when I was discouraged and needed a reminder that all that hard work and sacrifice was worth it.

It played a big role in my eventual success.

Even today, it inspires me to do my best. To go after big, important goals and to stay the course when things aren't going so well.

I still get goosebumps every time I play it.

So ... what's YOUR anthem?

It doesn't matter what stage of business growth you're in right now. I picked mine when I was getting started. But you can pick one anytime. Because it really helps to have a song you can turn to for encouragement and inspiration.

Something that speaks to you when you're down and helps you get back on your feet.

## When You're Stuck at the Bottom

Your business starts to slow down. At first, you're not worried. But it keeps getting worse.

And before you know it, you're down to almost no work.

You're not sure why it happened. Everything had been going great for months — even years. And suddenly everything aligned the wrong way.

One client went away. Another is in limbo because your main contact left the company. Another client put your projects on hold. And other prospects are now ghosting you.

You work night and day to search for clients. You leave no stone unturned. You make prospecting your full-time job for two, three or four weeks. And still nothing.

It's like the Twilight Zone!

At some point in this rough patch, it's common to start questioning everything and drawing conclusions.

"Nothing's working!" you tell yourself. "It's like I'm cursed."

It certainly feels that way – especially if most of your colleagues seem to be doing fine.

I recently had a coaching client tell me that his last 12 prospect opportunities all either ghosted him, decided to work with someone else or decided not to move forward with the work.

We're talking 12 very qualified prospects with well-defined projects and budgets.

I mean... what do you say to that, right?

Yet it's during these challenging and desperate moments that you have to be most careful with what you tell yourself. Because the internal conversation you have with yourself has an effect on your results.

If you tell yourself you're doomed, you continue to get poor results. Which creates even more anxiety and desperation.

When you hit this kind of bottom, you have to disengage for a bit. Get out of your environment. Clear your head. And give the problem to the Universe to solve.

You've done all you can. And yes, there will be more to do. I'm not suggesting the work ends here. But when you're definitely stuck at the bottom, solving this problem is now above your pay grade.

Take it off your shoulders. Give it to a higher power. Go do something fun (I mean... you now have the free time to do so!), and trust that the solutions and the results will come.

Because they always do.

Oh, and about that coaching client who lost those 12 opportunities... after two months of struggle, he's now busier than he's ever been. He even had to bring in another writer to help him with the workload!

## Standing in the Middle of the Storm

We wrestle with emotions multiple times a day.

Very often, this is a real struggle. And the way we tend to deal with these emotions is the same way we talk about them:

I am angry.

I am anxious.

I am afraid.

By saying “I am,” we’re telling ourselves that the emotion is part of us. That it defines us and who we are.

But that’s not true. We are not our emotions. We might be dealing with a powerful emotion. But that emotion is not who we are.

Think of a lightning storm, with thunder, heavy rain and strong winds.

You can either choose to be outside in the middle of that storm ... or you can choose to be inside, looking at that storm through our living room window.

I don’t know about you, but I’d rather be inside looking out, in awe of the storm as I sip a delicious cup of coffee.

I’ve been out in that storm. It’s no fun. I’ve spent way too much time in it, struggling, getting beat down, soaking wet ... and not realizing that I can just come inside the house, dry off and just observe it from the comfort of my living room.

We have a choice. We don’t have to wrestle with that storm. It’s not part of us — it’s outside of us.

## Certificates of Appreciation

My grandfather Jorge was an entrepreneur at heart.

Like me, he just wasn’t wired to work for someone else. He wanted to make his own way. So he and his brother opened a car repair business in the early 1950s.

He loved this work so much that he eventually went out entirely on his own to launch his own auto parts distribution business.

While he had an incredible knowledge of auto parts, his biggest talent was his ability to develop great rapport and relationships with others.

He was one of the nicest people you’ve ever met. The kind of guy you loved being around. His personality was magnetic. And his customers loved him.

On top of that, he took pride in delivering amazing service to his customers. If something went wrong – say a customer was delivered the wrong part – he’d make it right in a heartbeat.

We take that kind of service for granted now, but back then that kind of service was not the standard.

I was lucky enough to have spent a lot of time with my grandfather growing up. And one of the things he taught me – directly and indirectly – is that providing a valuable service to your customers is a noble thing.

Serving others by adding value to their businesses is something you should be proud of and get paid for.

I was recently reminded of this while reading the book *Thou Shall Prosper* by Daniel Lapin. Lapin calls every dollar you earn a “certificate of appreciation” from your client.

You’re exchanging value for value. And that’s a beautiful thing. You’re contributing to the betterment of someone else’s life, which means you’re contributing to the betterment of humanity.

But the reason I needed that reminder is that I find it easy to lose sight of this idea, especially today.

My observation – as a student of culture, politics, communications and human behavior – is that these age-old ideas of hard work, service, ingenuity and success are under attack. And they have been for quite some time.

The narrative I’m hearing more and more these days is that capitalism is a severely flawed system. That it breeds income inequality, racism and corporate greed.

And in that context, it’s hard to think of every dollar you earn a “certificate of appreciation” from your client.

As your success grows, it’s not uncommon to start feeling guilty about that success. You might not feel worthy of it. It can feel unearned, as if somehow you lucked into it all.

There’s no doubt that there is income inequality. There is racism. There is corporate greed. There is evil in this world. It’s all very troubling. I think about this quite a bit.

But I want to pose two ideas to you. First, capitalism is not a zero-sum game. When you provide a valuable service, you’re making the world a better place. You’re making someone else’s life easier. And the “pie” gets larger when you do this. You’re not splitting the pie into more slices.

Second, we can accept the fact that all those wrongs and inequities exist ... yet still feel proud of a job well done. Proud of the progress you're making in your businesses and with your financial success.

These are not mutually exclusive ideas.

Capitalism is not perfect – not at all. It has many flaws and dangerous side effects when left unchecked. We've all seen the dark side of this model.

But I've yet to see another economic model that has worked universally as well as the idea that every dollar you earn providing a valuable service is a "certificate of appreciation" from your client.

You, my friend, make the world a better place by offering your talents in the marketplace.

And when you do better for yourself, not only are you making other people's lives better, you have an even greater capability to contribute to the betterment of humanity.

So be proud of what you're doing. There's no reason to feel guilt or shame for your efforts and your resulting success. You're helping to make the pie bigger and other people's lives better.

## I Can't Do That

I've spent most of my life saying, "I can't do that" (or some version of "I can't") to myself.

I can't charge more.

I can't offer that type of service.

I'm not qualified to help clients with their strategy.

I'm just not good at sports.

I don't have the personality to succeed in sales.

I can't afford a nicer house.

And the thing is, none of those things are true!

I bet you do the same to yourself. We all do.

And we make ourselves feel better by offering some justification as to why we can't.

So my advice today is very simple.

Start catching those “I can’t” thoughts.

When you catch yourself, ask, “What’s my justification for not being able to do that? What’s the story I’m telling myself?”

And then consider...what if that’s all a big fat lie? What if your lizard brain is just trying to keep you safe in your warm, dry cave?

Here’s a hint: it is a big fat lie. All of it.

Look, if the thing you’re saying you can’t do is something you’re not interested in doing, that’s fine. No harm done.

But if it’s something you really want to do, you need to start telling yourself a different story. Because possibilities will only emerge when you change the story.

That’s when the smart workarounds and great ideas will surface. It’s when you’ll see how you can get around the obstacles you thought were too much to overcome.

Will the “I can’ts” ever stop? Not really.

But the less weight you give those instinctual thoughts, the better you’ll get at calling them what they are: BS.

And the better you’ll be at finding good solutions.

## Detaching Emotionally from Outcomes

Do you know what’s truly liberating in this business? It’s getting to a place where you’re not emotionally attached to a yes or no from prospects.

Here’s what that looks like:

You have a discovery call and qualify the prospect well.

If they’re a fit, you put together the best solution. Then you send them your proposal. You explain your value and differentiators. You lay out how you could help them meet their objectives.

And then you let it go.

In other words, you detach yourself emotionally from getting a yes or no.

Detaching yourself emotionally doesn't mean you don't follow up with the prospect. You do, of course. But because you're not emotionally tied to the results, you don't do it a scattered or desperate way.

And that, my friend, is freedom!

Having a good cash flow and being in a strong financial position make it easier to detach yourself emotionally from the outcome. But this isn't a money thing. It's a mindset thing. And it's something you can work towards.

The idea is to set up systems and processes that will make it easier for you to detach emotionally from the outcome of your proposals.

Because the minute you feel you have to land an opportunity, you put yourself at a disadvantage.

## Consumed by the Process

For many years, I practiced a goal-setting approach that centers on the outcome.

The basic idea was to start with a vision, translate that vision into a goal, and then break down that goal into smaller goals (or milestones), followed by the specific actions you'd need to take to reach those milestones.

This was a deeply engrained paradigm. It started in high school, continued through college, my career in corporate sales, and even many years into my freelancing business.

But a few years ago, I began to notice that many challenges aren't straightforward and don't lend themselves to setting goals, such as reaching a specific sales number for the year. Or landing X number of clients next quarter. Or reaching a specific body weight or body mass metric by a certain date.

That's when I shifted my goal-setting system to focus on process and not outcomes. And suddenly, many of the goals that had eluded me finally started to manifest.

There's a great little book on this topic called *The Practicing Mind* by Thomas M. Sterner. It argues that focusing on the process is way more productive than focusing on the outcome. And a key part of this approach is maintaining emotional detachment from the outcome.

This is a Buddhist philosophy that resonates very strongly with me. Here's an excerpt from the book:

I once read an interview with a coach for the U.S. Olympic archery team. He commented that the biggest problem he faced in coaching the American team was that they were fixated on their scores, or the result of their shots. It was as if they were drawing the bow and releasing the arrow only to hit the bull's-eye and earn a good score. This was in contrast to the Asian teams, who, having grown up in different cultures, were consumed in the process of properly executing the technique that led up to releasing the shot. Where the arrow hit the target was almost unimportant compared to the motion of drawing the bow correctly and releasing the shot. They viewed the result with an almost detached indifference. For them, the desired goal was a natural result of prioritizing the proper technique of drawing the bow. They operated in a completely different paradigm, and because of it, they were very difficult to beat.

Look, making the kind of improvements you're trying to make in your business is not easy. It can't be simplified into a formula. I can help you narrow the options for getting there. I can show you what to avoid and what strategies, techniques and actions will most likely get you there.

But there's no guarantee that what I'll teach you or coach you through will work. All I can do is help you to greatly increase your chances of success. And I'll be there alongside you to cheer you on, support you, and help you course-correct along the way.

The best thing you can do is obsesses over the process rather than the outcome. Because I know with every fiber of my being that if you can commit to daily consistency... to the process... to doing what you know you need to do and making smart adjustments as you go... you'll get what you want. Or better.

## What's Your Free Time Worth?

How much is your free time worth?

I'm not talking about your internal hourly rate. I'm talking about your personal time. Time for relaxing and reading. Time to spend with your family or go for a hike.

I would guess that this time is easily worth twice as much as your internal hourly rate in your business.



So when you're deciding what personal tasks you can outsource to others — tasks that you don't enjoy — start by comparing the costs of outsourcing with twice your internal hourly rate.

This can give you some perspective and make the decision easier.

But what if you don't have the money to outsource all this work?

I get it. This may not be something you can do all at once. But you can at least start by budgeting and allocating a higher percentage of your income to outsourcing or delegating some tasks.

Start with one little thing. Because once you start enjoying the benefits of outsourcing, you start seeing the possibilities.

And you'll start to prioritize it even more.

## Your Ideal Workday

Think about your typical workday. How much control do you have over what you do and when you do it?

And when you think about each day, do you feel energized, excited, happy and anxious to get to it?

Or do you feel drained, stressed, unhappy, worried or depressed?

Having coached nearly 1,000 solo professionals, I've found that two of the biggest sources of happiness are:

- 1) Having control over our schedule
- 2) Doing work that's interesting, challenging and engaging

Given the choice, many of us would gladly trade some of our income for more control and doing work we truly enjoy.

Yet when I talk with writers and content marketers, most of them feel under the gun to meet deadlines and take meetings. Their weeks are stressful and filled with work they dislike.

In fact, many have less freedom and flexibility than they did when traditionally employed! They feel like they've created a horrible "job" for themselves, and it sits heavy on them.

One trick that helps me with this problem is to start with the end in mind. I get crystal clear on what my ideal day looks like by writing out an hour-by-hour description of that day.

I write down what I'll do first, what I'll do after that, and so on. I include how I'll feel and what I'll be thinking at each moment. I allow myself to dream big and have fun with this exercise. Nothing's too unrealistic. I imagine and create what I want to be real. And I get emotionally involved in the process.

In fact, I create three different versions of this "perfect day." I write one for a typical "production" day, then one for a typical "buffer" day, and another for a typical "free" day. I also review and update these descriptions at least once a quarter.

This practice has worked remarkably well for me. It helps me make sure that each day brings joy and freedom instead of drudgery.

So, here's my challenge for you: set a timer for 10 minutes and write up a description of your ideal production day. Allow your imagination to run free. Have fun with it!

You might be surprised by what your ideal day actually looks like ... and how it compares to your current typical day.

## Stop Worrying About Low-Cost Writers

One of the worst things you can do as a freelance professional is to obsess over low-cost providers. It's not good for your mental health.

Yes, it's normal to worry sometimes about discount writers here or overseas. Or you might be concerned about content marketing firms that sell bargain-basement packages.

I get it. It's frustrating to see the commoditization of content marketing and copywriting.

But it's an inevitable trend. And the worst thing you can do is stew over something you have no control over. Instead, your time is much better spent focusing on improving your business.

Let me illustrate with a metaphor.

Think of a fine dining restaurant that you love. A restaurant that you go to once, or maybe twice, a year on special occasions.

Does the restaurant owner worry that there's a McDonald's located just a few blocks away?

Of course not. This restaurant is in a totally different category. It's not competing with McDonald's.

So think of yourself as a fine dining establishment that creates great value for your clients. If you worry that you're going after the same prospects as low-cost providers who are charging 80-90% less, then it's time to rethink your target market and your positioning.

Create a distinction between yourself and low-cost providers by your positioning and the value you deliver.

Make this distinction clear to your prospects and clients. Otherwise, they'll think that you're all the same.

## I'm the Guy You Call When...

A few years ago, I listened to an interview with Tony Robbins, the well-known business strategist and motivational speaker. He talked about the people he works with one on one.

These are people at the highest levels of society and industry. People who can contact his office and get a call back from him within a few hours.

In that interview, he talked about how he defines the value he brings to his clients. And that conversation has stayed with me all these years.

Tony expressed the value he delivers to clients using a specific format. Here are a couple of examples he used (and I'm paraphrasing):

"I'm the guy you call when you're a pro athlete, a big match is coming up, you've lost your swing — and you need to fix it fast."

"I'm the guy you call when your personal life is a wreck. Your marriage is collapsing. Your son is in the hospital from a near drug overdose. And you need to get your life on track immediately."

This got me thinking about how I define and express the value I bring to my clients. It would be something like:

“I’m the guy you call when you’re an established high-income writer on the verge of burnout. Your work brings you little joy and you have no time for yourself and the people you love.”

The format is essentially this:

“I’m the [guy/gal] that [your audience] calls when [expensive problem].”

Here’s another example:

“I’m the guy you call when you’re a healthcare marketer who’s tired of working with writers who only take orders and deliver a subpar product.”

Try coming up with your own “I’m the guy/gal...” value statement.

Use it as a guidepost to have better conversations with prospects and write more persuasive copy.

## Clients Under Pressure

You’re working on a quote for a large project. And when you tally everything up, you realize it’s a BIG number.

Big, as in “I’ve never quoted anything this high before!”

What will be your first emotion? Probably, fear.

Fear that you’re out of your league. Fear that the client will laugh in your face or feel insulted by such a big number.

So what do you do? You probably let fear take over and cut the number down to something more “reasonable.” (Whatever that means!)

Sound familiar?

Here’s the thing: your clients are under just as much pressure as you are. You’re under pressure to land the project, sure.

But your clients feel pressure to get that white paper, annual report or massive website copy overhaul done! If they say no to you, they might need to start their search for a writer all over again.

Maybe they don’t have a backup. Or maybe the other two writers they’ve talked to aren’t as qualified as you are.

Saying no to you could seriously delay or jeopardize the project. And the better you've qualified them... the better the relationship you have... the more you know about their situation and timing... the more leverage you have.

Take ALL of these factors into account when you price the project. Quote what the work is worth. Think in terms of value, not just time. Think in terms of what you bring to the table, and what's important to the client.

Quote something you'll be happy with if you land the deal — not something you'll regret if you get a "yes."

Because you're not the only one under pressure. The client is under pressure too.

## A Different Kind of Debt

Here's a definition of financial debt that I really like: When you take on debt, you're borrowing from the future.

But not too long ago, I realized there's another kind of debt that many of us don't take advantage of. You'd probably agree that you're wiser now than you were a year ago. You've learned a few lessons. You've pushed yourself and enjoyed a mix of failures and successes. And hopefully that's made you better and wiser.

So wouldn't it be great if you could borrow some of the wisdom you'll have NEXT year... and use it today?

I know this idea sounds like a mere thought exercise. But it does have a practical application. Take 20 minutes today to journal on this question:

What would my future self (a year from today) tell me if it could call them up?  
What advice and wisdom would I share with myself?

And then ask yourself: what can I do today and this week to start applying that wisdom?

Sound silly? Maybe. But you have nothing to lose by trying this out. You don't have to pay it back. It's risk-free.

Which makes this the perfect kind of debt!

## What Paul Rand Told Steve Jobs

There's a story I've come across a few times, most recently in the excellent book *Essentialism* by Greg McKewon.

When Steve Jobs was looking for a logo for his company NeXT, he turned to renowned graphic designer Paul Rand, who was known for his work on the logos of IBM, UPS, Westinghouse and other famous brands.

Jobs asked Rand to come up with a few options for the NeXT logo. But Rand said no. He told Jobs, "I don't work that way." And then he added, "I will solve your problem the best way I know how. And you will pay me. You don't have to use my solution. And if you want other options, go talk to other people. That's up to you."

Jobs ended up hiring Rand, who did indeed solve the problem by creating the perfect logo for NeXT.

There's a very powerful lesson in this story. When you know how you can help your clients solve their problems ... and why you do what you do so well ... you need to stand your ground.

You need to have a set of standards and stick to them, even if you might lose a prospect or client. Because every time you bend, you lose the respect of good clients.

So, when a prospect wants a one-off project — and you don't do one-offs — you explain that you work differently. Your model is to partner with clients who are looking for a higher-value resource, not an order taker.

Each and every one of us has the choice to work the way we want to work — at least to a greater extent than we are now. But instead we talk about "can't" and "shouldn't."

When you start thinking the way Paul Rand did, you start seeing possibilities for your business. You get clarity about where you need to go, which will drive your daily decisions and behavior. Which, in turn, will generate better and better results for you.

## Think Bigger and Better When Quoting Fees

What is the going rate for a drip email campaign?

There's no easy answer here. The traditional approach is to say you'll write three emails for \$1,000, for example, and leave it at that.

But consider what the drip campaign is promoting. Could this be a good opportunity to inject a bit of value-based element into your pricing?

A better approach is to say you'll craft a drip campaign consisting of X, Y, and Z, designed to get X result. You'll work with the client to design the campaign, the best strategy and call to action. You'll advise on other elements to consider that will help boost results. You'll work with them to analyze results and make adjustments as needed.

Your fee for doing that is X.

See the difference?

## Sell Yourself First

Some writers hesitate to reach out to prospects and clients and offer to help with writing projects. They fear they'll come across as greedy, insensitive or out of touch.

If you boil it down, this fear reveals a lot about how you perceive the value of your services. Because if you truly saw the value in your services, you wouldn't hesitate to offer them.

But if you can't sell yourself on the idea that you make the lives and businesses of your clients better, you won't be able to sell them on the idea either.

I know this because I've spent the majority of my life in sales. As a kid, I ran a candy store out of my garage. Before I graduated from college, I sold computers in a retail store. And before that, I sold water and air filters. As a sales professional, I sold fire hydrants, sewer pipe, professional IT services and software.

And one of the most important lessons I learned from these experiences is this: you have to believe in what you're selling.

It doesn't matter if you're selling sewer pipe or content marketing services. And you know what? I know that you offer more value to clients than you give yourself credit for. But there's a good possibility that you discount your work as "nothing."

How do you break out of that belief cycle? Here is one simple way: take some time and do a quick inventory of all the clients you've worked with over the years.

Think about what you did for them and how you helped.

Reflect on all the accolades you have received. The testimonials. The clients that kept coming back. And while you're at it, take a couple of minutes to think about how far you've come in your business. See how high you've climbed.

Enjoy that moment. Let it sink in. Rejoice in the fact that at one point, you never thought you'd be where you are today.

Believe in what you are doing. Recognize the value you deliver. Sell yourself first.

Only then can you approach prospects and clients with confidence ... and stand a chance of earning their business.

## You've Paid the Price

Have you ever completed a project so quickly and efficiently that you felt guilty charging the client the fixed fee you quoted upfront?

This isn't uncommon. I've struggled with it more than once.

So what should you do when it happens? First, try to understand where that guilt is coming from. For many of us, it comes from our background and upbringing. In the U.S., this mindset is often a remnant of the Protestant work ethic. Getting something without putting in a "fair" share of work was considered a sin.

There's nothing wrong with hard work, of course. And I'm not suggesting that you try to get something for nothing.

But you should also recognize that hard work and the value you deliver don't always happen at the same time. Often, the hard work — the blood, sweat and tears — happens way before you deliver the client project.

Remember all those years where you cut your teeth on bad clients and low fees? You've learned a ton since then. And the knowledge, experience and perspective you acquired are what allows you to deliver a ton of value to clients with a lot less effort.

But remember: you already paid the price. You put in the work. So, no — whatever you do, do NOT discount your fee when this happens.

Get out of that time-for-money thinking. Because your real value isn't in your time. It's contained in the sum of everything you've done to get to this place.



## Ask These Powerful Questions When Pricing Client Projects

A few years ago, I shifted my thinking on how I price my work. And it's had a huge impact on the growth of my business and income.

For most of my writing career, I would ask myself the following question when quoting projects:

"What number is high enough to make this project worth my while — but low enough for the client to say yes?"

That construct worked for a long time. I grew my business and even broke six figures applying that mindset. But a few years ago, I was completely burned out. I was working all the time.

I was also getting bolder. I'd tried a few new things in my business that had once felt a little risky ... and they worked.

So, I started taking a different approach to my pricing. And that made all the difference. Rather than starting with the lowest possible number and adding incremental amounts to it, I asked myself these questions:

"What number would make me really happy? What number would make me feel like I can take my time with this project and deliver an amazing product?"

Don't get me wrong. It's not like I did shoddy work before. But you know what it's like to get the job for a number that, in hindsight, was too low. It can be torture!

Do you know what happened when I started asking myself this question? Most of my clients said yes!

I don't know if it's because I felt good about that number. Or if it's because the number was right. I just know I was getting to yes. Not with everyone, but with enough clients that I knew I was onto something.

This is a mindset more than a pricing formula. But that's where you have to start. Because only then can you make the lasting improvements you need to get to where you want to go.

## Selling with Your Wallet

A coaching client of mine recently quoted a brochure project for a client. This wasn't your typical brochure. It was a specialized, story-based piece of marketing for a \$25 million property.

My coaching client proposed some new ideas that her client really liked. Then they got to the money discussion.

My client had about \$2,000 in mind. But she didn't say that. Instead, she stuck to the process I taught her and asked the client for his budget. He replied that he could pay up to \$3,000 for the piece.

What happened here? Well, this writer was pricing the project in her head based on:

- What she felt was reasonable
- What she's gotten for this kind of work in the past
- What she felt the client might be able to pay
- What she felt comfortable quoting.

That's how she arrived at \$2,000. But that's "her wallet." She was selling as if she were the client.

But she's NOT the client. The client was thinking bigger. The client lives in a world where he's marketing multimillion-dollar properties to very wealthy individuals. And having a marketing piece that would increase the chances that the right buyer would come and pay his asking price ... what's that worth to him?

My point is this: the way you view the world, your business, and your value isn't the way everyone views it. And when you come across a client or prospect who's thinking bigger, quoting a very low fee can have a detrimental effect.

It will make them wonder, "Why so cheap?" And it could make them look elsewhere.

## Stair-Stepping

A coaching client recently asked me what she needed to do to start landing well-known brands, such as Fortune 500 companies. She specifically asked what kind of training she would need to take to qualify for these types of clients.

I found her underlying assumption interesting. Because in the vast majority of cases, you don't need more skills training to go after these opportunities. You do, however, need to do two things:

- 1) Give YOURSELF permission to go after these clients.
- 2) Take whatever confidence you have now and find a way to grow it.

You don't need outside permission. You can go after whomever you want whenever you want. In fact, boatloads of writers go after bigger clients than you do, even though they're less experienced, less skilled and less qualified to do so.

And you know what? Some of these under-qualified writers actually land these clients!

Women have a particularly difficult time with this. I know I'm generalizing, but there's a good amount of evidence showing that women won't go after something unless they feel they check all the boxes. Men, on the other hand, are much more likely to go after something big even if they only check some of the boxes.

Awareness is the first step to making real change. So ladies... there you go. In general, you're much more susceptible to hesitation when it comes to something like this. Understand that this is normal ... and move in that direction anyway.

My second point is to use whatever confidence level you have now and grow it.

Here's the deal. Experience, ability, skill, confidence – these are all relative. Say you're on step five of 10 on a staircase. Each step represents where you are in your business AND your confidence level. You'd love to land level-9 clients and level-10 clients, but you're terrified. You don't feel ready.

Fine, work with your level-5 confidence to go after some level-6's and level-7's. Those are a bit outside your comfort zone ... but not so far up there that you're terrified to make your move. So go after them.

Once you land a few 6's and 7's, that's your new baseline! What used to feel out of reach is now our new normal. So it's now time to go after 8's and 9's. Again, that's outside your comfort zone but not so far out there that it feels impossible.

You'll soon land your first client in that category. And then another one. And before you know it, this is your new comfort zone.

And there you are – so close to the 10's you now can't imagine why you wouldn't go after them!

One last point. Wherever you are on the staircase, there are people below looking up at you, admiring you, wondering how they'll ever get to that step.

Being where you are might not be a big deal to you, but it's a big deal to someone else. And it was a big deal to you at some point.

It's all relative. And the fact that you are where you are right now is proof that you're capable of so much more.

## The Value of Sleeping Well at Night

My wife and I had our wills and medical directives (also known as "living wills") drafted when our first child was born.

And more recently we updated both sets of documents because we now have two kids, plus our situation had changed since we first went through this process.

I don't remember what we paid the first time. But to update both sets of documents, we paid somewhere around \$900. That's a lot of money. Especially when LegalZoom charges as little as \$89 to draft your will and as little as \$39 to draft your medical directive.

But let me ask you, how confident are you that what you'll get with an online service is on par with what you'll get from an experienced attorney who specializes in this kind of work? Would you sleep well at night if you went the online route?

What if LegalZoom missed something? What if you made choices based on not fully understanding the law in your state?

The whole point of going through this process is to have peace of mind. Once you're dead, you won't have to worry about a thing. You're in a better place!

But until then, you need to know that your family and your kids will be taken care of. And should you end up in a hospital bed in critical condition, that you'll be treated based on your wishes.

Our attorney didn't just throw together a bunch of boilerplate and have us sign some documents. He took the time to understand our situation, concerns and wishes. He asked very good follow-up questions based on what we told him, and he made some excellent suggestions based on our answers.

Not only that, but he preempted possible confusion by explaining in plain English a couple of choices in our medical directives that didn't mean what we thought they meant.

Needless to say, this was \$900 well spent. Did this advice take more of his time? Did he have to work harder for us to provide that value?

No, his value had nothing to do with time. It was his expertise and guidance that truly mattered.

So what the heck does this have to do with you?

Every month we come across prospects who are looking for the LegalZoom equivalent in writing and content marketing.

It's not that they're bad people. It's simply that they either don't value a more comprehensive service ... or they don't realize what they're risking when they go with a cheaper (or even rock-bottom) option.

Which is why you have to understand where and how you add value to your clients – and to which types of clients.

Remember, peace of mind is a form of value. When a client hires you, what problems do you help them avoid? How do you make the experience smoother? How do you keep them from wasting time and resources? How do you ensure that the piece or initiative will give them what they want (whatever that might be, even if it's not a direct response situation)? How will you make your contact look good to their team or their superiors?

Take pride in being the professional who goes way beyond what the commoditized, bargain-basement providers offer.

And remember that it's not about putting in more effort. It's about knowing where and how to add the kind of value that will be meaningful to your clients.

## Fly the Plane

My brother is a commercial airline pilot. We recently got into a conversation about flight safety. (A topic that fascinates me.) He said the number one thing they teach pilots is to “keep flying the plane, even when things go wrong.”

You'd think this is self-evident. But when fear strikes, an untrained pilot can get easily distracted, make rash decisions and forget that they still need to fly the plane!

“Fly the plane” is a rule we can also apply to our businesses. When things go well, it’s easy to keep calm and stay in control. But when bad things happen, it’s easy to let fear take over.

As a result, we make poor decisions, take haphazard action or become paralyzed — all of which only exacerbate the situation.

Challenges, obstacles, and crises are all part of running a business. They’re inevitable. So, it’s not about what happens. It’s about what we do when bad things happen.

It’s about remaining cool, maintaining focus and staying the course.

We need to keep flying the plane, no matter what. Because we can’t turn things around if we lose control.

## Failure Is the Beginning

Having a good business requires hard work, ambition and grit. Because when you’re on the path to a good business, you’re going to stumble many times.

Most people consider failure a bad thing. It’s something to be avoided. That’s how I viewed it until just a few years ago.

But when you realize failure is a necessary ingredient of success, you view it differently. Failure becomes feedback. It’s a necessary step in the process.

Failure marks the beginning, not the end. It’s the reason why many venture capitalists won’t invest in startups where the founder has never had a failed company. They know that failure is the best teacher. And without failing, the founder hasn’t learned important lessons.

Yes, failure can be demoralizing. Sometimes, you just want to cry and give up. That’s perfectly normal. (And a good cry session can be a healthy form of release.)

But even though failing isn’t fun, it’s worth the agony. It’s needed if you want to succeed.

So it’s time to rethink how you view failure. Your growth and happiness depend on it.

## Trailing Indicators

Take any current metric in your business, such as:

- Current income
- Number of clients
- Quality of clients
- Fees you're charging
- Number of hours you're working every week
- Internal hourly rate
- Balance in your profit account
- Buffer in your owner's compensation account.

When you look at these metrics, you're looking at the result of what you've done (and not done) up to now.

In other words, each of these metrics is a byproduct of things you've already done, not things you've yet to do.

They're what economists call "trailing indicators."

If you like what you see, you need to recognize that you have done this. It wasn't luck. You took a series of actions, some of which created these positive effects.

And if you don't like what you see, it's important to recognize that these are also effects of your decisions and actions.

I point this out not so you can beat yourself up. Instead, it's so you can see that YOU can change these metrics. It's within your power. It's not up to chance. Your current situation (good or bad) is the result of past decisions and actions, nothing more. And your future situation can be a lot different.

It's your choice.

## The Hand We're Dealt

Life is unfair. Business is unfair. We rarely get what we want when we want it.

Instead, we're forced to use the limited time, resources, knowledge and experience we have at the moment.

For many people, that's not enough. They think of themselves as victims, and they get angry and bitter.

I'd even say this is the default mindset we all fall into when life gets hard. We wallow in self-pity and look for evidence of unfairness.

"Why does she get what she wants? How is that fair? I've been at this longer than she has — way longer!"

"Well, of course, he's making great money. His wife is at home with the kids while he's entertaining clients."

"Easy for him to say! He's got more [fill in the blank: experience, money, contacts, resources...]"

I learned this lesson the hard way. And frankly, I'm still learning it today. My first job out of college was terrible. Or at least, that's what I thought at the time.

I got a job in a management training program for a national distributor. As a trainee, I spent nine months working in a warehouse doing shipping, receiving, stocking shelves, and loading trucks — when it should have only been only six weeks, according to my boss when he hired me!

This was in South Florida during the hottest months of the year. The days were long: 7 am to 9 pm Monday through Friday and then 7 am to 1 pm on Saturdays.

I was exhausted, disappointed, angry, disillusioned. I kept thinking, I got a four-year degree for this nonsense?

The following year, that sacrifice finally paid off. Or at least I thought it did. I was given my own small branch to run. But here's the kicker: I was still getting paid trainee wages. I had no help (I did all my shipping and receiving for the first two months). And I was back to working 14-hour days.

I was expected to work miracles with revenue and customer service. It felt like an impossible expectation. I was miserable. I didn't see a way out of this cycle. I felt trapped.

It sucks when this kind of thing happens. Especially if it keeps happening. It feels like this is happening only to us. The rest of the world is fine. No one's had to deal with this before. Just us, just now.

Yet a quick look at history shows us that we have no idea what we're talking about. Countless people have had to deal with much, much worse. And they make my little sob story sound like a day in Disneyland.



I think about George Washington in Valley Forge at the lowest point of the American Revolution. His troops were sick, malnourished, freezing. Morale was beyond low.

But in the space of a few months, he was able to transform a battered Continental Army into a unified, world-class fighting force capable of beating the British.

He's not alone. Countless leaders throughout history have been asked to do impossible things with very little. Many pulled it off.

Those that didn't learned huge lessons. And if they survived, they were transformed by the experience. These leaders and the people they led learned to be more creative and resourceful in desperate situations.

They learned to work with the hand they were dealt.

## Josh's Lucky Break

In 1998, Josh found himself in a life-changing situation.

He was a 17-year old singer working with a vocal coach. Out of the blue, a famous music producer called him one afternoon.

The producer was in a pickle. A singer who was scheduled to perform at a special event wasn't going to make it. So the producer needed to find a substitute singer fast.

He hired Josh on the spot.

Josh was terrified as he walked on stage for that rehearsal. After all, this was no regular rehearsal. It was for the Grammy awards show, and he was to fill in for Andrea Bocelli and sing a duet with Celine Dion.

The rest is history. At the Grammy awards that night, he showed the world what an amazing voice he had. He went on to have an extremely successful career. His first four solo albums are certified multi-platinum, and in 2007 he was the number-one best-selling artist in the US, with over 22.3 million records. As of 2012, he had sold over 25 million records worldwide.

Today you know this singer as Josh Groban.

The lesson here is simple. We can talk about lucky breaks all day long. They make great stories. But luck only happens when preparation meets opportunity.

We're given opportunities every single day. The key is to be prepared. Do your best. Study your craft.

That way, when the right opportunity comes your way, you can take full advantage of it.

## The Underappreciated Benefit of Getting Away

My family and I went to the beach a while ago.

We took some time off to get away from all the craziness in the world, recharge the batteries and hit the reset button.

This was our first trip in more than three months. Three months that have felt more like nine months, to be honest! So it was great to get out and change our environment.

One of the things that I've started to appreciate more and more when I take time off is the change of perspective it almost always brings.

Sure, the beach is fun. Hanging out with the family and having some quality time together is priceless.

But getting away from my work for a few days is equally as important.

I've found that when I get back (even after a short trip), I have a clearer mind, different and better perspectives, and a more optimistic outlook on my business and life.

And I've found this to be true even if I spent an hour a day handling email while I was out. Or if the trip wasn't perfect (it was so cloudy and rainy, we didn't even see the sun!). Or if the time off was relatively short.

The moral of the story: take more time off. But don't just stay home if it's safe to get away. Change your environment. Go somewhere, even if it's a modest setting like a campsite or a small cabin in the woods.

And do it more often. I've found that several short trips in a year is much more effective than one longer getaway. Not only do you have more moments of positive anticipation, but you also get the benefit of consistent "system resets."

## The Grownups Have Left the Building

In his 2012 keynote address to the University of the Arts, author Neil Gaiman said:

“The old rules are crumbling and nobody knows what the new rules are. So make up your own rules.”

Many of my coaching clients come to me looking for specific answers, steps and formulas. They want to be told what to do.

There’s a place for that, of course. And I take great pride in breaking the complex into simple steps. But I also find that many of these writers are scared to take chances. They spend a lot of time worrying about how things should be done.

But there is no “should” when you have a writing business. You can chart your own course and make your own decisions.

Want to position yourself as a consultant and not a writer? Go for it.

What to stop being shopped around? Tell prospects you don’t work that way.

Want to start offering workshops as a side hustle? Do it.

Don’t wait for someone to give you permission to pursue your ideas. Invest some of your time and energy into those ideas and see what’s viable.

As a business owner, you owe it to yourself to make decisions that your traditionally employed colleagues can only dream of. Otherwise, you’re squandering your opportunity.

The grownups have left the building; you’re in charge now.

So go for it.

## What Would Tony Do?

There’s a little hack I often use when my confidence is slipping.

Usually I do this when I’m trying something new or I’m doing something I’m nervous about for some reason.

It could be going after a bigger client than normal. Offering a new product or service at a much higher price point. Dealing with a difficult client who’s making

me feel like maybe I'm not cut out for this work — like I'm not qualified to help people.

I call it the WWTD question. It's a very simple question I ask myself. And it goes like this:

What would Tony do?

Many years ago, when I was in college, I started listening to Tony Robbins' cassette tapes. He and other similar motivational speakers had a huge impact on me.

And even though my tastes and preferences have evolved over the years, Tony was one of the first virtual mentors I had.

He just seemed larger than life. Like he could solve any problem, get through any situation, stare adversity in the eye and meet or exceed any ambitious goal.

One day when I found myself in a really low spot, I just asked myself the question: "What would Tony do if he were me in this situation?"

Surprisingly, that question gave me excellent clarity. And I was able to get out of that funk and take the right actions to get back on track.

In a way, he became my alter ego. I wasn't imitating him or his voice or mannerisms. I was just channeling his confidence, energy and smarts.

I've used this technique many times since. And I encourage you to give it a try.

Who do you admire? Who has the character, confidence, energy, smarts, talent or larger-than-life personality you would love to be able to borrow when you need it most?

It could be an athlete, a celebrity, a rock star or even someone you know. Spend a few minutes today brainstorming a short list of people who have that kind of effect on you. People you would love to have on your team if you could somehow.

And next time you find yourself with a big challenge, or you're unmotivated, scared, worried, or you just feel hopeless and are thinking about giving up ...

Ask yourself, "What would \_\_\_\_\_ do in this situation?"

Pretend he or she is sitting there in your office. What would they advise you to do? And how would they tell you to do it?

Channel that alter ego. And let him or her take over for you.

## Bike Riding in Santa Monica

In a podcast interview with author Tim Ferriss (of *The Four-Hour Workweek* fame), Derek Sivers describes a time when he lived in Santa Monica, California.

Every day, he'd ride his bike about 25 miles round trip on a path that stretches past Venice Beach and continues south from there.

At first, he would gun it.

He'd push himself as hard as he could, pedaling as fast as possible, with the goal of getting a really solid workout.

Invariably his time was always about the same, about 43 minutes and 35 seconds.

One day he took a different approach. He relaxed a bit and just enjoyed the ride and amazing scenery – something he'd never allowed himself to do.

He was in the moment. Happy. Joyful. And when he finished, he checked his watch. It had taken him all of 46 minutes and 20 seconds – only about three minutes more than what it normally took.

This is a powerful metaphor for our businesses and our lives. We can push ourselves to the brink of exhaustion and eventually burn out. Or we can choose to enjoy the process and live each day to the fullest.

Pushing yourself like crazy is not the only way to get the results you want. You can get most of what you want and still enjoy the ride.

I don't know about you, but I very often take the first approach. I gun it like crazy and push myself to the brink.

But when we do that, we not only burn out, we also miss out on all the beauty and love that surrounds us.

## The Biggest Regret

Most people spend their lives making fear-based decisions.

They don't go after their dreams because they're afraid to fail or to look stupid. They don't try new things and experiences because they're afraid of taking the risk. They don't love the way they want to love for fear of being vulnerable. They don't say what needs to be said for fear of upsetting others or rocking the boat.

I fall into these traps myself. We all do. But these fears exist only because we subconsciously act as if we have unlimited time. We just go about our day, and the thought of death only enters our thoughts when a loved one passes away.

But if we spent more time thinking about how short life really is, the fears that keep us from living a life that's true to ourselves would fade away. Our fears would be drowned by the urgency of having no time to waste. Fear would have to take a back seat because we don't want to leave this world with regrets.

An Australian nurse by the name of Bronnie Ware spent several years caring for patients during the last days of their lives. She would ask her patients if they had any regrets or if they would do things differently if they could go back in time.

Want to know what her patients' number one regret? They regretted not having the courage to live a life true to themselves, instead of the life that others expected.

How often do we go through life playing it safe, letting fear drive most of our decisions, trying to be, do or accomplish what others expect us to be, do or achieve?

We don't have to wait till the end to endure that regret. You don't have to overhaul your life or business overnight. But ask yourself what you can start doing differently this week and today in order to live a life that's true to yourself.

See it as a gift from others who waited too long and want better for us.

## Part Two: Strategy

I was brought up to believe there's no such thing as an overnight success. All great accomplishments take time and require time, effort, persistence, sacrifice, pain and growth.

Or so I was told.

But then gurus started popping up, claiming that this model of thinking was flawed. They claimed you could hack your way to amazing results in a fraction of the time.

So who's right?

I believe both models are true. You need to have the right perspective, patience, character and grit to push through obstacles. But you also need innovation and creativity to make things happen fast, before you lose your hope and motivation.

Author James Clear's "1% Better Every Day" approach is a great example of this kind of hybrid thinking. Clear argues that tiny improvements every day over the course of a year compound dramatically. The key is taking minuscule steps every day... but being consistent about it.

As you read through this section on strategy, I think you'll see this hybrid approach come through. You may not feel like you're doing something big and meaningful and bold when you implement these ideas. Some of them are simply tiny improvements that you implement every day or every week.

But these tiny improvements can compound dramatically over the course of a year—if you're consistent. And your daily reward comes from knowing you're being consistent.

In that way, you can hack your way into achievements you never thought possible.

### 3 Reasons to Start a Profit Account

Profit accounts are common for brick-and-mortar businesses. These "retained earnings" are used for funding expansions or acquisitions and/or for paying future dividends to shareholders.

Freelance professionals don't typically do these things, so why would we need a separate profit account?

I'll give you three great reasons.

First, it's a way to treat yourself. Let's be honest, most of us don't do enough to treat ourselves or our families. And when we do, we feel guilty about it.

Yes, a good portion of what we earn will go to our mortgage, insurance, groceries and other bills. But that shouldn't be all of it. If we put aside even a small percentage of what we earn in a profit account every month, we can use a percentage of that money to treat ourselves (and our family) guilt-free.

Second, it's a tangible way to see your business grow. The remaining balance in our profit accounts will continue to grow over time. It's a tangible reminder of our success and growth. Which is important because it's easy to feel like we're not making any progress, even though we actually are.

Finally, it's a way to create some wealth. Many traditional brick-and-mortar businesses can be sold when the founders are ready to exit. Not so much with freelance businesses. We won't be able to sell our businesses and cash out when we're done.

But when we have a profit account, we're accumulating wealth that will be available to us when we decide to move on.

If you're only taking out 50 percent of your profit account balance as a distribution every quarter, that amount continues to grow. And over the course of five, 10 or 20 years, you could have a very sizeable balance.

If you don't already have a profit account for your business, it's time to open one. It can dramatically change the way you feel about your business — and your wealth.

## Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty

There's a business book from the 1980s by Harvey Mackay called *Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty*. It's a very appropriate metaphor, especially during times of uncertainty.

Here are four key "wells" we all need to dig before we get thirsty:

### 1. Cash flow management

When you are the business, it's tempting to take all the revenue for yourself.



But if you don't have a good system for managing cash flow, you risk falling into hard times, even during good economic times.

## 2. Relationship capital

Don't be "that guy" — the person who only calls or writes when he needs something.

The time to make deposits into those relationship bank accounts is when you don't need to make a withdrawal. Stay in touch with people!

All you need to do is reach out to three to five people a day with a quick message. It doesn't have to be anything long or involved.

## 3. Start your email list

Even if all you have is five or six people to start, that's good enough. An email list of clients, dormant clients, and prospects is gold. It makes it so much easier to communicate, stay in touch, add value, promote new services and start conversations.

## 4. Marketing skills

The time to market your business is when you don't need to market your business. Once you have a system and the habit is in place, it's much easier to scale.

You might be tempted to put some of these off. Don't do that. Start digging your well now.

## What a 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Painter Can Teach Us

The biggest objection I hear from writers about hiring other writers as subcontractors is that no one can write the way they do. So they give up on the idea of scaling their business by leveraging the talents and efforts of others.

I made that same argument for years. But it's a false argument. Because this isn't a binary (yes/no) situation. You have to think about it differently.

In his excellent book *Clockwork*, Mike Michalowicz tells the story of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch artist Sir Peter Lely. Lely painted Baroque-style portraits, and when he moved to London, he quickly became the most sought-after portrait artist in Europe and the official painter for the royal family.

Lely was a good painter, but he wasn't the best. He was, however, very skilled at painting faces.

And he was also brilliant at building systems. As he became more popular and couldn't keep up with demand, he started hiring other painters to paint the things he was only reasonably good at — such as backgrounds, furniture and clothing.

That way, he could spend ALL his time doing the thing he was amazing at: painting faces.

I'm not saying you have to adopt this model. Scaling with other writers isn't for everyone. And even if it is, finding, onboarding, training and retaining the right writers takes time, energy and work.

But it all starts by recognizing where you add the absolute most value in each project and sticking with that thing.

And then let others do the rest.

Recognize where you add the absolute most value in each project — and then stick with that one thing when outsourcing.

## Syndicating Your Expertise

Have you ever thought of providing clients with a syndicated solution?

By “syndicated solution,” I'm referring to something you created for a client once — and it worked so well you repackage and sell it to other clients?

There are several flavors of this syndication strategy.

One flavor is a copywriting play.

Say, for instance, that you helped a local commercial photographer build a list of prospects and market to those prospects with an email campaign. The results were remarkable and you start seeing that you can do the same for other photographers.

You could tweak the copy and process to the point where it's effective and results are predictable. And now you take what you learned here and create a “paint-by-numbers” offer that similar photography businesses can deploy to get great results.

Another flavor is a content marketing play.

Here, you deploy a content marketing strategy designed to get opt-ins (leads) or even to kickstart a content marketing effort.

Your solution includes a series of must-have content marketing pieces, along with a ready-made plan for deploying and leveraging these assets.

In most of these scenarios, the ideal target is a less sophisticated business or organization that doesn't have the know-how, skills or capacity to do this themselves. So they're open to having someone come in and deploy a plug-and-play solution for them.

This syndication model isn't for everyone. But I know this: I've been frustrated by the fact that 100% of my writing business was based on completely custom work.

That's fun for a while. But it can get old, and it makes it hard to scale your business. Which keeps you trapped in the time-for-money cycle.

## Give Me 20

One of my favorite things to do is to tackle big challenges.

Don't get me wrong, given the choice I'd rather have things easier than harder. But there's nothing like a big, complex challenge to get the creative juices flowing.

I typically start a brainstorming session after gathering data, information and opinions. And one of my favorite techniques is to write down 20 possible solutions for tackling the problem.

Sounds super simple. But I'm constantly surprised by how effective this process is.

Here's what typically happens: the first five or 10 ideas flow quickly. That's the obvious stuff.

Once I get to about 10 ideas, I start to slow down. I might even get distracted. So ideas 11 to 15 take more thinking.

Once I get to about 15 ideas, I almost always feel like I've run out. But I have to get to 20. So I push myself.

Often, I'll leave my office and go outside with my notebook. I might go for a walk or visit a coffee shop. Little by little, a few new ideas will emerge. And I don't stop until I get to 20.

So here's what I've noticed: ideas one to 10 are decent to good. Ideas 11-15 are very good and more creative. Some are worth trying. The best ideas are almost always in the 16-20 group.

Why is that? I believe many of the later ideas are the product of your subconscious mind. It needs time to do its thing. That's why it's important to stretch yourself and

go beyond the first 10, even when you feel the best solution is in that initial outpouring.

Most big, complex challenges require truly creative solutions. Sure, you might come up with easier Band-Aid solutions. But if you want breakthrough results, you need a different level of thinking and implementation.

It requires creative and unconstrained ideas that reside elsewhere ... and need a good amount of coaxing.

## 10% on the Business

One of the challenges of being self-employed is that we get sucked into working IN the business at the expense of working ON the business.

Working IN the business is mainly about doing client work and administration.

Working ON the business is about anything related to improving the business.

This includes things such as:

- Thinking about the direction of your business
- Brainstorming new ideas
- Developing and implementing strategies
- Working on professional development
- Working on new initiatives to improve the business
- Marketing

When you're not sure how to get these two functions in your weekly schedule, the "working on the business" part gets left out.

Our brains are interesting. When we need to make a choice that requires a high degree of cognitive energy, we put off the decision.

And because nature hates a vacuum, when we don't decide to schedule time to work on our business, that time is taken up by "working in the business" tasks.

So what's the right mix?

I recommend spending an average of 10% of your workweek ON your business. It's an effective and realistic ratio.

If you work 40 hours a week, you should carve out four hours for tasks that will help move your business forward.

Not client work. Not serving clients.

Rather, tasks that will improve your mindset, enable you to land better clients, diversify your income, help you earn more in less time, have greater freedom about what clients and projects you take on, and enjoy your work more.

It's that simple: just allocate 10% every week. And, just as importantly, schedule those time blocks as appointments in your calendar.

Not every week will be perfect. Some weeks will be more, some will be less. That's OK.

It's not about perfection. It's about intention, systems (scheduling, etc.) and consistency.

## Stonyfield's Brilliant Strategy

Stonyfield Farm is a large producer of organic yogurt and dairy products in the U.S.

And about 12 years ago, they were heavily criticized for selling their product in Walmart stores all over the country.

Consumers who, until this point, were huge fans of what the company was doing were alarmed and even disgusted with the Walmart move.

How could they do that? How could Stonyfield sell to the big, bad, evil Walmart? That's not what Stonyfield was about. So why were they selling out?

Their founder and CEO, Gary Hirshberg, responded to all the criticism in a popular documentary (I believe it was *Food, Inc.*). And his answer was brilliant.

Not because it was a smart PR move ... or because of the way he worded it.

It was brilliant because it demonstrated that he had a very strategic reason for making that move into Walmart.

And it wasn't about profits, market share or the stock price.

It was about the company's Big Why. Their *raison d'être*.

He explained that he didn't care for Walmart either. But Walmart was the country's largest grocer. If Stonyfield could move a ton of product through Walmart, that

would be a ton more organic food consumed — food that would have otherwise have been non-organic had Stonefield not been on Walmart shelves.

Shoppers who wouldn't normally buy organic would try it. And many of them would come back for more. Which means less pesticide use, which means a healthier environment.

In other words, Hirshberg saw how scaling up his operation to serve Walmart would translate into a healthier environment. Which speaks to his company's Big Why.

Most of us start freelancing without a clear vision of our Big Why. We know how to do the work. And we want more freedom and flexibility. So we might think our Big Why is freedom, flexibility, a higher income, a shorter workweek, creative variety or something along those lines.

But that's not it. Those are just vehicles to get the outcome we truly want.

The Big Why is the core reason we do what you do.

Behind that is a set of vehicles — or links in a chain — that make that happen, such as strategies, tactics, game plans, habits and processes.

Most of us only think about the last two links in that chain. So we end up making decisions about our business that don't serve us. But because they're not tied to (or derived from) our Big Why, we end up on a treadmill of disappointment.

We work hard and are focused. But we're not really happy with where we are. And if we do feel happy, it's typically short-lived.

If you haven't already, spend some time thinking about your Big Why. Don't just accept the first answer that comes to mind. Plant the question in your mind and let it marinate.

Once you have clarity about your purpose for doing what you do, all your decisions will become much easier.

## Easy to Work With

Craftspeople take great pride in their skills, knowledge and expertise. So they don't like to hear that it's other things that clients appreciate the most about them.

Writers and copywriters often feel the same way about their craft. They think their writing skills should stand on their own. And that's what attracts prospects and keeps them coming back, they think.

But your craft is just one part of what gets prospects to connect with you and turns them into clients. It's just one part of what gets clients to hire you back for more work.

Want to know what's just as important (maybe even MORE important)?

Being easy to work with. Being a true professional. Someone who does what they say they're going to do—every time.

Someone clients enjoy talking and working with. Someone they feel cares about them—not just as a business but as a person. Someone who's happy and grateful and has a good attitude.

Don't get me wrong. Writing chops matter—a lot. But writing ability is like a high school dance. Once you're admitted to the dance, you have just as good a chance of dancing with that cute boy or girl as anyone. The key is getting inside.

Same with your craft. A certain level of skill is essential. But beyond that, you get diminishing returns. At that point, it's the other stuff that truly matters.

And please don't misunderstand me. This is NOT about personality. This is not about being an extrovert or having a fun and bubbly personality. This is about stuff we can all control and develop.

This email from a previous coaching client proves my point:

Ed:

Of all the advice you've dispensed, one thing has always stuck with me: the feedback you received from marketing directors about what they wanted from their writers.

Nowhere on their list did it say "A-List copywriter" or "superior copywriting skills."

Instead, it was things like meets deadlines, is easy to work with, is available, communicates, and is professional.

I took that to heart.

Today, I got this feedback from an agency I write for:

"You ROCK and make my job so much easier. You are one of the few that we can always count on, and I appreciate you so much!"

I'm not their best writer, but feedback like that means they will continue to send work my way.

I just wanted to thank you. Because that feedback makes one thing clear: this is a business. And you have to be someone people want to work with.

Yes, work on your craft. Work on developing and improving your skills. But also work on these other things. Because when you're someone your clients really want to work with, you'll never starve.

## The Freedom Triad

If you're good at what you do—and you've achieved financial success as a writer, copywriter or marketing consultant—you'll eventually reach an income ceiling.

Typically, that monthly income ceiling is in the \$12k - \$15k range. Once you start earning at that level, it gets harder to break through this ceiling.

How do you get beyond this income level consistently? You need the freedom triad.

The freedom triad consists of:

1. Book higher-earning work
2. Find ways to do that work faster
3. Make that work as recurring as possible.

Sometimes you can often get away with doing just two of these very well. It might be enough to get you to a better place and (mostly) stay there. But if you want to reach this level and stay there, you have to excel in all three of these areas.

That's not always easy to do. You may have to make tough and scary decisions. That's why it's better to transition your way there.

You're not going to fire your clients today, or change the way you do the work overnight, or insist on a long-term agreement with everyone starting tomorrow.

But if you keep all three components of the freedom triad top-of-mind, you'll start making better and better decisions. The results compound on each other, creating a multiplier effect over time.



And before you know it, you'll be earning a very nice, consistent and predictable income – and enjoying the level of freedom you've been seeking all along.

## Put Expiration Dates on Your Quote

We've all had the experience of sending out a quote and getting radio silence or something non-committal in response.

There's no way to avoid these situations entirely. But you can minimize them by putting a deadline on your quote or proposal.

I avoided this for a long time. Because it always felt a bit absurd that a sudden rise in fees was the justification for the deadline.

But that's not what the deadline is about at all. It's your schedule that's the moving target. You have lots of projects in your pipeline, and things are constantly changing.

So I suggest making a deadline of 14 days. Enough of a window to give them a chance to discuss internally and respond. But not so long that it drags out forever.

And then explain your reason for assigning it. It's a way to guarantee your availability.

It also gives you a good timeframe for following up. When you have a 14-day window, you can confidently follow up as that deadline approaches. And it will reduce the number of non-responses – or responses that drag on forever.

## X as a Service

I used to get massages fairly regularly. But it started to feel like a luxury, so I stopped going.

Yet massages have great health benefits, so about a year ago I decided to recommit to going. I went to Massage Envy, a nationwide franchise that offers massage and skin care services.

Turns out, they have a membership program that's brilliant. At Massage Envy, a \$60 monthly membership gets you a monthly massage. Any additional massages are \$40 per session.

When you consider that the price of a massage without membership is \$90, this is a great deal.

To become a member, you have to make a 12-month commitment, which might sound like a turn off. But for me, it was a bonus!

Why? Well, by signing up for a membership, I'm forcing myself to get that monthly massage. Because when I'm paying \$60 a month, I'm going to make sure I do it. And so, not surprisingly, I've been getting a regular monthly massage ever since I joined.

This got me thinking about how we work with our clients. Ask yourself: what do your clients wish they could do on a consistent basis — but they haven't been able to do?

In other words, what is their massage? And how can you offer that as a service?

How can you offer case studies as a service? Or a newsletter as a service? Or a series of articles, ebooks or lead magnets as a service?

And how can you offer this service as a package deal where you perform it on a regular basis in exchange for a regular monthly fee?

This approach is a great way to introduce some recurring income into your business. So don't start by asking yourself, "What kind of retainer agreement should I present?"

Start at the other end of the equation and ask, "What are my clients not doing that they know they need to do — and how can I become the person that does it for them?"

## Should You Have a Rush Fee?

In the best-selling book *Freakonomics*, the authors discuss the issue of late fees and their unintended impact. They describe a study where a daycare center implemented fines for parents who pick up their kids late.

To their surprise, the fine resulted in even more parents picking up late! They concluded that the late fee made parents feel less guilty about showing up late, so more of them started doing it. ("I'm paying for it, so it's okay.")

So here's my stance on charging rush fees: they often help clients justify their own disorganization.

That's why I don't recommend charging rush fees to good long-term clients that have recurring content needs. Instead, you want to set expectations early in the relationship about when you can start on projects and how long you'll need to complete them.

Then, when something comes up that needs to be rushed, you treat it as an exception. You communicate that you're making an exception to the client, without charging them extra.

When you take this approach, clients appreciate that you're doing them a favor. It builds mutual trust and keeps them from using your rush fee as a "green light" to be disorganized.

And you'll avoid the problem of every job being a rush project.

## Are You Using This Pricing Approach?

I absolutely hate the hourly pricing model. I'm also completely against the per-word pricing model.

But there's another model that's not too far removed from these two, and it's just as bad. It's not quite a model. It's more of a way of thinking and talking about your fees. And that's the per-page pricing approach.

I'm very guilty of this. I did it for years. But it's wrong. And I'm going to tell you why.

When you quote a project and give a price per page or page range, you place the emphasis on effort and/or output. But the client doesn't really care about the number of pages or amount of effort. They care about getting what they want.

Of course, a 100-page report is going to be more expensive than a 10-page report. But I'm not talking about extremes. I'm talking about creative work.

When you put the emphasis on the number of pages, you are shifting the discussion from value and to volume.

And guess what? That's what the client will start to focus on too.

Think about it. If they now know they're going to pay per page... then why ask for a 10-page white paper when they can get away with seven?

You know what comes next. The client reduces the size of the deliverable as a way to bring down the price. But invariably, the deliverable ends up being as long as what you originally quoted!

Here's what I suggest: don't talk about volume when it comes to pricing or fees. Instead, talk about complexity, the value of getting it right, and the risk of getting it wrong. Talk about your deep experience with the topic, the industry, the client, or the audience they're going after.

Craft an offer based on their needs and objectives. Value first and always. Not effort. Not length. Not time.

Because at the end of the day, the client doesn't really care how many words you write or how long it takes you.

What good clients really care about is getting an excellent product from you.

## Picking Apart Your Bundle

A great strategy for earning more in less time is to bundle and package some of your services. Especially services that run the risk of getting shopped around.

Blog posts are a great example. You never want to just quote one blog post. You want to quote a series of posts – or better yet, a service bundle that includes a bit of strategy and planning, as an example.

When you do this, you make it harder for the client to make price comparisons. Because everyone else is going to quote just the blog posts.

Sometimes, however, bundling can get tricky. The prospective client will pick apart your bundle and ask how much you'd charge if you took away one or more of the components.

Don't fall into this trap. If you do, you run the risk of being lumped backed in with the other poor souls who are quoting by the post.

So how do you avoid this?

First, when discussing the project with the client, ask good questions to understand their objective. In many cases, you'll learn that the client could benefit from more help. They may need help with a publication plan, brainstorming topics, coming up with ideas and a strategy for repurposing some of that content, improving the content's SEO, and promoting the posts in social media.

When you uncover these other opportunities, you can present your bundled offer with greater confidence, because it's well-aligned with their needs.

Second, if you come across a client who ONLY wants that single post (or even just two or three posts) and that's it, you have to decide if the opportunity is worth pursuing.

This will be a difficult opportunity to win because it limits how you can present your value. So unless you're confident they really want YOU, you have to decide whether it's worth putting your energy into a proposal.

Third, you need to stand by your package and prevent the client from picking it apart.

I build my bundles based on what I'm confident the client wants, based on our conversations. So if they come back to me asking how much each item is worth on its own, my first response is to defend the importance of all the items in the bundle.

If they don't see the value in one or two of the items, I'll ask what they would want instead and get into a conversation. I look for substitutions rather than offer a discount. Because when you allow them to pick it apart and go "a la carte," the whole thing starts falling apart.

Think of it this way: this weekend, we ordered delivery from Chipotle. The kid's meal (read: bundle) comes with a choice of a juice, white milk or chocolate milk. My kid (believe it or not) doesn't drink any of them. Chipotle has a "no drink" as an option. But does that reduce the price of the kid's meal? No.

The bottom line? This is common practice elsewhere. People accept it and so will your clients. But YOU need to be the one setting and maintaining that boundary.

## Your Internal Elevator Pitch

How we talk about our business—and the value we deliver—matters. So we're careful about how we talk about it to our clients and how we communicate it on our website.

But many of us aren't having this conversation with ourselves. We have to internalize how we think about our business.

One way to do this is to record yourself while talking about yourself and your business. I started doing this during long walks or drives by recording long voice memos on my phone.

You can start by talking about the basics:

I write white papers and other long-form marketing communications.

Or you can talk about the benefits you deliver:

I help marketing directors get projects off their to-do list.

You can then dig deeper by asking yourself, “so what?”

Eventually, you might get to something like this:

I make marketing directors look good by helping them conceive and produce more successful marketing communications. I partner with them to ensure we have the best strategy and plan. And I bring my 12 years of health IT experience into our engagements to bring fresh perspectives and ensure we hit or exceed all of our objectives.

I call this your internal elevator pitch. So go for a walk and ask yourself what value you deliver to your clients.

Keep trying and asking “so what” until you come up with something that’s conversational and that you could deliver effectively in a one-to-one conversation.

## Consider a Productized Service

Consider productizing a service that you do really well. Because it’s a lot easier to promote and sell a very specific offer at a fixed fee than a customized service with no pricing attached to it.

Not sure about the difference? Think of it this way:

Say you want a new dining room table. The cabinetmaker could ask what type of dining room table you want. You could talk about the size of the table and its shape, and the type of wood to use.

Or, the cabinetmaker could show you a catalogue of three dining room tables, an inexpensive one made of pine, a more expensive one of maple and a top of the line one of cherry.

You still have some flexibility — maybe you want a different shape or size — but the main parameters are set and priced.

That’s the difference between a custom and productized service.

So think of a service that you can productize. It should be something that you do well and that you enjoy.

Then think of how you can fix the scope and the price, even if you have to offer it at different tiers.

## Roadmapping as a Front-end Offer

If you're trying to drum up new business right now, you might want to experiment with a lower-priced, entry-level offer. And something that lends itself nicely to that kind of approach is roadmapping.

Roadmapping is an engagement where you conduct a very specific audit for a client, then offer recommendations and an action plan to execute on your recommendations.

This type of offer is great for a few reasons:

- 1) It gives you something tangible to market

My local wine retailer has been using this approach. Instead of just say, "I have all these different wines in stock. Which ones do you want?" he gets more specific.

About twice a week, he sends out a newsletter about a particular wine. He gets into detail about it — how he found it, why he likes it, its flavor profile, a bit about the winemaker and their history, and so on.

This specific, tangible approach makes it much more likely that people will buy. Because he's putting the spotlight on one item.

- 2) It solves a key problem your audience might be struggling with

Maybe your audience needs to repurpose content, rework content or get more out of the content they have already, but they don't know how to go about it.

A roadmapping engagement will give them the clarity they need without having to commit to a larger project.

- 3) It's a lower-cost offer

When offers are lower-cost, it's easier to get to yes. It gets you in the door and increases the probability that they'll hire you to do the execution and/or other work.

So if you need to get some projects in the door during a time of uncertainty, consider offering roadmapping projects.

They're a great way to get your foot in the door and start building momentum.

## Dr. Rothbloom's Secret

Every year, I drive nearly two hours round trip to see my eye doctor, Dr. Rothbloom. When I first moved to Atlanta, his office was close to my apartment. But since then, I've moved further away.

Even though there are plenty of ophthalmologists within 10 minutes of my house, I still make the drive to see Dr. Rothbloom.

Why do I do this?

First, he's taken great care of my family and me over the years, even during a couple of eye emergencies.

Second, he truly cares about his patients. He has thousands of patients (yes, he really does!) and still remembers that I own a coaching business, my family lives in Puerto Rico, and other similar details. For a while, I thought he took notes and reviewed them prior to our appointments. But eventually I realized he just had an amazing memory.

He'll also take 10 minutes to chat at the start of every visit about what's going on in my life and business. Ten minutes for a doctor is like 60 minutes for a regular person. It's not like he's got nothing better to do.

We have great conversations about business strategy, living well, travel, and the state of the world. It goes way beyond small talk!

Here's what I've realized: Dr. Rothbloom is an above-average ophthalmologist, but he's probably not the best in the city.

He seems to have good technology in his office, but it may not be exactly cutting-edge. He's not close to my house, but he's not a crazy distance away either. And he does an excellent job of dialing in my contact lens prescription every year so I can see better.

Dr. Rothbloom is good at his profession — no doubt.

But his biggest competitive advantage is making me feel like he really cares about me and my family.



What does that have to do with the health of my eyes?

Nothing. But I think he knows that's his advantage. And I'll bet he's purposely built his practice in a way that enables him to spend that kind of time with each patient.

When a patient arrives, his tech ensures all information is still up to date. That person also performs all the initial eye tests, such as eye pressure and vision acuity.

This tech gets about 90% of the data Dr. Rothbloom needs. When Dr. Rothbloom arrives, he only needs the other 10% ... which gives him more time to spend with each patient, doing what he does so well – talking.

I'm sure plenty of other ophthalmologists believe only they can perform those initial tests. Or they don't see the value of training and paying someone else to do it.

Every profession is like this. Ophthalmologists, chefs, tennis coaches, personal trainers, college professors, lawyers, engineers, librarians – every one of these professions has practitioners who truly believe they (and only they) can do the work for their clients.

They think their business is different from others. And in order to do things right, they have to do it all themselves.

That's a huge misconception. This fallacy puts professionals on a fast track to burnout or limited earning potential.

So ask yourself... what do you do best in your work?

What are the one or two things you love to do? The one or two things you do better than most? The things that keep your clients coming back for more?

Give it some thought. And resist the temptation to say, "Well, that might work for Dr. Rothbloom ... but my business is different."

## When You Can't Name Names

It's not unusual for client work to be subject to non-disclosure agreements. Which usually means you can't advertise that you've worked with the client or put a sample on your website.

Fortunately, you can work around this problem. Start by making sure you have content on your website that positions you as an authority in that particular area. You don't need dozens of articles to demonstrate authority. You just need a few.

Next, make sure your website copy explains why you can't post samples. Something to the effect of "due to the nature of my work, I can't post samples in this area" will suffice.

However, you can hint at some of the companies you've worked with. Something like: "I've worked with the CEO of one of the largest logistics companies in the Northeastern U.S...."

In the vast majority of cases, having these elements in place will allay the concerns of most prospective clients. Because good prospects don't need to see everything. They just need to see enough to understand that you're worth contacting.

And when they DO contact you? That's when the real selling begins.

## How to Get Better Pricing Feedback from Your Peers

It's very common to reach out to peers for feedback on how you should price a project for a client or prospect. Especially when you have access to a group of like-minded, trusted writers who are working at your level.

But there's a good way to ask for feedback ... and a way that won't get you the insights you need. And it all has to do with how you ask.

Here's the way most of us ask for this kind of feedback:

"I need to quote three ebooks for this prospect. The topic is X, and they want each ebook to be about 2,500 words long. What would you charge for something like this?"

Here's the problem with that approach: there's no context.

You haven't given us enough information. We don't know what type of business or industry this is. We don't know if they've worked with other writers before, how they're making the decision, what their budget is, why they reached out to you, what else they said in the conversation, and so on.

And without this context, it's difficult for a peer to give you helpful advice.

Unlike so many other industries, we're not selling tangible products that have widely accepted market price ranges. We're not selling couches, cars, a bottling machine for a factory line, a bulldozer or compressors for air conditioning systems.

We're selling custom services. And with custom services, the fees are all over the place. Because they're contextual.

So is there a better way to ask for pricing feedback? Yes! Rather than ask, “What would you charge for X?” ... ask instead,

“Have you done something like this before? If so, what did you charge?”

Notice the slight shift in questioning. It might seem small and insignificant, but it makes ALL the difference.

Why? Two reasons...

First, you’re now looking for other data points. You’re not asking what they would charge. Instead, you’re asking if they’ve done something similar. And if so, what they charged for it. So you now have answers you can incorporate into your decision.

Second, this approach increases the chances that you’ll get more answers. Giving someone a situation and asking what they’d do takes a lot of thinking. No one wants to give bad advice, so they want to think about it. They also have to provide their reasoning and logic, which also takes work. And when there’s work involved, fewer people respond. It’s human nature.

But if all you’re asking is if they’ve done something like this before – and if so, what they charged – that’s a much easier question to answer. You’re just asking for facts, not an elaborate and justified pricing opinion.

So give this style of questioning a try the next time you need some pricing help. I bet you’ll get more and better feedback.

## The Value of Publishing Your Own Content

I’m often asked if it’s worth writing and publishing your own content on a regular basis. My answer is always the same: yes, it’s absolutely worth it, for three good reasons.

The first reason is the one most people already understand: visibility. Creating and publishing your own content gives you visibility in your target market – assuming you put it out there consistently, promote it AND make your content interesting. It doesn’t need to be mind-blowing. It doesn’t have to be long; 300-500 words is a great range.

The second reason is that it shows prospective clients how you think. And that’s very important. People buy from people, and they overwhelmingly buy from

people they like. So if your ideas and reasoning resonate with them, that increases the probability they'll hire you.

The third reason is that it enables you to gain clarity around your thinking. You have all this knowledge in your head just swimming around. Until you force yourself to document, think through, and explore some of these ideas, you won't be able to leverage them.

And the more you practice doing this, the easier it gets to create that content. It's like a muscle.

So yes, there are good reasons to create your own content regularly. And as you can see, they go way beyond the obvious.

## Schedule Hour by Hour

If you want to get a lot done — including important but not urgent things — you should schedule your day hour by hour.

This might sound crazy, but hear me out.

We're all familiar with to-do lists. But the problem with to-do lists is that they have no time constraints. When we add time constraints to our to-do list (by planning your day hour by hour), a couple of things happen.

First, we see what's actually doable that day. And second, we have a roadmap for the day that we can follow.

Here's what happens when we take this approach: we plan out our day in the morning (or the evening before) when we're feeling logical and rational.

Then, as the day goes on, we start to feel a bit restless and rebellious. We don't want to work on boring X; we'd rather work on fun Y instead. But, no, we have a plan for the day, laid out hour by hour.

This plan keeps our emotional, rebellious self on track.

This doesn't mean you can't build buffers, flexibility and free time into your daily plan. In fact, you should! But at the same time, be specific about what you're going to do and when you're going to do it. Even if it's taking a 30-minute break at 10:30 to check social media.

Because when you have an hour-by-hour plan, you'll stay on track and be much more productive.

## The Jigsaw Puzzle

In the fall of 2008, Pete Savage, Steve Slaunwhite and I put together a book proposal for a book that would eventually become *The Wealthy Freelancer*.

As you can imagine, this was quite a project, despite the fact that there were three of us working on it. Pete described how this project would fit into his business and other initiatives he had going on. And he used a jigsaw puzzle as a metaphor to explain his thinking.

The puzzle represents his work capacity. At the time, it consisted of five pieces, each representing a different project or initiative. Each piece was about the same size, meaning that each needed about the same level of time, energy and focus.

In early 2009, our book proposal was accepted by an imprint of Penguin. We were all ecstatic! But soon after, we were faced with the realization that we now had to write a manuscript—and we only had four months to do it.

Pete was the first to realize he couldn't just jam this new project into his existing jigsaw puzzle. He couldn't replace the "write book proposal" piece with "write book manuscript." Why? Because writing a manuscript is a heck of a lot more time-intensive than writing a book proposal!

He knew this puzzle piece needed to be bigger. But the size of the overall puzzle couldn't change—so something had to give. And for Pete, that meant eliminating a real estate investment project he had recently started.

He had other options. He could have reduced the size of some of his other puzzle pieces or eliminated others. But after much deliberation, he chose to replace the real estate project puzzle piece with the manuscript puzzle piece.

Pete's approach really struck a chord, and it's stayed with me all these years.

The thing is, I'm an optimist. I credit this optimism for much of my success. But that optimism can also get me into trouble. Because when a new, exciting project comes my way, my natural reaction is to say yes. But every yes adds another piece to my puzzle, and I have no room for other pieces!

So if I want to take on another initiative, I do have to look at my puzzle. Usually, this forces me to think about the value of each piece. In some cases, scaling back a bit on one or more of them is the answer. In other cases, I have to remove one piece to replace it with a new effort.

And in some cases, I have to say no to the new initiative, even when it really hurts. It may not be no forever. It's just a no right now, until my situation changes.

The lesson here is simple. Before you take on a new major client, a huge initiative with another client, a side project that has you uber-excited, or a major marketing push, take a close look at your jigsaw puzzle.

You can temporarily stretch the edges of that puzzle — and sometimes that's okay. But you can't do that forever. Otherwise, your puzzle will start to pull apart.

## Ultimatum Follow-up

Getting nothing but radio silence from prospects can be frustrating.

Especially after you've had some initial discussions and sent in your proposal.

When you hear nothing back, your self-esteem and confidence can take a hit. And you start to feel like you're wasting your time.

So how can you compel prospects to respond?

One way to increase the likelihood of getting a response is to create a pattern interrupt.

Here are two ways to do it.

1) Let prospects know this is your last attempt

This a technique I've been using for years.

In your last follow-up attempt, you let prospects know that this will be the last one.

You could say something like this:

Hi Jane, this will be my last follow-up attempt. It sounds like this project is no longer a priority for you, which is fine. I'd love the opportunity to connect again should you return to this project or if something else comes up.

Often, prospects won't respond to your follow-ups because they don't have an answer for you. Something is going on internally that they can't communicate — and they feel bad giving you the same "I'm not sure" answer.

So they opt for radio silence. By telling them that this is a last follow up attempt, you're disrupting this pattern. Prospects can no longer use you as a type of snooze button, and so they're more likely to respond.

## 2) Ask prospects if they've given up

This idea comes from Chris Hardee, a former coaching client of mine. He discovered it in the book *Never Split the Difference* by Chris Voss.

With this approach, you ask non-responsive prospects the following question in your final follow up attempt:

Hey Bill, have you given up on this project?

I would suggest combining this question with the first approach I outlined. So it would be something like:

Hey Bill, have you given up on this project?  
This will be my last follow up attempt...

Give these two ideas a try the next time you've submitted a proposal — and are getting nothing but radio silence.

## The Problem With Ready-Now Prospects

Everyone loves prospects who are ready to buy NOW.

They have a need, they know what they want, they have the budget, and they're ready to go. The timing is right.

I love those prospects too. But over the past few years, my love and excitement for them have waned. So much so that these days I actually prefer to get not-yet-ready leads.

I know that sounds crazy, so let me explain.

Ready-now prospects have one advantage: they're ready to pull the trigger. But if YOU are the one contacting them and they have an immediate need, you're still missing trust and buy-in.

After all, you just entered their world. They haven't had enough time to get to know you.

Sure, the urgency of their need may overcome that lack of trust or buy-in. They may just do some basic due diligence and be ready to go. But often, their urgency isn't great enough to overcome that absence of trust. So they'll take some time to look at other service providers. And invariably, they'll find someone cheaper than you.

And because they don't know enough about your value and key differentiators, they'll often go with the cheaper provider.

So, yes ... I love talking with new prospects who are ready to go now. But I'm also skeptical that they'll actually hire me. Because they haven't gotten to know me well enough yet.

That's why – everything else being equal – I prefer not-yet-ready prospects. Even though the payoff isn't immediate, I can nurture them until they are ready to engage. And through that nurturing (or staying-in-touch) process, I can build the trust and buy-in I need to become the obvious choice once they're ready to go.

My whole coaching business is based on this strategy. I get coaching inquiries every month from people who just heard about me that same week. But I've learned that these are typically not good prospects.

They need to get to know me a bit more first. They need to listen to my podcast, read my articles and get familiar with my thinking and my advice for a few weeks or months (sometimes even years).

If they do that, when they're finally ready to hire someone, I'm often the only one they consider.

So here's something to think about today:

What can you do to attract more not-yet-ready leads?

And how can you stay in touch with them in a way that builds trust and buy-in over a period of months?

## Mindhunter

There's an excellent crime drama series on Netflix called *Mindhunter*. It's based on real-life events inside the FBI in the 1970s when two FBI agents and a Harvard psychology professor spearheaded a new division to get inside the mind of serial killers.



Up until that point, the FBI didn't pay much attention to how serial killers behaved. In fact, the term "serial killer" didn't even exist. But these agents developed a process to better understand and catch serial killers by studying their damaged psyches.

Along the way, the agents pioneered the development of modern serial-killer profiling. And they helped pave the way for law enforcement to better track and predict the behavior of these dangerous criminals and catch them faster.

So what on earth does that have to do with running a business? We're not trying to catch serial killers.

True, but there's a very good chance that over the course of a year, you'll bring in a client that's a real dud. You thought they would work out fine at first. But once you started working together, you realized it wasn't a fit at all. And you probably wondered how you missed the warning signs.

The good news: you can take a similar approach to these FBI agents by debriefing yourself every time you have to fire a client. Because every bad prospect leaves clues. And the better you get at identifying those clues early on, the better you'll be at vetting prospects.

The idea is to start developing a profile (or an avatar or persona) of the kind of prospect that won't work out for you. These profiles won't be perfect. It won't detect every bad situation. But the more you study the attributes of these poor-fit prospects, the better you'll get at profiling.

Start looking for clues. Think back to your first conversation and/or email exchange. What did they say or do that was a clue? Don't stop at actions or words. List as many attributes of these clients as you can.

For instance, maybe they didn't have a dedicated marketing person. Or this was their first time working with a writer. Or the company was small.

Not every attribute will make your shortlist of things to watch for. But the idea is to look for common factors among bad clients and start a list.

Do this for three or four clients that didn't work out and you'll soon have a profile that would impress an FBI psychologist.

## I'd Like to Pick Your Brain

Ever have a client or prospect ask to pick your brain? Maybe they want to have a meeting or call with you to brainstorm topic ideas or plan their content marketing for the next quarter.

This can be a real problem, because in most cases the client or prospect expects you to do this for free. These people somehow believe that you only get paid for cranking out tangible deliverables. And brainstorming, scheming, planning – that's not really doing work, in their minds at least.

So you comply. And before you know it, you've been to two or three one-hour meetings. And now it's becoming a regular thing.

What should you do? Should you start charging for your time? What should you tell the prospect or client?

The most important thing to do is to nip this in the bud early. Not once you've done two or three calls.

You need to do it professionally but firmly. And you need to offer a better option – one that will give them what they want and give you what YOU want, which is to get paid for your expertise.

Notice that I said "expertise" and not time. It's very important that you don't think of this as your time, because you'll fall prey to the "selling your time" mentality, and that won't end well.

So what's the better option? Offer to do a planning session with them. Come up with a service package that includes one or two calls (whatever's appropriate) to brainstorm and firm up ideas and come up with an action plan for whatever it is they're trying to accomplish.

The deliverable is a clear plan that lays out the results of the planning session (or sessions).

It explains what needs to be done and why, and it identifies objectives, specific recommendations, parties involved, timelines and anything else the client will need to execute that plan effectively.

Don't just agree to let clients and prospects pick your brain. Value yourself more by crafting and offering a simple planning engagement ... and put a price on it.

## Smarter Decisions

Author and habit-development expert James Clear recently reminded me of a very powerful truth recently:

“When you say no, you are only saying no to one option. When you say yes, you are saying no to every other option.”

Think about that for a second. Until I read that statement, I always thought of yes and no as opposite scenarios – as equals.

But they’re NOT equals. Not when you’re making decisions.

When you say yes to something, you’re now locked in. That commitment keeps you from taking advantage of so many other better choices. You’ve committed a fixed amount of your capacity until that task or project is over.

What about when you say no? The downside of saying no to a bad or average choice is minimal. But the upside is massive! Because you’ve turned down only ONE thing. And you now have the time and bandwidth to say yes to something much better.

So when you say yes to a client or project that’s not a fit – but you’re doing it out of fear – you’re saying no to every other option out there.

Sure, you may feel you don’t have other options now. But just because you can’t see those options (they haven’t materialized yet) doesn’t mean they don’t exist. The ideal opportunity might turn up the very next day. And now you don’t have the time or capacity to take it on.

You might try to do both anyway. But will you be able to do great work if you’re way overcommitted? There’s always a tradeoff. Something’s got to give.

Look... we all have a limited amount of time to do all the things we want to do. But we often treat our time as if it’s a given. As if we have an unlimited supply. And we make choices accordingly.

We say yes to too many things, people or opportunities. And before we know it, we’re stretched way too thin with little or no time for the people and things that matter most.

Our time here is not guaranteed. So choose wisely. Don’t feel bad when you have to say no. Because when you do, you open up time and resources for other, much better opportunities.

## Solve Expensive Problems

We often describe ourselves as “content writers” or “copywriters.”

And that’s fine. It’s a practical way to communicate what we offer.

But if you want to command higher fees, you need to shift how you describe yourself – to yourself. And it’s all about solving expensive problems.

Yes, the only way you can consistently generate a high income is to solve problems that can cost clients a lot of money.

Think about a white paper, for example. If your white paper helps to put a prospect on the buying path to a \$500,000 piece of medical equipment, that’s huge!

So what about a company that does NOT have that white paper... or their current white paper is missing the mark...? That’s an expensive problem, isn’t it? A VERY expensive one!

So start thinking about the expensive problems you help solve, even indirectly. Don’t diminish your contribution. Don’t be modest.

Get to the heart of what you do. Then keep that value top of mind the next time you talk to a prospect or client.

And see how it shifts your confidence.

## Success Triad

In times of great uncertainty, you need the success triad to see you through. The success triad is composed of three things you need to do on a regular basis to succeed in difficult environments.

### 1. Critical thinking

Look outside of your own realm to see how others are succeeding. Collect examples of what other organizations are doing – especially if they’re outside your industry and profession.

Some of your best ideas will be an extrapolation of what others are doing outside your industry to succeed. Connect the dots and borrow some of these elements to help your own clients.

Analyze what others are doing to come up with new ideas.

## 2. Creative problem solving

Get creative in your own positioning and in how you help clients.

Spend time brainstorming and incubating new ideas. Be more resourceful and increase the ingenuity factor.

## 3. Execution

Take steady, consistent action. Step outside your comfort zone and try new things. Approach prospects with new offers. Take risks. When you have success in one area, use those successes to build your confidence and take new risks.

When you perform all three elements of the success triad, you take ownership of your business and your success.

And you'll dramatically increase your chances of coming out of this situation in a better spot, while also helping your clients even more.

## You're Undercharging

Every day, people call the Four Seasons Hotel in Atlanta to book a room. And every day, dozens of people decide not to book at the Four Seasons because they think it's too expensive.

They end up booking someplace cheaper, like the Ramada Inn.

When the Four Seasons loses this booking, do its executives debate whether they should lower their prices to Ramada Inn levels?

Not likely.

Unfortunately, many creative professionals don't follow the example of the Four Seasons. And so they undercharge for their services.

Why do so many of them undercharge? It's because they're looking at the wrong indicators to determine whether or not they ARE pricing correctly.

They give way too much weight to every "no" they get from a prospective client. And they especially give way too much weight to the last "no" they got.

Does the Four Seasons freak out whenever a potential customer decides it's too expensive and books elsewhere? No. Because the Four Seasons isn't trying to serve everyone. It's serving a select market.

The same applies (or should apply) to you. Which is why using "no's" as an indicator of how you should adjust your pricing is not a good practice.

So recognize that you're very likely undercharging. You may not know it now, but you'll realize it when you start to quote higher and still land some projects. Not ALL projects. But some of the ones in your target market.

So why not start quoting a little bit higher now? And when you get a yes, take that as confirmation that you're on the right track.

## Charge Enough

A few years ago, a friend and colleague described his pricing philosophy to me this way:

"I want to charge enough for my work so that I don't have to nickel and dime my clients."

In other words, he quotes high enough that if the client comes to him with a moderate change or wants to move in a slightly different direction, he can go along with those changes and still feel good about the deal.

Sure, if the changes are substantial, he might need to bring it up to the client and possibly create a whole new project with a fee to make those changes. But what my colleague didn't want to worry about is moderate adjustments to the scope, direction or timeline.

Ever since he expressed this idea to me in this way, I've adopted it myself. And you can do the same.

Why not price your work high enough that you have some room to maneuver should you need to? Why not give yourself a bit more margin and reduce the stress of something not going exactly as planned?

Good clients don't want to get into a nickel-and-dime discussion. You don't either. So don't create a pricing situation that will lead to such a situation!

The client will be happier. And so will you.

## Part Three: Implement

We've all been in situations where you had to change your schedule unexpectedly due to unforeseen circumstances.

Think pandemic. A death in the family. A serious illness.

Once you get past the initial shock, your attention turns to your work. Because you know this event will be a major disruption.

How will you get everything done with these new constraints? You get stressed and anxious, with your mind running in all directions.

But eventually you hunker down and get to work. Because you have deadlines to meet, and you can't sit around waiting for things to change. And then somehow, miraculously, you adapt to the new constraints.

You get creative and resourceful. You become more productive. You find pockets of time. You get help. The work gets done and everything's OK.

This section is all about implementation. And any time you implement something new in your business, new constraints apply.

But constraints can be good. They force us to bring our very best to the table. And they help us realize what we're truly capable of.

So as you read through this section, don't let the thought of these constraints put you off. Sure, you may need to change your way of doing things. But you've got what it takes to adapt.

And not only will you solve the problems you're facing ... you'll come out the other end stronger, smarter, more confident and more fulfilled.

### Drama-Free Decision-Making

Every once in awhile, you get an opportunity that's just too good to pass up.

The opportunity has great money and good people. And maybe it's something you've wanted to do for a while.

You want it—and you know it's the right thing to do. There's only one problem: the timeline is super-tight.

You'll be limited in your ability to take on other work. And you're going to have to work longer than usual every week.

What should you do? Are you making a mistake by putting yourself in that kind of position?

Here's how I approach these kinds of decisions.

First, I start by saying yes to myself internally. I mentally accept the job and then work from that position.

Why does this mental shift help? Because a big part of the stress in these situations comes from actually making the decision – not from dealing with it once you've made it.

Now that you've mentally accepted the opportunity, you can chip away at the problem without a monkey on your back. And only then should you start addressing questions such as:

- What will I do with my other clients? How will I handle recurring projects?
- What will I do when I'm presented with new opportunities?
- What will we do about childcare?
- What if I get sick somewhere in the middle of the project?
- What are the payment terms? How would I want them changed so I can make this work financially for me?

At this point, it's an objective problem-solving session rather than a stressful "OMG, what should I do?"

Which means that you'll much more likely come up with better, smarter solutions – without the drama.

## Dig a Little Deeper

Too often, writers feel pressure to respond to requests and questions from clients and prospects ... even when they don't have enough information to respond adequately.

Questions such as:

- How much do you charge for X?



- Can you turn around an ebook by the 18th?
- Have you ever written a white paper on the topic of data breaches?
- Can you send me samples of case studies you've written about telehealth solutions?

I'm a people pleaser by nature. So my tendency is to respond right away and give people what they want. For a long time, I mistakenly believed that responsiveness equaled great service. And we all know how important providing great service is.

We see other businesses do this. You ask about their service and they send a quote. They don't even ask questions. Or if they do, they're very basic – not questions to better identify “fit.”

But you're not running a customer service line. Your job isn't to automatically give prospects and clients what they ask. Your job is to give them what they need. And what they need and what they ask for are often two totally different things.

How can you better understand what they're looking for and trying to achieve?

Simple: you thank them for their interest and respond with one or two clarifying questions that will enable you to assess the situation (and answer their question) more effectively.

It's a give-and-take. Sure, you have to give up some information as well in the back-and-forth exchange. You can't usually ask three or four follow-up questions without giving them SOMETHING.

But by digging just a bit, you do two things:

- 1) You'll be better equipped to answer in a way that's meaningful.
- 2) You'll position yourself as a real pro who doesn't just jump when they say “jump.”

Instead, you demonstrate that you have the knowledge, wisdom and experience to ask good questions to better understand them and their objectives.

## Always End with a Next Step

When you're talking with a prospect for the first time, you should always establish a next step before hanging up.

Always.

Doing so elevates your professionalism, highlights the value you bring to the table, and ties that value to what the prospect is trying to achieve.

Sometimes the prospect will just flat out ask you, “What’s our next step?”

But if they don't ask, it's your job to bring it up and create agreement on that next step. A great way to do that is with the Summary/Proof/Next Step technique:

- SUMMARY: “Based on what you've shared with me here, I feel confident that I'd be able to provide you with a [your project deliverable] that enables you to [desired results/benefits for the prospect].”
- PROOF: “I know this topic well and I have significant experience in the [your target market] industry. So I understand many of the key business drivers here and can hit the ground running....”
- NEXT STEP: I'm going to draft a proposal/quote and send it to you by [date and time]. Once I send that out, when would be a good time to follow up with you?

This technique is simple ... and surprisingly effective. Give it a try next time you wrap up a discovery call with a prospect.

## A Powerful Way to End a Prospect Call

As you just saw, at the end of every discovery call, I always let the prospect know the next steps.

But recently, I’ve been adding a new step to these conversations, and they’ve been very effective in uncovering potential objections and setting you up for success.

You simply ask the prospect: “Based on our discussion today, on a scale of 1 to 10, how are you feeling about potentially working with me on this project? I’m just trying to get a read on how you’re feeling about it.”

And just let them talk.

If they give you anything less than a 7 or 8, reply with: “Thanks, I respect that. I’m curious, what would it take for you to feel more like an 8 or 9?”

Again, just let them talk.

This takes some practice, so role-play if you can. Or practice saying it out loud to yourself. You'll get more comfortable the more you use it.

I've found this to be a very revealing question... so give it a try next time!

## How to Say No Gracefully

For many of us, it's hard to say to a prospect or client. But when a boundary has been breached, saying no is often the best course of action.

Fortunately, there are a couple of ways to make this process easier. First, ignore your sunk costs. Sunk costs are costs you've already incurred that can't be recovered.

For example, maybe you've put a lot of work into the proposal. Or maybe you've spent a lot of time on the phone with the prospect.

Our natural tendency is to factor these sunk costs into our decision making. But that's a mistake. What's done is done. Instead, you should base your decision on what you see today, not what you've already put into it.

Second, don't sugarcoat the message. You can soften the delivery. But don't talk in circles. I like to use the sandwich technique to deliver the "no" effectively. The sandwich consists of:

1. The top slice of bread (a validation of the situation)
2. The meat (the main point you need to communicate)
3. The bottom slice of bread (a recommendation or referral).

For example, it might go something like this:

Bread: "Maria, I've given this project a lot of thought...."

Meat: "... frankly, I don't think this is going to be a fit. We're too far apart on the fee [or I'm starting to move away from X type of work and into Y type of work...]. I'm having to make some tough decisions, just like this one. I'd love to help you but, unfortunately, I'm going to have to pass."

Bread: "However, I have a colleague who's done a lot of this kind of work. I think he'd be a great fit for this project. Would you like me to connect the two of you?"

Saying no is never fun. But it does get easier with practice. Usually, people appreciate it when you're upfront rather than wishy-washy. And it's much better than taking on a project you don't want.

## Responding to Sticker Shock

You've probably had the experience of quoting a project and having the prospect react in shock at the price.

Instinctually, you might want to justify the price by describing the time and effort it will take for you to do the work.

But that's a mistake. Because it diminishes the value of your expertise.

After all, the value that you bring to a project isn't in the time you put into a project. It's in the expertise and experience you bring to it.

After all, do surgeons justify the cost of surgery by the minutes and hours it will take them to perform it? No, they justify the cost in terms of their skills and experience.

This is an important distinction because someone will always be willing to sell their time for less. Time is a cheap commodity these days. So you can't make your time the center of the conversation.

Instead, you should steer the conversation to two things:

- 1) The value that you bring
- 2) The risk of hiring a cheaper resource

Talk about your value, which lies in your expertise and experience, which will, in turn, help clients reach their objectives faster and better. Remind clients how you're different and why those differences matter. Show why you're a good fit.

Talk about the risk of giving this project to someone with less relevant experience. What would happen if this less experienced person messed it up?

You, on the other hand, have been doing this for a long time. You've seen the costly mistakes that can occur — and you can help them avoid those same mistakes and deliver a product that hits the mark.

And if the prospect still resists your pricing, that's a pretty good indicator they're not the right client for you.

## Are Good Prospects Ghosting You?

You have a great conversation with a prospective client. And they make it very clear that they want to work with you. So, you send over your agreement. But then they ghost you, never to be heard from again.

Argh!

Unfortunately, you can never eliminate ghosting entirely. But you can minimize it by refining your qualification process in your discovery call.

The discovery call is the call you have with a prospect where you learn about their situation and what they're looking for. It's tempting to improvise during this call. But until you have this type of call down cold, you need to make sure you're asking all the right questions.

Pay attention to their "pain" and its impact. Read between the lines. How is this problem impacting them? Is it a big issue? Are they truly motivated to solve it? Or is your help just a "nice to have"?

Pay attention to their timing. How urgent is this problem for them? Do they need it ASAP? Or could they delay indefinitely?

Ask about their decision-making process. Who else are they talking to? Have they worked with outside writers before? Who will be involved in the decision to hire you? Does the person you're talking to have the authority? Or do they still have to build a case internally?

End the call with summary, proof, and next step, where you sum up the conversation, remind the prospect of your relevant experience and put the ball back in their court.

Yes, even when you put all these pieces in place, you may still get ghosted by prospects. But it won't happen often.

And you'll feel good knowing you did everything you could to vet them.

## Is Warm Email Prospecting Still Effective?

Every few weeks, someone will ask me whether warm email prospecting still works. Based on what I hear from freelancers all around the world, in dozens of different target markets, I can tell you this:

Yes, warm email prospecting still works! And it not only works, but it works well.

But there is a difference between what worked before and what works today. You have a lot less room for error.

In the past, you could get by if you did an “okay” job with your email copy. But now your emails MUST tick all the boxes.

They must be:

1. Personalized
2. Sent to the right person
3. Brief
4. About them, not you

And if you want to further increase your rate of success, you should:

- Send out emails frequently
- Bring LinkedIn into the mix by making it part of your follow-up process
- Focus on quality, not quantity
- Highlight something about your experience or track record in the prospect’s field or domain (as opposed to highlighting your writing experience)

I’ve seen a big surge in the number of companies and marketers using what they think is warm email prospecting. But MOST of these vendors are doing email prospecting the wrong way. They cut corners like crazy.

And when everyone else is taking shortcuts, it gives your more personalized message the opportunity to stand out.

## Franken-emails

I started using warm email prospecting 20 years ago this year. The early versions weren’t great. But over the next few years I refined my approach and came up with my current recommended format.

I started teaching this strategy in 2011, and since then I’ve noticed a significant increase in the number of businesses using this approach.

Seeing dozens of similar emails from other companies has been validating for me. But it’s also made this approach somewhat less effective. Because, generally speaking, the more it’s used, the less attention it gets.

But again, notice that I said, “generally speaking.”

Here’s the good news. Most marketers using this approach are doing it wrong. They’re sacrificing personalization and email customization in the name of volume and automation.

They’re trying to mimic this approach but in a generic and automated way, hoping that SOME prospects will respond (which they do!)

The result is a Frankenstein of an email that’s so diluted, it somewhat works with some people. But that’s it. It’s a Franken-email.

The good news is that:

- A) You don’t have to follow their lead (in fact, definitely don’t!)
- B) Their generic approach only makes your emails stand out, if you take the time to keep them truly personalized.

So don’t try to wedge in personalization. Make sure it’s natural AND that the transition to your value proposition makes sense. It’s got to be congruent.

Otherwise, you might as well be sending out Franken-email mass broadcasts along with everybody else.

## “My Website Isn’t Generating Leads!”

You might think that if you update your website with new copy, leads will start rolling in.

I don’t blame you for having that expectation. But unfortunately, it rarely happens.

Sure, you might get a few more leads over the course of a year. But your content update isn’t going to make a difference if that’s ALL you do.

I’m not saying this to discourage you. Instead, I want to give you clarity on what actually moves the needle.

So, here’s the thing: your website won’t generate leads if you don’t drive traffic to it. It doesn’t matter how great your content is. No traffic means no leads.

There are three basic ways to drive that traffic:

- 1) paid ads
- 2) SEO
- 3) breadcrumb trails

(Breadcrumb trails are activities that lead people to your website, such as posting on social media, public speaking, appearing as a podcast guest, writing a guest blog post, etc.)

My advice? Forget paid ads and focus on SEO and breadcrumb trails. You don't have to go crazy with SEO. Making even basic tweaks can help.

Then start laying breadcrumb trails to help people find your website. Because a website in and of itself isn't going to solve your lead generation problems.

You have to drive traffic to it.

## Requests for Samples

Something that often happens when you send a warm email to a prospect is that they ask for samples.

This stumps most writers. And they'll end up sending samples that aren't really relevant or will actually slow down the process.

This is a classic example of a hot potato, where a prospective client throws something at you and you're not sure how to handle it.

What you need to do is toss it back to the prospect. Let's look at a few examples.

Say the prospect asks, "Can you send me more samples?" Respond with a follow up question, "Sure, what are you looking for?" And include an explanation that you don't want to bombard them with irrelevant samples.

Another example: the prospect asks, "Can you send me more samples of X, Y, Z?"

Here, you can provide some samples and provide a bit of context for each. Then ask, "Out of the things you mentioned, is there one area in particular you're looking for help with?" Or ask, "Out of the things you mentioned, is there one area you're having difficulty finding a solid writer for?"

When you follow up, don't ask if they've reviewed what you sent them because you're just making it easy for them to say, "No, I haven't had a chance to yet."



Instead, focus on starting a discussion:

“Hi, I’m checking in to see if it’d make sense to schedule a 15-minute discovery call in the next couple of weeks. The way I typically engage with new clients is to do a pilot project that will help us get to know each other better and confirm if we’re a good fit. Interested in scheduling a quick chat?”

Remember, it’s your job to keep moving the ball down the field ... if it’s movable.

## Give Them ONE Thing

Many clients know exactly what they need when they come to you. They have a defined project they want to tackle.

But many other prospects and clients aren’t sure what they need. They know they have a problem. But they don’t know how to solve it or what deliverables they’ll need from you.

In these situations, it’s tempting to give the client a list of recommendations. As you listen to them, you realize they need A, B, C, D, E and so on.

But that’s a big mistake. Because presenting a laundry list of solutions and projects only adds to the problem.

Want to know what plagues clients more than anything else these days?

Overwhelm.

They’re overwhelmed with ideas and potential courses of action. The problem isn’t a lack of information. The problem is that they’re drowning in information.

Your clients have plenty of ideas – too many ideas! What they need is a set of clear solutions... one at a time. So help them focus on ONE thing at a time.

Pick the ONE thing that will:

- A) Give them a quick win
- B) That would be simple to implement

This makes it easier to get a yes. And once they see the results, they’ll be 1,000% sold on you.

## When Marketing is Your Full-Time Job

Big, world-changing events, such as COVID-19, can make your warm email prospecting efforts easier.

It gives you something really clear, timely and specific to point out in your lead (the “meaningful connection”).

Plus, you end up with an email script you can basically reuse (only about 10% needs to be personalized).

But make no mistake. You’re still going to have to send out a ton of emails to get results.

If you’re in survival mode right now and just trying to get above water, you need to step up your efforts. Sending out one email a week isn’t going to do it. Marketing (both outreach and attraction marketing) will need to be your full-time job.

Sure, take breaks. Take care of yourself. Exercise, meditate, journal and reflect. But after doing your client work, self-marketing is your full-time job...for now.

As you start landing work, scale it back accordingly. But not till then.

## Overdo or Underdo?

Should you overdo your marketing and somehow deal with the overflow if and when it happens?

Or should you play it safe and throttle back so that you come at (or below) your capacity?

Most writers play it safe and throttle back. But in most situations, that’s the wrong move.

Most of us underestimate the level of effort and focus required to reach our income goals. We think it will take X ... when in reality it would take about X, plus 30% to 50% more.

When you play it safe, you’ll almost always undershoot and come up short. This creates stress and anxiety and which leads you to make poor decisions. You end up taking on the wrong clients or saying yes to suboptimal fees or projects you hate to do.

When you overdo your efforts, you run the risk of having way too much. But you also have something else: options!

You can price your work higher because you don't have to take it all. You can be bolder in your approach, and your confidence will come across in conversations with prospects and clients.

You can try things you would never have tried if you were desperate for work. Which typically leads to better results and even greater confidence.

And if you're STILL over capacity, you can refer the prospect to a colleague with whom you have a referral fee agreement or some kind of reciprocal agreement.

Or you can see if the prospect can wait four weeks until your schedule opens up again. Or you can start thinking about scaling a bit with a subcontractor writer.

Or you could buck up, take on the extra work, and increase your work capacity temporarily to get it all done and collect the extra income.

I don't know about you, but I like having options. And if I had to choose between these two problems (the stress of falling short of my income targets or the stress of having too much work), I'd choose the latter any day.

## Small Pockets of Time

Ever finish a task and then have about a 10-minute window before your next call or activity. What do you do with that time?

If you're like most people, the default is to waste it. But 10-minutes is a valuable chunk of time. You can do so much!

You can respond to email, respond on social media forums, make a quick call, do a mind map, create a brief outline.

It's not enough time... but that's a good thing because it forces you to get to the heart of a matter and focus on getting something done.

So keep a list of short tasks you can do the next time you have five or ten minutes in hand, tasks that will help move things forward and get them off your to-do list.

Very often, it's the little actions that can help you build serious momentum on a project.

## Breaking Up Your Problem

We often find ourselves having to make a big decision in our business. And in many cases, that decision is so overwhelming that we keep putting it off. Or we just don't know what to do, so we act based on emotion, not a logical plan.

The result is often less than optimal. For example, maybe one of your top clients is becoming a real pain to work with and you don't know how to get around this.

Or maybe you want to start transitioning more of your income into passive or semi-passive income. Or you want to scale your business and grow your team, but you're not sure how to start that process.

In all of the cases, the challenges and end goal can feel overwhelming. And when that happens, breaking up the initiative, goal or decision into short-term and long-term moves is the best course of action.

Specifically breaking up actions and outcomes into short-term and long-term.

For example, you might decide to keep your pain in the butt client for now (short-term action). But start working TODAY (short-term action) to replace them by stepping up your prospecting efforts and landing better clients (long-term goal).

For our next example, you might keep doing what you're doing with current clients (short-term action), while also carving out your time you budget to work ON your business (short-term action) to develop an info product that will eventually pay dividends (long-term goal).

I know this might seem like common sense. But we still don't do it because we're not sure how to think about the problem. So we keep putting things off until the problem festers and gets out of control.

In these situations, I find that breaking up problems into short-term and long-term thinking really helps. We don't have to solve the whole thing right now. We just need to get started with the easier "now" stuff. That's what gets us going and builds momentum.

## Project Start Dates

Here's a very simple thing you can do right away to better manage client expectations and avoid stressful "hot potato" issues: include a start date in every project agreement.

You probably already commit to a deadline, and you probably list that deadline in your fee agreement. But not many writers also include the date when they're going to start on the project.

There are two reasons why it pays to do this. First, it keeps clients from bugging you about the project before you're able to start. Many clients assume that the moment they send you the signed agreement, you're ready to go and you start work immediately.

But there's a good chance that you have a backlog of work and won't be able to start immediately.

Second, it enables you to better explain and justify the deadline you've committed to for the initial draft. If the deadline is 30 days from now, the client might wonder why it's going to take you so long.

But if you explain that you'll start on this date and will agree to have the first milestone (whether it's an outline, first draft, or something else) by this other date... that level of granularity and visibility will avert questions and further probing about your timeline.

Again, it's a very simple thing to do. But it's something that can make a big difference in setting client expectations and keeping them happy.

## Project Timetables

If you've ever made any improvements to your home, you're familiar with how contractors work. They give an estimated start date. But that estimate is based on what their schedule looks like today.

And that schedule can (and will) change based on when you decide to move forward.

So if it takes you a week or two to decide on a contractor, you know they probably won't be able to start when they estimated. Or if you change the scope once the project starts or you delay in making a big decision, this impacts the project timeline. We get it. We accept it.

But for some reason, many writers think they can't operate the same way when working with clients.

Take a white paper, for example. White papers are complex projects that often require some back-and-forth between you and the client. So if you give the client a

deadline without also detailing key project milestones (and when those are due), you can end up with a big problem in your hands.

Because if you promise you'll get started by X date, but you still haven't received the signed agreement a week after the original start date, you're not going to be able to make the deadline you quoted.

Or if the client takes ten days to turn around comments and feedback, and you allocated three, you're now under the gun to complete that initial draft in record time!

The solution is simple: include a project timeline table with your fee agreement. This table should highlight the project's key milestones, when each is due to the client, and when each is due back to you.

And the first milestone it needs to list is when the signed fee agreement (and deposit, if applicable) is due. Because without that, you can't get started.

This approach won't prevent every eventuality, but it will drastically reduce the risk of the project going off the rails... and you getting the blame for that.

## Asking for Referrals

Here's something to try the next time you have room for another client in your schedule.

When you meet with an existing client, ask them this simple question:

"Hey, Belinda. I currently have room in my schedule for one more client. But I'm not looking for just any client. I'm trying to be very strategic about whom I work with and whom I bring on board. You're already familiar with my strengths. And my best clients tend to come from referrals. So I'm wondering, who do you know who could potentially benefit from what I do? Does a friend or colleague come to mind who might be a good fit?"

That's it. Just see what they say.

In my experience, about half will tell you they're happy to help, but they need time to think of some names. Another 25% will give you a name on the spot. And another 25% (or often less) will tell you that they can't think of anyone.

For those who say they need to give it some thought, thank them and ask if you can call them back in three or four days to follow up. You can follow up that

conversation with a quick email to thank them and to remind them that you'll check in next Tuesday. And make sure to set up a reminder to follow up when you said you would.

Cultivating referrals is an intentional strategy. It doesn't happen by chance. And this is a small and simple (yet very effective) step in that strategy.

## Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen

It's not uncommon to have multiple reviewers involved in complex client projects. Think white papers, ebooks, original research reports, web copy, messaging platforms and similar projects where a lot of people have a lot to say.

But having too many cooks in the kitchen can create a big mess. Feedback can be confusing. Edits often conflict. And some reviewers will want to add big chunks of content that aren't part of the scope of work.

There are two basic ways to reduce the chances of this happening (and when it does, helping you deal with it effectively).

The first way is to insist on a roadmapping engagement. When the project is very complex and/or you sense there's not 100% agreement about the topic, objective, approach, audience or plan, then a roadmapping engagement can help keep everyone on the same page.

A white paper plan is a good example of a roadmapping example. It's simply a three to four-page document that sets out a frame of reference for the white paper. It's a bit like a creative brief, but specifically tailored for a white paper project.

The plan itself has value. But the greatest value is that it forces you to engage with the client and get buy-in on all the key elements of the project. You hash everything out and get all the decision-makers and reviewers on the same page.

The second way is to insist that the client name a single point of contact for the project. The role of this individual is to gather feedback and edits from all the reviewers and consolidate and reconcile that feedback.

If there are opposing ideas or suggestions, this person decides which ones to go with. And if a reviewer wants to add a whole new section that's out of scope, this single point of contact identifies out-of-scope requests and kills them before they get to you.

As a result, you only have to deal with edits that have been approved and are aligned with the original plan.

Does this always work perfectly? Of course not; nothing ever does. But both of these strategies dramatically reduce problems that can derail your project and turn it into your biggest nightmare.

## Deposits on Small Projects

Someone recently asked me whether to ask for a deposit for a small project with a new client. This individual knows I'm a big proponent of requiring a deposit on that first project with any new client—typically 50%. But she didn't feel it was practical to ask for a deposit on something so small.

In these situations, I recommend asking for the full payment up front.

You can explain this to new clients. Let them know that you always ask for a 50% deposit on the first project for any new client. But if that first project is under X amount, you require full payment up front.

This does three things:

- 1) It's a final check to ensure the prospect is fully qualified.
- 2) It establishes an important precedent. You're a professional with standards, systems and requirements.
- 3) It shows that you're practical. No one wants to cut two small checks. Most clients are perfectly fine paying up front for something small.

It's easy to get caught up in the idea that there's only one way to do things. But when you ignore self-limiting beliefs and just do what YOU want, you quickly realize those beliefs were nonsense.

Most good prospects will comply with what you want. And you'll start building the confidence you need to set other standards in your business.

Remember: YOU make the rules. There's no "review board" governing what you can and cannot do. It's all up to you.



## Variable Income and Expenses

One of the many challenges of running your own business is income variability.

Some months you book a lot of work but have little cash coming in the door. Other months you land little new work, but you have a ton of payments coming in from past invoices.

This makes it very difficult to manage personal finances because most of our bills are fixed or fairly predictable. Which means in some months you don't have enough to cover them and in some months you have too much.

So how do you deal with this? I've found two very effective and simple ways:

The first is to start paying yourself a fixed monthly salary.

By "salary," I simply mean you pay yourself a fixed and predetermined amount. Also, it doesn't have to be once a month. You can pay yourself every 15 days if that's better for you.

My world changed when I started doing this. The predictability forced me to get my act together with my personal finances, because now I had very clear constraints to work with.

The second is to have a personal "buffer" account to help cover variable expenses.

Periodic big-ticket items, such as bi-annual life insurance premiums, and unexpected expenses—such as back-to-school expenses, charitable donations, and minor car repairs—used to completely mess up my cash flow system.

(To be clear, I'm not talking about an emergency account here. You should still have an emergency account to help with the big, unexpected stuff such as a medical bill, a big car repair, etc.).

A buffer account solved this dilemma for me. I deposit a fixed amount into this account every month. And every time I have an unexpected or variable expense, I simply draw the difference of what I don't have in my regular checking account from that buffer account.

How much should you put in the account every month? Here's a simple way to start:

- Add up all your predictable but variable bills
- Add things that came up last year that were NOT predictable
- Add 20% to account for the unexpected

- Divide the grand total amount you'll need by 12

And that's your monthly contribution to this account. Combine this idea with a fixed monthly draw from your business, and you'll be well on your way to reducing financial stress and taking undue pressure off your business.

## Time Tracking

I take great care in planning my week every Monday morning. But even the most carefully planned week won't ever go exactly as planned.

Life happens. Business happens.

And you know what? The purpose of pre-planning your week is NOT to architect a perfect week. The point is to proactively take charge of your week, days and hours. Because if you don't take charge of your time ahead of time, someone else will.

Having said that, I've recently felt like my weeks are getting out of control. You know that feeling you get on Friday of, "Wow, it's Friday already? How could it be? Where did the time go?"

That used to be a great feeling when I worked for someone else. Finally, the weekend!

But it's not such a great feeling when you're on your own. And lately I've felt like something's missing. Like I don't really have the control I thought I had.

So recently I ran a little where I tracked my time in a very detailed way. I used a tool called Toggl. And after two or three full weeks of doing this, I did some analysis of where my time was going.

There were a few surprising and sobering insights. But you know what? There's nothing like the truth to help you make important changes. And that's exactly what happened. Based on these findings, I started making better decisions about where I spend my time and energy...and what I outsource and delegate to my team.

I've often resisted the saying, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." But when it comes to something like this, I do believe there's value in measuring – as uncomfortable as it might be for me.

I suggest you do the same. Track your days hour by hour for about two or three weeks. And see what comes up for you. I bet you'll find some surprises in the mix.

## Front-Load Your Day

If you had a great routine that was working for you prior to the pandemic, chances are that routine is now gone or drastically altered.

I'm personally having a very difficult time establishing new routines in my life and business that enable me to be effective at work, while giving me the flexibility I need to deal with the new realities.

Kids at home doing distance learning. New and unpredictable schedules. New pressures at work. Appliances that seem to be breaking constantly. (I had three appliances break in the first four weeks of the lockdown!)

And while I'm still trying to figure out things out, here's one thing that is working – and that I recommend you do as well: front-load your most important tasks every day.

For me, that's exercise, meditation, journaling and tasks that are in my zone of genius... even if it's just one of those tasks per day.

I've found that if I move all those key items to the start of the day, they get done. When I don't, they get dropped.

It's like booking an early-morning doctor's appointment. First thing in the morning, your doctor is always on time. But when you take a late-afternoon appointment, they're almost always behind schedule.

So make a list of the few things you MUST do every day. Your non-negotiables. Make sure that some of those items help you stay healthy physically, mentally or emotionally. Take care of yourself first. Then work your way up to tasks and activities that match the energy you have early in the day.

When you front-load your routines, you stand a better chance of having better days. When you don't, you get caught in a very frustrating, negative cycle that can quickly spiral out of control.

## Boost Your Productivity with Work-Block Allocations

Every day, I have a list of things I need to get done that day. And I create a schedule that maps out my day hour-by-hour with some buffer time for inevitable interruptions, miscalculations and other unexpected things.

This system has worked fairly well for me over the years. But with the pandemic, two things have changed that are making this approach more challenging.

First, my routines are not as stable as before. The kids are home and the world is still a crazy place.

Second, I'm extremely busy at work. Business has picked up recently and I also have a number of projects I couldn't keep pushing off that have all come to a head. So this has forced me to try new things.

Here's what I've been experimenting with: I designate three work blocks per day. One in the morning, one mid-day and one in the afternoon. Each block is two hours long, give or take.

Now I take my to-do list and I'm allocating these items to different work blocks. I'm literally taking a sheet of paper, dividing it into three sections, and slotting in each task or item.

I've created a set of rules (or protocols) for what types of tasks go into each block to make this "slotting" process easier.

For instance, my morning block is reserved for things such as:

- Writing
- Drafting campaign copy
- Brainstorming and thinking time
- Creating training content
- Reading
- Strategizing

My midday block is for:

- Coaching calls
- Onboarding calls with new clients
- Drafting game plans for clients
- Responding to email
- Recording or screencasting a training class
- Recording these daily insights

And my afternoon block is for:

- Slack
- Facebook
- Personal email inbox
- Miscellaneous tasks

- Personal or professional training I'm working on for myself

Is this system perfect? Do I switch it around based on constraints and unexpected things that come up? Absolutely!

But that's my basic protocol. It takes the cognitive load off the decision-making every day when I make my allocations.

So far, this system is keeping me from doing stupid things, such as processing email early in the morning or leaving creative tasks to later in the day when I don't have the right energy.

The point is to align tasks with the time of day when you have the right kind of energy for those tasks. That's way better than prioritizing tasks based on what you're interested in or other people's priorities.

If you've been having trouble with procrastination or getting tasks done effectively, give this system a try.

## Not Feeling Up to It

You have plenty of reasons not to do something important. Say you know you have to overhaul your positioning. You started the process, but then you landed a huge client. So you hit "pause" on that effort to onboard the client.

Or maybe you have a family emergency that will require your attention for a few weeks. You have good reason to shift gears and tend to that emergency.

But do you want to know what's NOT a good reason to stop working on something important?

Not feeling up to it.

You're just not in the mood. You haven't found the inspiration. You feel a bit tired. You'd rather do something else.

Once you've made the commitment to do something important, your mood shouldn't be a factor in doing what you need to do. You need to do it anyway.

If you need to hack your way into the task, that's fine. In fact, that's quite normal. You can break it down into small, simple actions. Or you can identify a quick, 10-minute sub-step that makes it easier to get started.

Almost every day, there is at least one thing I do NOT feel like doing. Sometimes I pretend I didn't see it on my task list. I procrastinate, put it off, ignore it. But that doesn't solve the problem. It only makes it worse.

So I remind myself that I have to pay the piper. I can do it now and get it over with ... or I can let it fester and pay a higher price tomorrow.

So yes, there are good fundamental reasons to pause, push or scrap important tasks and initiatives. But not feeling up to it is not one of them.

## Easing In, Easing Out

One of the things I vowed to change when I went out on my own was to structure my workweek in a way that matched my own rhythm.

For instance, I've never liked getting right to it early on a Monday morning. I did that for six years in one job and I hated it. I need to ease into my week, not jump right in.

Same thing at the end of the week. I don't want to go full throttle to the very end. It sends me into the weekend with stress and anxiety.

That's why I use my Mondays and Fridays as buffer days. On Mondays, I plan my week, work on the business, catch up on loose ends, and so on. I don't schedule calls or work on intense projects. I save that for my production days, which are Tuesday through Thursday.

Fridays are a hybrid day for me. They can be either a free day, but most often they're split between free time and buffer time.

For my buffer time, I'll do my weekly recap, work a bit ON the business, catch up on things I didn't get to during my production days, run errands, and so on.

For my free time, I try to do something active and fun. That could include a longer workout at the gym. Or time with friends or family. Or maybe a hike.

Do I stick to this model perfectly? Far from it. I've spent too many buffer days on production work. And time-sensitive projects have a way of seeping into my Friday free time.

But still, I'm intentional about it. I make an effort and set boundaries. When it doesn't work out, I try to learn from my mistakes.

Still, my weeks are a million times better than they were when I worked for someone else. I'm grateful that I get to set the direction and pace – not someone else!

So... what's your rhythm? And how are you organizing your weekly and daily structure to match?

## Elon Musk's Focus Hack

Elon Musk is arguably the poster child of focus and productivity. He not only runs Tesla – which by itself is an enormous feat – he also runs SpaceX and leads a number of other ventures.

It's difficult to believe that one person can find the time to do all this successfully. But Elon Musk does it and does it well.

Now... I'm not advocating working 18-hour days, seven days a week. But I recently came across an article that explained how Musk is able to keep all those plates spinning. And it has to do with compartmentalizing his week.

Rather than work on a mix of projects and issues from all these companies all in one day, he focuses on one company at a time. So, Mondays, for example, he might focus on SpaceX – and SpaceX only. On Tuesdays, he'll fly up to the Bay Area and focus exclusively on Tesla for the next two days. Thursdays are dedicated to another one of his ventures ... and so on.

This got me thinking about the application of this idea for people like us. We might not be running multiple companies. But we wear multiple hats in the company we are running.

And two of the hats that we often ignore are marketing and working on our business. If that sounds like you, try dedicating part of one specific day to these areas.

It doesn't have to be the full day. It could be a morning, an afternoon ... or, heck, just two hours first thing on Thursday mornings to focus on this one function or activity – and nothing else.

Recently, I've been working on getting a consulting side hustle off the ground. But as important as this project is for me, it's turned into a backburner project. I start off the week with the intention to get back into it ... but then life and other urgent tasks get in the way.

By Friday afternoon, I've barely (if at all) worked on my launch. So starting this week, I'm dedicating three hours every Friday morning to this project – no exceptions. By making this commitment ahead of time, I'll not only make it happen, but I'll be able to focus on the task at hand when that time comes.

I've done this before with other priorities that always seemed to fall by the wayside. So I know it works well. And now that I know it also works for one of the busiest people on the planet, I have no excuse.

## Matching Work to Energy Levels

One of the many great things about running your own show is that you can work when, how and where you want.

You could wake up at 4 am every day and be done by 10 am if that's your preferred schedule. Or you could work late at night every night and sleep in till noon. Or you could work in spurts throughout the day.

Whatever works for you!

But the operative word is “works.” You need to be very clear about what works and doesn't work well for you. Otherwise, you'll spin your wheels, waste a lot of time and work during times not suited for your energy levels.

I'll give you an example. I'm definitely a morning person. I know that. And I do my best creative work before noon.

In the afternoons, I have a different energy – one that's better suited for coaching calls and live training sessions.

Evenings aren't a great time for me to work. I feel like I've already given it my all by then and my energy levels are low. I have less focus and discipline. So if I get in front of my computer in the evenings, I'll just end up reading the news, catching up on email or jumping on social media. And before I know it, I've wasted 45 minutes on that stuff!

During my regular work hours, I'm much better about sticking to the plan. And I think that's because I actually have a plan ... and I have the kind of energy that enables me to be more disciplined.

This might not be the case for you. But I'm sure you too have different levels of energy at different times of the day. You know when you're most alert. And you also know when you're more likely to get distracted.



You know what times of day (or night) have a higher risk of you getting off track or doing shoddy work. Or when what would normally take, say 30 minutes, will probably take one hour or longer.

So make a plan based on your energy flow throughout the day. And create guide rails for yourself to help you get done what you need to get done as best as you can, without distractions.

There are no rules. You get to make them. But design them in a way that helps you do great work efficiently and enables you to have some fun in the process.

## The Little Moments

You set some big goals. You hire a business coach to help you with that plan and provide you with the framework, tools, systems, feedback and encouragement to reach those goals. You roll up your sleeves and you get to work, excited to make some big changes.

But then ... life happens. You land a huge project that soaks up all your time. Your kid gets sick. Your basement floods. You have a family emergency.

We're talking about the things that happen to all of us in normal, everyday life.

So what can you do when they happen?

Here's what you need to know: big goals aren't accomplished during big, long, and focused work sprints. Sure, those massive efforts feel good and ARE good for making progress.

But do you know when real progress and breakthroughs happen?

They happen during the little moments.

The 30 minutes you spent brainstorming some messaging ideas.

The single warm email you sent this morning.

The 15 (focused) minutes you spent on LinkedIn yesterday afternoon.

The moment you held your ground with a client and explained that you couldn't say yes to her request because it was out of scope.

The courage you mustered to quote 20% higher on that project for a new prospect.

The follow-up call you made that Friday afternoon.

We often think that it's the big things that make a huge difference, like setting goals, making plans, hiring a coach or taking massive action.

Yes, all these things matter — a lot. But it's the little moments of truth that compound on each other to yield the massive results we seek.

So if you're not happy with where you are right now in any aspect of your business, don't look for big, obvious reasons. Instead, think about all these little decision points. Those little moments when you've chosen to skip that small action because you thought it didn't matter.

Too often, the difference between success and mediocrity lies in what you do during these little moments.

## Want Some Help?

Are you an established, high-income writer, copywriter or marketing professional who's trying to get to the next level in your business?

Would you like some strategic and tactical guidance for earning more in less time doing work you love for better clients?

I'd love to learn more about your business to see if and how I could help you get there. Send an email to [ed@b2blauncher.com](mailto:ed@b2blauncher.com) with the word "BREAKTHROUGH" in the subject line and I'll get back to you with more details.