
Puberty for Designers: Learning How to Sell

Personal takeaways from “The Win Without Pitching Manifesto” by Blaire Enns

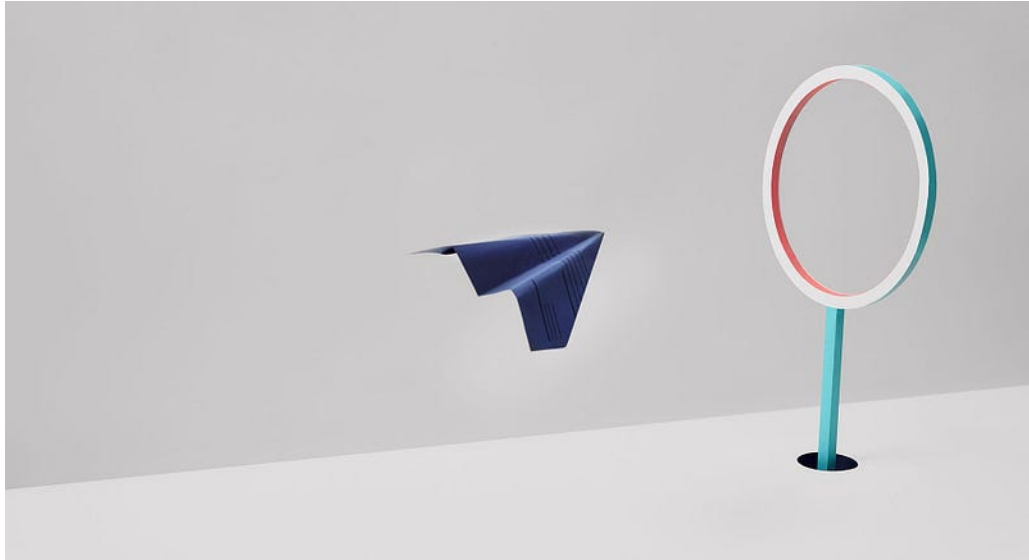


Illustration by [Alicja Colon](#)

Thanks, Chris Do.

12,000 characters for 12 proclamations. Challenging myself to write a takeaway after every chapter was surprisingly fun. Here, we will be tackling focus, selectivity, respectful selling, continuous learning, and conquering money. Fundamental but untaught parts by those who encouraged us to follow our wildest dreams as a creative.

It is important to mention that this manifesto is aimed at creative agencies to get them—the creatives, the experts—to control the process when talking with a client. So conflicts when comparing it to one's personal life are expected. The wisdom overflowing from Blaire is still enough to give you a positive mini existential crisis.

Proclamation 1: Choose a Focus

**“The world doesn't
need another
generalist firm.”**

BLAIR ENNS | CEO WIN WITHOUT PITCHING

Quote by Blaire Enns — Picture taken from [Win Without Pitching Twitter](#)

All my life, I've been trying to be a jack of all trades, thinking I'm a super unique and talented individual when I should obtain deep expertise in one thing instead.

This realization was essential for my future self. Graphic design, logo design, front-end, back-end, frameworks, bots, no-code. I feel like knowing the life cycle makes me “know it all already”. I'm ready to choose a specialization.

Although it is nice to, say, be a grandmaster of Scrabble at 14 years old, I do not want to become someone who stares blankly and wonders “Is this really all that life has to offer?”. This dangerous question has the potential to crumble towers of “expertise”. It, however, (quickly or slowly) follow-ups with a new, true desire for a certain kind of passion. See a [TedX talk](#) about how early specialization can diminish long-term growth.

Proclamation 2: conversions, not presentations

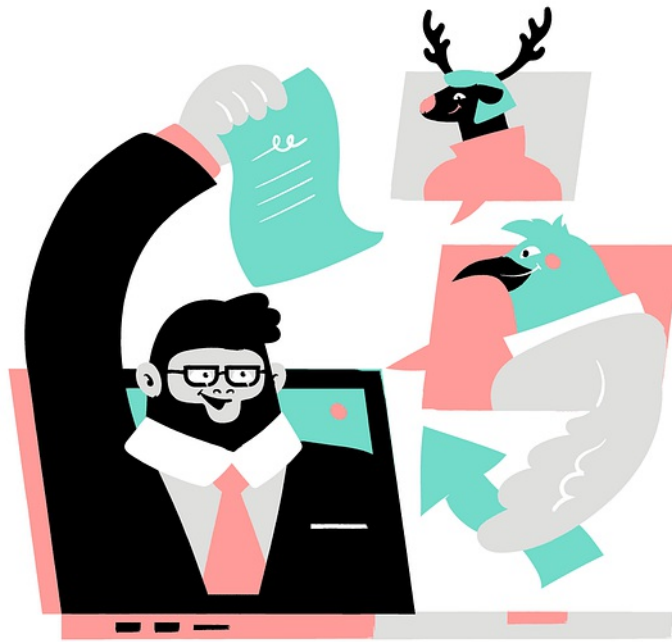


Illustration by [Ramy Wafaa](#)

Approval, approval, approval. As a kid, I used to show my drawings to my parents and await their ego-boosting validation. Kids were pretty high on dopamine back then, and social media's not to be blamed. LOL!

In my eyes, Blaire tackles this invisible, personal catastrophe with great maturity. Something only experience can give. By pointing out the typical dynamics of judge/command (client) & present/comply (agency) today, it, in his words, erodes the deep expertise an agency has built.

This is why he suggests clarifying. Set a strategy and revolve around it in every action. Free yourself from presenting, big reveals, etc. your clients to you cause you are the doctor tending to their business pains. And like a doctor, work it out through conversation and collaboration.

As a student product designer, this is also good wisdom ingested. Seniors usually look down on your capability and expertise because of a similar dynamic, it's high time to change.

Proclamation 3: Diagnosis before Prescription

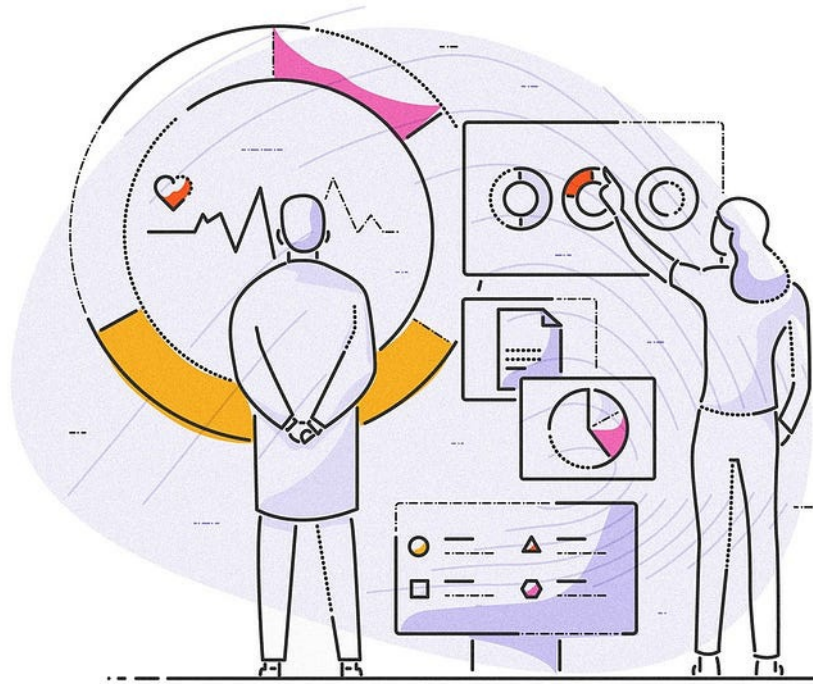


Illustration by [James Oconnell](#)

The customer is not always right. More correctly, they usually have strong ideas and a strong sense that he is right. Designers are the doctors of companies. Many clients come self-diagnosed: “You may be correct, but let’s find out for sure.”

The point of this chapter is to take control. Clients usually possess the leader-like role, so they’re used to bearing the burden and the pressure to make things right. How might we reduce this? Do we show them technical and thought processes (unconsciously) to signify our credibility? Design is a process after all.

Proclamation 4: Embrace selling



Illustration by [Gloria Shugleva](#)

As a maker myself, I fear selling. I hate poking my nose into the lives of others and pitch (which I should do less next time unless paid) my pre-made solution like it's going to fix all their problems.

I was afraid of lying.

This chapter revalidated the advice of a certain Stephen Suici, founder of Tabangay Ta, to me. He told me that marketing is all about position and timing, not graphic design and copywriting. Blaire takes this a step further and advises readers to even reject if needed so that the client at hand can find a better service that is an actual fit. Additionally, once the deal is closed we, surprise, surprise, actually help the person and ensure they get the most of our offer.

The new model offered is also an intriguing and honest one. Educate the unaware enough, and demand will be created. Inspire with, say, your portfolios, and clients will follow through. Reassure buyers after the exchange is made, as they usually feel remorse afterwards. Comfort them.

Oh and remember, we're salespersons now.

Proclamation 5: propose with words and don't write

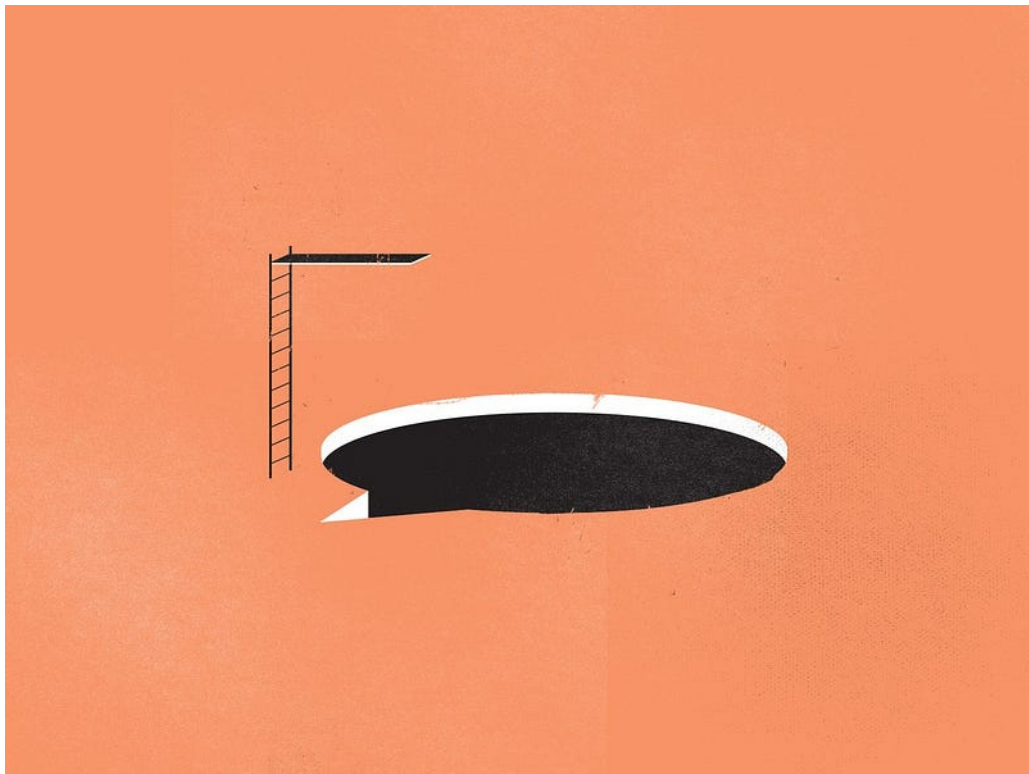


Illustration by [Nate Hanson](#)

To be about to converse with a client on an idea means that the client acknowledges us as experts. Again, diagnose first before prescribing.

As a designer, my early days consisted of designing the client's logo in advance or presenting my website design to the client before even before our first meeting. I would usually get excited over the brief and create the "solution" in hopes of leaving a good impression. But no — Blaire tells us that should not be the case.

Usually, after the clients have seen your effort, they will be too shy to tell you how they honestly feel and go with what you made instead. All while trying to regain control and point you towards the direction they want to head over to.

This chapter had me reflect on my days as a freelancer. Truly, I have regretted a few things here and there. But I am glad to have cringed, for it shows that I have truly grown.

Proclamation 6: Selectivity with Expertise

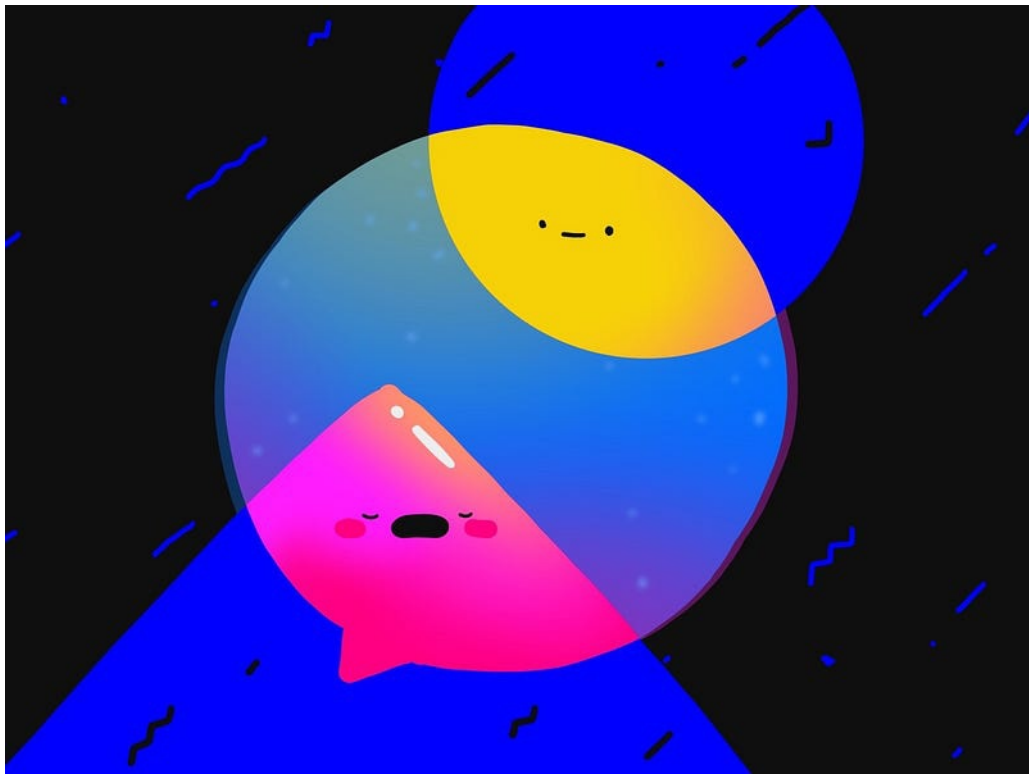


Illustration by [Lena Vargas](#)

Quick sum up: be brutally honest.

To acquire quality clients almost always translates to weeding out the malevolent grass first. This brings me to a thought: popular designers like Chris Do are reaching a large volume of people. How do they efficiently segregate those worthy and those not? What kind of system is their company implementing? That, I might need to tag Do himself.

Others may see this as a suicide mission for your agency, but Blaire debates otherwise; saying no and being the first to admit that a client's organization is unable to afford you is actually a jumpstart to becoming more credible with your agency's expertise. Ergo, clients' buying resistance will decrease, turning the previous proclamation "conversations instead of documents" more probable with less friction.

Proclamation 7: Follow up your claim of expertise with, well, proper expertise.



Illustration by [Storytale](#)

“A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one.”

This book is making me grow.

Looking back at my creative life, my success was always rooted in my adaptability. As a curious fellow, I could learn a new tool and quickly follow up with an output. I thrived at using swords in gunfights—but then I’d eventually learn how to use a sniper rifle yards away, considering knots and bullet physics, until I find it easy to take headshots.

Being a malleable generalist was and is still my edge. I was offered a job as a product designer because of [my first telemedicine app concept](#). I didn’t even know what telemedicine was until I researched the entire industry. Heck, I didn’t even know about Figma’s existence and its capabilities until I decided to bring my app concept (from paper sketches) to life! Not only that but the said app concept went on to win a nationwide UX competition. This served as the foundation for my [“joining-hackathons-to-force-myself-to-learn as a solution” \(JHTFMTL-AAS?\)](#).

Many people like to drop their jaws upon discovering my age. I’m 17 by the way. I don’t like to admit it, but I think this is why I got away with being a celebrated generalist. I think. The fact that kids my age were

expected to not get things right correctly set up a perfect environment for me to fail without setbacks. Rapidly and efficiently. By setbacks, I am talking about the negative psychological effects which can sometimes get the best of me. Happy to have spotted this issue early on.

Now that I'm turning 18 this year, expectations are going to rise. Reality won't be as kind to me now. It is time I settle for a specialization and gather deep expertise. Now I understand why Chris Do pushes saying no, growth-wise.

Proclamation 8: No pay, no consult.



Illustration by [Justas Galaburda](#)

The “treat designers like doctors” mindset stops here. Designers do not and should not be giving out their thinking for free. These words and “suggestions” come from hundreds of hours of moving pixels with Figma. Thinking hard if the design addition they made was a good decision for the users. Picturing out multiple scenarios in their head on how a user session would turn out with said newly-implemented design. Put simply: experience is a painstakingly expensive resource.

Honestly, I thought this proclamation is where Blaire would disappoint. Where it'd finally dawn upon readers that he's all talk. But no. Blaire continues to make interesting points. Just when you're about to say “how do I pull that off?”, advices are given. Indeed, we must be responsible businessmen as much as we are responsible designers.

Designers have the right to be compensated for their strategy—which requires a conversation first and therefore should not be expected upon the client’s release of cash—before they even mention it. Because cases like these end up with the designers clarifying extra details about the payment. “We’ll get started as soon as we receive the deposit, as it is our policy for all new clients.”

Before we even begin to debate about the notion where designers should prove themselves of their worth and therefore charge their thinking for free, we should take it inside ourselves and know that there is a fine line between showing your expertise via your portfolio vs actually starting to working on the client’s project for free. Remember, you’re the expert here. Gain that control.

Proclamation 9: But first, let’s talk money

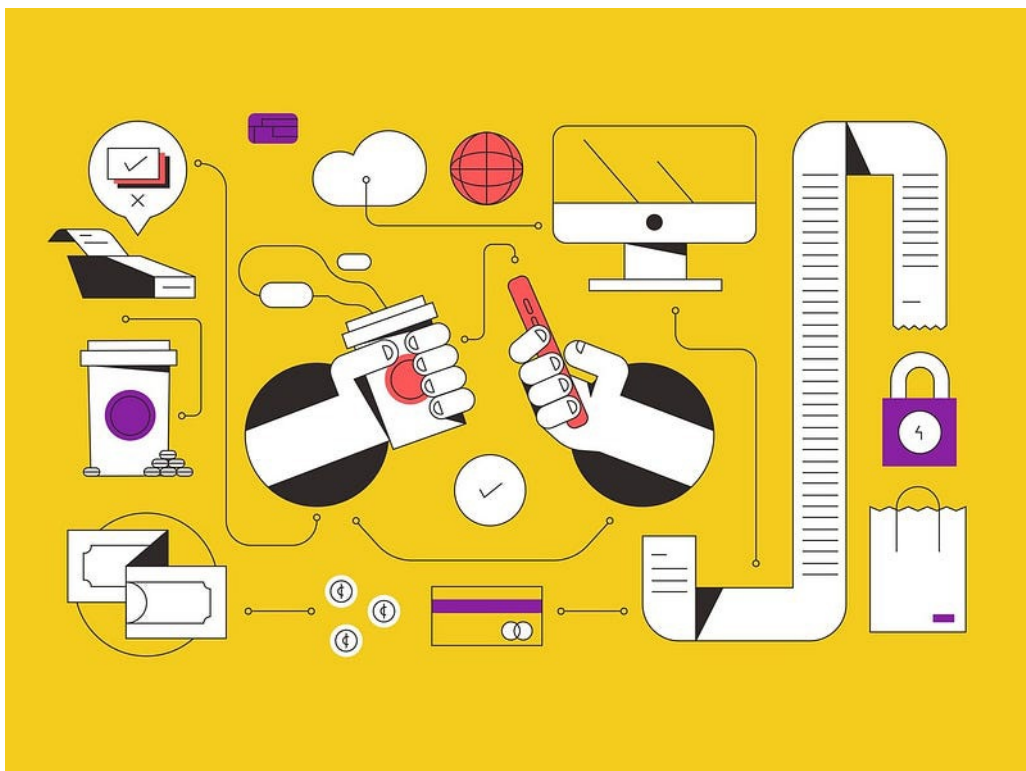


Illustration by [Jairus](#)

As a Filipino, wait, actually, this has nothing about me being Filipino. Throughout my life, there’s always been an invisible awkwardness when I talk money with anyone else other than my family. In a facing-the-client context, it’s one of those times where my impostor syndrome kicks in and fills my body with guilt—to the brim.

Again, Blaire comes up with a specific framework for accepting clients at a comfortable place. Quality over quantity. A client should be able to

provide 10% of our gross target annual fee. He calls it the Minimum Level of Engagement.

A gem in this section resonates with the recent habit-forming reads I've encountered. In Blaire's words: Discussing money early is an easily formed habit that, once acquired, helps us better make the decisions that shape the future of our practice.

Proclamation 10: When should we use discounts?



Illustration by [Vida Lamakani](#)

If you're like me, you've probably had a client who you used a discount on—be it a friend or whatever—only for that person to use said price as the reference price for their future requests.

In this proclamation, Blaire quickly does away with the tradition where companies accept a client for a low price, hoping to gradually increase it from there. While this is a common strategy I have seen in real life, profit margin, like power, only diminishes with time.

Going back to discounts, the business development guru follows up with alternatives to discounting. As you should only discuss as a last resort: only in rare occasions where both parties see that it is good for them in the long run. This decision was given no framework, it is all up to designers to decide. Said alternatives include giving out guarantees,

terms, and simply holding out our ground. I didn't know I could do this before. To guarantee only that the client will come to appreciate our thinking—as the experts—during our conversations; nothing more, nothing less. The next statement makes the idea of me becoming an adult really clear. One should also be open to the idea of doing payments in terms of installments. As far as I know, contracts to be reviewed by a lawyer, at the very least, are involved here. So I think knowing one (I think there's an area where you could get lawyers to sign as a witness. I don't know, I'm just a kid writing this without WiFi.) is a prerequisite.

Finally, Blaire hovers to charities. Simply saying that charities should be treated like charities. Honestly, I think almost everybody has an ulterior motive. Charity work, for me, has helped me jumpstart my career. It was and still is in charity work that gave me my job for it was in volunteering for initiatives that showed my talent to the world (while getting to learn new skills). I'm pretty sure businesses also see this as an opportunity to grow their connections. To conclude, charity work is work that should be done without expectations. Rewards will be coming back to you tenfold even when that was not what you were initially going for.

Proclamation 11: You're good. Now start charging more.

Storytale



Illustration by [Storytale](#)

Interesting, but relatable point. It is the implementation of a surprise design change and the calculation of the added new cost behind it that irks designers. It did with me. That's why when the chat head of THAT client appears, I sigh and ignore it. I don't wanna work with him anymore. Despite that, I, now drowned in guilt from ghosting, continue to provide my services at an unclear rate.

As of the moment of writing, I have yet to have a proper conversation with said client. There will be two outcomes: he raises his pay or I stop designing, thinking for him.

Another point I pondered on was this: strategic talks must come first, with the efforts coming in later. However, the charge more logic comes handy in anticipation of nitpicky design changes. My logic here is to make clients pay for their disruptive attitude in advance. Though we must be selective, it is better safe than sorry. That's just one point of view. Besides, a client approached us because we are the experts, are we not? We must provide clients with confidence and peace of mind. The bigger the client, the bigger the price—should be obvious.

Proclamation 12: Keep your self-worth high—both in money and respect.



Illustration by [Kristina Ooo](#)

The last proclamation. Let out your bittersweet finallys.

Blaire talked a lot about money and client selectivity. However, at the end of the day, he reminds us that respect begets respect. Then, money. Emphasizing how we, as creatives, should focus on creating, changing the world. But to not forget that we must do so in a sustainable manner; for schools only ever encourage us to dream big and assume that basic needs will be met autonomously. That is why respect for our craft must remain high. Clients get the perceived higher power because they hold the money, but let's not forget what Blaire drills into all of our heads: we can always say no. Another opportunity will inevitably arrive.

Do away with pitches! A particular question struck me. In verbatim: How can we harness our gifts to change the world if they are so common or undervalued that they must be given away for free? This is why we must gain mastery over focus, selectivity, respectful selling, continuous learning, and the conquering of money.

By [Carl Kho](#) on [January 19, 2022](#).

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