The freelancer's guide to good jobs & great pay

34% of North American workers now consider themselves freelancers, and their work adds $715 billion to the economy every year. In Europe, freelance numbers have increased by 45% since last year alone, making it the fastest growing group in the EU labour market.

While our ranks are growing, most freelancers (and the people who hire them) still treat freelancing as a commodity. Unfortunately, commoditized labour is usually a race to the bottom, rewarding the cheapest, fastest, and most available workers. Just look at the hundreds of gig-matching websites that list freelancers by skill, hourly rate, and turnaround time. Freelancers are being reduced to their core skills, sorted by hourly price, and stacked up against thousands of other freelancers without any clear way to stand out, prove their value, or demonstrate their problem-solving skills.

There's another way to operate. **As a freelancer, you can become a sought-after leader in your craft – someone who earns respect, commands attention, and earns a good living in the process.**

Enter, this email course (cue dramatic music and glitter explosions). *The freelancer's guide to good jobs & great pay* shows you, from start to finish, how to ensure your projects are successful and enjoyable for both parties. Because, freelancing can provide much more than a commodity exchange; it can be an amazing collaboration between you and your clients – a scenario where you're valued for your knowledge and expertise, considered irreplaceable, paid well, and hired repeatedly by people you like and admire.

I've developed the ideas and processes in this course over 16 years of freelancing. I don't freelance as an interim step until I build a wildly successful product or a huge company. This is a long-term, long-lasting career that's now more stable than any corporate job. I freelance because I love being a freelancer. It gives me the ability to chart my own path in life, not to mention working in my underwear (with my clients being none-the-wiser). I choose who I work with, when I work, and most importantly, when I don't need to work.

Here's what we'll cover in this mini-course:

- Setting client expectations
- Writing proposals that get you hired
- Getting paid on time, every time
- Communicating your way to stress-free projects
- Showing work that gets approved
- Guiding clients to make helpful revision requests
- Finishing projects and helping your clients succeed
- ***A discount to the full course*** (***on the last page***)

Setting client expectations

Many years ago, a woman emailed to ask if I could build her new website. She had heard about my work through a friend, saw my name listed on other websites, and gushed about my portfolio.

She clearly wanted to work with me and offered to pay half the project fee upfront, just so we could skip all the formalities and start designing. It seemed like a dream. Someone who loved my work was throwing money my way, and she wanted to start – now.

Was I ever wrong.

I didn't set any expectations for the project, such as determining whether we were a good fit and defining her goals. I just started designing. I was quickly awoken from my happy dream when I sent her an initial mockup.

First, she said I hadn't done my best work, because she hated everything about the design. It didn't match her audience or her business. Why had I "phoned it in" on her project and given my best work to all my other clients?

I ended up doing five times the work to salvage and complete the project. She still wasn't totally happy at the end. This experience taught me the value of setting clear expectations before money changes hands.

If both parties aren't perfectly clear about the deliverables, process, timeline, and shared responsibilities – in writing, before there's money on the table – you're basically jumping out a window and hoping it's not the 47th floor.

My process now involves the following steps. No exceptions:

- **Onboarding**. I have an onboarding process that serves two purposes. First, it pre-qualifies clients before I put my own time and effort into a new project. Potential clients see my project rates, exactly which services I do and don't provide, and how the project will unfold, step by step. Then they fill in a project planner, which demonstrates how they communicate in writing (and if I understand what they're trying to say) and whether their goals match up with my expertise. Second, the onboarding process shows me whether a potential client can follow directions. It seems like a silly test, but I've found that if someone can't read instructions

and provide clear answers to my questions, the project is destined for failure. For example, if I ask them to share one favourite website and I get 27 examples, warning bells start to ring.

- **Communication**. Next, I talk to the potential client on the phone or through video. It's important to see how well we communicate, listen, and riff of each other's ideas. This conversation also brings their goals to life, because they explain their motivations and what drives their work. Even though this is a web design project, we talk a lot about their business and what I can do to help.

- **In writing**. The second lesson in this course covers proposals, so I won't outline what goes into one yet. But, I always put everything in writing before there's money involved. It's essential to be fully transparent – even though costs are mentioned in my onboarding process and we've discussed the deliverables in a call – about what services I'm providing, how much it will cost, and how long it will take to finish. Legally, it's good to have everything in writing, but it's even better to ensure both parties understand and accept the project terms, so we never reach the point where lawyers are screaming at a judge about witness badgering (like a scene from *Law & Order*). And if the client starts pushing for more, we can easily refer back to the signed agreement and project terms.

These three steps (onboarding, initial communication, and putting the project in writing) will help you to screen your clients more effectively and significantly reduce those bad project / bad client experiences. After all, you deserve the clients you get – and since you deserve great clients, make sure you do everything in your power to work with ones you're stoked about.

One note: if, during any point between between the introduction and signed contract, you feel like the work isn't a good fit, or you get a bad feeling about the project or the client, end the relationship. Gut feelings, especially after you've freelanced for a while, often are rooted in fact, so listen to them closely. You don't need to be rude; just explain that you're not the right person for the gig or you don't think your skills / expertise are a good match for the project.

While it might seem smart to quickly accept money for a new project (especially when you've got an eager, paying client), it's definitely in your best interest to set clear expectations about deliverables, costs, and timelines before the work begins. That way there are no alarms and no surprises (as Radiohead said so eloquently).

Writing proposals that get you hired

I include jokes about vegan donuts and being paid in gold doubloons in my client proposals, most of which come in at over $10,000. What don't these proposals have? Legal-ese, lawyer-speak or anything that isn't phrased in clear, plain English.

(Note: this isn't legal advice, since I'm not a lawyer. I'm simply sharing how I use proposals to structure and reinforce my client work.)

My plain-language proposals may go against business conventions, but if I'm selling my value as an irreplaceable problem solver, not a commoditized and interchangeable labourer, I want these proposals to reflect my personality just as clearly as my website, business documents, and any other communication materials.

Jokes about donuts and doubloons aside, if a pre-project reaches the proposal stage, I have a high chance of getting the job. It's not because I'm the best designer or programmer (I'm not). It's not because I'm the cheapest or fastest, either.

Landing projects from your proposals depends more on the why than the how (i.e. technical specs). Why will your proposed solution work? And, why are you the right person to help the client achieve their business goals?

Answering those two questions will set your work apart from most other freelance proposals, because you're not just sharing what you're going to do, but also why you're doing it and how it will help their business. And if you can inject some authentic personality into the process, that's icing on the vegan donut (which might technically make it a cupcake).

Here's how I structure my proposals:

- **Define the problem**. What's wrong, broken, requires an update, or needs fixing? If it's a redesign, map out why the site is being revised (in the same words and phrases the client used to describe the problem). You

only need a few sentences, but it sets the stage for everything that follows.

- **Outline your solution**. How will you fix the problem? Answer the two "whys" we covered earlier (why your solution and why you) as briefly as possible.

- **Offer proof**. Do you have a testimonial or case study that shows how you solved a similar problem? Quote or share it here. If you don't have a parallel testimonial, provide a general one that speaks to your ability to help clients achieve results. Include 1-3 lines, maximum, plus the client's name, title and business name.

- **Clarify the deliverables**. Use line items to describe exactly what the client will receive, in what format, and how many revisions/changes you'll provide. Include as much detail as you can. It doesn't hurt to include an optional, but relevant, deliverable here as an upsell – even if it's just a retainer or a future phase. A line or two for each deliverable is fine, but ensure you're ridiculously clear.

- **Attach a price to each deliverable**. Don't list your hourly rate and how many hours it will take you to complete each deliverable, because that punishes your own efficiency. Instead, attach a value to each deliverable based on your skills and problem-solving abilities. Pricing by value emphasizes the quality and benefits of that deliverable, without commoditizing your work. You also need to provide your payment terms (what types of payment you accept and when each payment is due – which we'll cover in the next lesson).

- **Set a schedule**. What's the start date? When will the client receive each deliverable? Remember, this isn't about the number of hours each step takes, it's a detailed project schedule. You can also list when you'll need certain client assets (like a brand guide, sitemap, photography, reference materials, etc), if that's part of the project. Beside the date for each deliverable, list how much of your fee is due at that time. That way, the client knows when they need to pay your invoice for each deliverable.

- **Describe your process, ownership rights, and kill fees**. If you're doing anything that requires steps, revisions and feedback, clarify all those details in your proposal. Once the project is done and payment has been made in full, who owns what? And, what happens if the project goes awry and needs to stop? Who owns any work done to date? And, what is owed if that

happens? It's worth getting some local legal advice to develop this part of your proposal.

- **Add more proof**. Reinforcing your reputation as someone who gets results for your clients is never a bad thing. Testimonials aren't just for sales pages.
- **Sign and date**. If you do end up in your own episode of Law & Order (and if so, you have my sympathies), at least your ass is covered, because everything is signed and dated.
- **Next steps**. Offer two scenarios with clear actions. If the potential client has questions, what should they do? (e.g. contact you by email? Schedule a phone call?) Or, if the client is ready to move forward, what's the next step? Sign and date the proposal? Send a downpayment? Contact you? Make this excruciatingly clear. In my own proposals, I emphasize that projects don't enter my calendar until I've received a down payment (and then I link to a payment form). People are far more likely to follow instructions if you give them an easy way to do so.

That's it. No fancy legal bits, no expensive software, no long and weighty sections. Typically, my proposals are 2-3 pages in Google Docs. I've made a template, too, so I simply open the template and fill in the blanks for any new project. The only thing I hear more often than, "I enjoyed reading your proposal," is, "I've just signed it and sent you the down payment. Schedule me in!"

A freelance proposal isn't just a legal document to show what you'll do, it's also your chance to drive home the value of your services. If you can prove to a potential client why they should hire you and how you'll help them, they'll hire you over any other freelancer (and you'll get those gold doubloons).

Getting paid on time, every time

If you haven't been screwed over by a client who was extremely late with your payment, or worse, never paid you at all, you haven't been freelancing very long. It happens, and it sucks to do your best work and get nothing but excuses in return. You can't eat excuses or use them to pay your rent. And since you're a freelancer, I'm guessing you don't have a crack legal team ready to fight for that money.

Once I was shorted $30,000 by a single client, at a time when I was only making double that each year. Basically, I lost six months of my entire freelance "salary" to one client. It was for a large company, too, with employees and a multi-year track record – and it happened gradually. I was repeatedly promised the money as long as I "just finished this one thing." By the time I finally put my foot down, the bill was huge. They even liked my designs and wanted to keep working with me (and really, who wouldn't in this situation? I was working for free).

I never wanted that to happen again. It hurt my pride *and* my bank account. Luckily, there are strategies you can apply to significantly reduce your number of non-paying clients – especially if you can't afford a lawyer (or a hit woman) to chase down the cash.

Larger companies typically have time-based invoice payment terms, like Net30 or Net90. This means the other party has 30 or 90 days to pay. Many freelancers automatically adopt this practice, too – and while net payment terms might be wise for big companies, they're not a good idea for freelancers.

Here's why.

If you're hired for a project and spend your time finishing each deliverable, you should be paid right when the deliverable is complete and approved – not 30 or 90 days later. The whole project could be done by then. If there's no lag in your work for the client, there should be no lag in their payment. That means Net0.

I've had a Net0 policy for years now, and it's cut the number of late- and non-paying clients to almost zero,

because I won't move on to the next project stage until I've received the money for each finished deliverable. Only once has a client failed to pay since I adopted the Neto rule, and luckily, I was only shorted the final (small) payment.

In order to instantly collect client payments, you either need to live in their local area, or they need to pay you online through a reputable payment processing system. These systems skim about 3% from each transaction to process the money and transfer it into your account. That cost is worthwhile to me, though, because I rarely work with local clients and I like the peace of mind that comes from seeing the money in my account and knowing we can move on to the next deliverable.

If I don't get paid, I don't keep working. This rule is non-negotiable. It's in all my proposals and I'm upfront about what it means. As soon as a deliverable is finished and approved, I immediately send an invoice that includes a link to my payment processing system. Most clients pay me just a few minutes after receiving the invoice. They pay quickly because they don't want to stop the project momentum.

Every freelancer, regardless of what type of work you do, can create a payment schedule that ensures you're not left empty-handed after the project is done. Motivate your clients to pay you promptly.

Since I'm a web designer, I break down my project payments as follows:

- Down payment – 10%
- Logo design sign-off – 20%
- Website template sign-off – 30%
- Beta site sign-off – 30%
- Launch – 10%

Only 10% of the total fee remains at launch, because, by the time I've finished programming the beta site, my job is basically finished. I've done all the required work, except for helping the client to add content or answering questions about launching or marketing.

Again, note that a project is not confirmed in my calendar until I receive a 10% down payment. How many times have you had a no-show client after you've confirmed the project and saved time in your schedule? Or they're late or unprepared to start? You've saved the space and time to work with them and now that space has a non-paying gap. Treat your schedule like it's your collection of

unopened Star Wars action figures; no one gets to touch it unless certain conditions have been met.

My clients know that projects don't start unless:

- **I receive a down payment**. If a client complains about paying before the work begins, they're probably going to be a bad client. If you're blocking time on your calendar and turning down other work in the meantime, you should receive money to hold that spot. It's a show of good faith.
- **We've both read, understood, and signed the proposal**. The proposal doesn't become a binding agreement until both parties are 100% clear about what's expected and what the project will involve.
- **The client turns in their homework**. Waiting for essential data, documents, files, assets, passwords, or photography can be a huge holdup. Don't start working until you have what you need to do your thing.

Ensuring you get prompt, timely payments can be uncomfortable. You might feel like making such specific demands will turn off your clients, but I've found that the opposite is true. The more I set polite, firm, and enthusiastic boundaries, the more my clients respect those boundaries. That's why it pays (literally, *har har*) to clarify payment terms and not be a pushover when it comes to money and scheduling.

Communicating your way to stress-free projects

They key to any successful freelance project isn't the quality of your work, it's how well you communicate with your client.

Don't believe me?

Think about it like this: you've just designed a logo, programmed an application, or written an "about" page for a client. The work draws on all your skills, expertise, knowledge, learning, and passions. But you show it to the client and they hate it (remember my dream-to-nightmare client from lesson one?). Even worse, they say it isn't even close to what they wanted, it needs a complete overhaul, and they want to have a call in three minutes to discuss the problem, which shouldn't take more than a few hours. Totally unreasonable, and all because communication fell short and boundaries were crushed.

Regardless of how amazing your work might be, unless you can communicate effectively with your clients, understand their needs, and express why your work will help to accomplish their goals, you'll end up transforming that amazing work into something awful – or worse, making misguided changes that go against your expertise and best practices.

Now that we've established why communication is basically the most important thing *ever*, what can you do to make sure it's effective?

- **Set expectations**. Refer back to the first lesson and communicate clearly before money's involved.
- **Establish your expertise**. It's not enough to tell a client you can do the work. You have to clearly explain why you're the right person for the job, how you'll solve their problems, and how you'll help them to reach a tax bracket typically reserved for rappers and Richard Branson. Do this as early as possible, so they start to think of you as an expert, instead of just a hired gun.

- **Clearly define goals and successes**. What are the project goals? How will success be measured? Regardless of what kind of services you provide, the answers to these two questions serve as the project's North Star. Say a client wants to make the logo bigger (and yes, they ALWAYS want to make the logo bigger), you can steer the discussion back to the agreed-upon goals and use them as a litmus test.

- **Set weekly check-ins**. If your project will take longer than a week, check in at least once a week until it's done. Use each check-in to establish where things are at, what's finished, what's still outstanding, and what's required of the client right now, or in the following week.

- **Stick to the scope**. If a task is not listed in the project deliverables, then it's not a task/deliverable you should do for free. Be nice but firm if a client asks for something outside of the project scope. Whether it's because a client doesn't know any better or they're just trying to score some extra value, it's up to you to set them straight.

- **Set boundaries**. If the project requires a lot of instant communication or quick decision-making, let the client know when you're typically available and when you're not working. For example, maybe that's 10am-5pm PST, Monday through Thursday. If people email or contact you outside of that timeframe, you've already established that you're not available. Know that if you answer emails or calls at 4 a.m., you're demonstrating that you don't respect your own boundaries, so they don't need to respect them, either.

- **Re-iterate their requests or ideas in your own words**. When a client asks for something that's within the project scope, confirm that it's exactly what they want – in your own words. This gives everyone a second chance to ensure it's the right step or the right request. It also prevents misunderstanding and flakey, spur-of-the-moment asks (since clients get the chance to change their minds).

- **Speak up for your expertise**. You don't have to be confrontational, but if a client asks for something that you know isn't right or won't accomplish their goals, speak your mind. They're paying you to share and implement your expert opinions.

- **Listen**. What's the most effective way to meet and exceed client expectations? Listen closely. They'll tell you, if you listen. You also need to listen to what's happening under the surface, because they might not

have the language to precisely describe their needs. For example, if a client says they want to create a 572-page PDF to use as a newsletter signup bonus, they're really trying to attract more subscribers which, in turn, will funnel into product sales. Ask "why" to uncover the essence of what they need and want.

Too many talented freelancers fall short in their client interactions. They pay close attention to their creative skills, at the expense of communication, which ends up ruining what could be an amazing project. Unless you can understand your client's needs and explain what you're doing to help them, you'll end up biting your nails down to the cuticle and submitting 3 a.m. emails to clientsfromhell.net.

Showing work that gets approved

Consider these two client feedback scenarios:

- "I've designed this new homepage. What are your thoughts?
- "Here's my vision for your homepage, based on our discussions, and what I think will best achieve your primary goals of generating more product revenue and newsletter signups. That's why both your signup field and the "most popular product" window feature so prominently. I chose fonts and a colour palette that feel warm and inviting, instead of cold and harsh. I've placed the shopping cart icon and navigation button in their current location, because this placement created a 20-30% sales increase for another client I worked with in a parallel industry."

Which is more likely to get approved?

Just as we discussed the importance of communication, how you present your work is just as critical as the work itself. You need to share your vision and explain your decisions. Whether it's writing, programming, design, illustration, or knitting rat sweaters, you've created the solution for a specific reason. Don't assume that your client understands your reasoning or thought processes.

Freelancers always need to *sell* their work – especially to the people who are already paying them to create it.

In my own design work, I've found that leading clients through a discussion of the mockup – including how it meets their needs, why I've made specific decisions, and how it functions – means they're much more likely to understand and promptly approve the work, instead of requesting arbitrary changes that don't serve the project goals.

How can you increase the odds that clients will approve your drafts and mockups?

- **Talk about results, not technical details.** Clients rarely care about technical stuff, such as font sizes, programming languages, or illustration brushes. They do care about how your work will affect their business

in a positive way. Focus your presentations and discussions on results.

- **Don't assume that questions are change requests**. If a client asks a question about your work, don't immediately offer to make a change. Instead, consider it an opportunity to teach, explain, or dig deeper into why they're asking the question in the first place.

- **Provide reasons for everything**. If you're writing, designing, programming, or coaching yak herders, you're drawing on your experience, knowledge, and skills to guide every decision. Be sure you can explain, in clear and simple language, why you've made certain choices and created what you're now presenting.

- **Never get defensive or arrogant**. When you show your work, it's your client's turn to critique it. That's part of the process, and it's important not to take their comments personally or get attached to the work itself. If a client wants a larger font size or a page re-written in first instead of third person, it's not an attack on your abilities. Consider that any feedback, positive or negative, is directed at your work, not at you.

- **Actually listen**. After you've shared your work and discussed the how and why of what you've done, it's time to shut up and listen to what your client has to say. Take notes, record the call, and pay attention. What do they like? What don't they like? And more importantly – what's at the root of their requests?

- **Never present work you aren't 100% stoked about**. If Murphy was a freelancer, his law would be, "anything that can be approved, will be approved." So if you share work that you secretly hate, your client will love it. Every time. You're ultimately responsible for the work you put into the world and use to grow your portfolio, so it might as well be work you're proud to share.

Sometimes, freelancers will give their client several creative options, like 2-3 homepage mockups or a few different animation styles. I don't believe in this approach. Why? It degrades your expertise, because you should have a strong opinion about what works, based on your knowledge, research, and client discussions. All of this information should lead you to a single path, not multiple possibilities. If a client doesn't like what you've done, you can always provide another revision. But if they do like it, you've saved yourself 2-3 times the work. It is smart to show several iterations, however, when you have multiple ways to express or embody the same goal, such as a business logo or tagline.

Telling a story and pitching your work is the most important part of client presentations. How can you weave the project goals, aesthetics, and your expertise into a story that your client will love? Never show a mockup and ask the client, "well, what do you think?" Use that draft or first sketch to illustrate how each element will prompt their customers to fall in love with the brand, interact with the work, and most importantly, open their wallets and spend their money.

Clients don't give a rat's ass about the nerdy details, from golden ratio grids to the ink in your pen. They care about how the work will solve their problems. If you can illustrate that (figuratively or literally), then they'll approve the work faster with fewer change requests.

Guiding clients to make helpful revision requests

Think back to your most horrible, most hated project ever. You know, the one that sent you scurrying back to the job boards, ready to trade in your freelance life for a comfy office cubicle with a Herman Miller chair.

What made it awful? Was it because the client asked for silly or totally misguided changes? Were you sick of making the words, drawings or designs "pop?" Did you wonder if the 1,435th round of change requests would be the final round?

Feedback makes or breaks projects. It can take your best work and turn it into a dancing-hamster-screen of popping words and fancy graphics – all above the fold, of course. And if that happens, chances are, it's your fault.

Big caveat: sometimes clients just don't respect your opinion, your work, or your reasoning. But, if you've followed the first lesson (expectations), they should be clear about what you're doing and why you're an expert in your field. Based on the fourth lesson (communication), they should understand the project goals, boundaries, and scope. If you've applied the fifth lesson (presentation) like the good student you are, they should be aware of your creative reasoning and instincts. If you've integrated all of the lessons to date and your client still ignores your expertise, then you've got one last chance to make things right.

You have to teach your clients how to give proper feedback. You tackle projects like theirs all the time, but this could be their first or second interaction with a creative freelancer. Translation: they might not know how to critique your work – **and the best kind of feedback is descriptive, not prescriptive.**

So, even if you've followed the lessons to a tee (you keener) and presented your work like a champ, you still might need to do revisions. This happens in every project. But, how you receive those revision requests and what you do next will set the project on a successful, enjoyable path, or send it down a dark, twisty and stressful road STRAIGHT TO FREELANCER HELL (okay, I got a little carried away there, but you get the idea).

In order to ensure feedback works for the project and not against it, you have to show your clients how to give good

feedback. Be clear – it's their job to suggest what isn't working, but it's your job (as the hired expert) to suggest how to fix it. After all, which scenario do you prefer?

- "Change the blue to green." This is prescriptive feedback.
- "This is the same blue that our competitor uses. How can we make our colour palette stand out?" This is descriptive feedback.

Scenario two describes the problem (and why it's a problem), instead of telling you how to fix an arbitrary "issue."

Don't be shy about telling your client (before the project starts) how to share feedback and request revisions. I give my clients a one-page PDF that demonstrates good feedback in one column and unhelpful/bad feedback in another column. You and your client both want a successful end result, so asking for a certain kind of feedback isn't bossy or arrogant, it's smart. It promotes success. Sometimes you need to gently remind your client that they're paying for your expertise, not hiring a monkey that says "yes sir/ma'am" to every request (if monkeys could talk, that is).

Additionally, guiding client feedback doesn't mean you don't listen or consider their perspective. The opposite is true; you're listening in a specific and complementary way in order to dig out the root of the problem and make it go away.

If your client hasn't worked with a creative freelancer before, or worse, they worked with someone who didn't properly direct their feedback, they may have acquired some bad habits. This isn't the end of the world. Instead, it's the perfect opportunity to do a little teaching. Your client might be new to this type of work, *but this is where you live*. It's your job to outline what helpful feedback looks like – and if they ask for something that won't work or doesn't serve the project, it's up to you to respond in a non-confrontational way.

You are the only person who can stop bad, prescriptive feedback. It's not your clients' job to know how to provide effective critiques, it's yours. Teach them how to give helpful feedback, right from the start of each project. The end result, for both of you, will be infinitely better. We're talking less stress and fewer ridiculous change requests. Heck, you might even start to enjoy the feedback process (cue cherubs with hipster moustaches, singing folk songs from the heavens).

Finishing projects and helping your clients succeed

In the past, my final contact with a client would include launching their website and sharing the good news. From there, I'd send them on their merry way and carry on with my new client work. I'd trust they knew what to do next (even though I hadn't told them what to do next...).

Here's the problem. I'd often check on their website a few weeks later and see that they'd bolded all the text, added another 43 items to the main navigation, or hyperlinked every other word. It wasn't because they weren't smart (they knew their businesses well), but because they didn't know what to do with the work I had provided.

And it was entirely my fault.

Do you know the easiest way to attract loads of new clients, simply by refreshing your inbox? Don't worry, this course isn't veering into scam territory. The honest, surefire way to fill your calendar months in advance is by helping clients to succeed beyond their (or your) wildest dreams.

Say you illustrate a book cover for someone who sells five copies. Not many people will see your work. Say, instead, they sell 10 million copies. Your name is on the second page (hopefully). That's 10 million people who have seen your work and know your name. Many of these people might need a cover design for their own books – and they know you designed one that sold 10 million copies. Guess who they want to hire? Now guess how tough it will be to land the project?

There's no magic genie in a shiny, antique lamp that can guarantee your clients will succeed. There are, however, steps you can take to help a client move toward his or her goals. Sure, it takes some extra work, but it's not difficult – and the payoff can be significant.

When you finish a piece of client work, you need to show the client how to use and apply it.

Even though you're primarily a writer, designer, programmer, or yak herding coach, you know what should happen once the client receives your final product. You've seen what's worked and what hasn't for other clients. Where should they submit their press releases? How can they use their new copy in a newsletter drip campaign? How can they lay out website pages that convert new visitors to subscribers or paying customers?

Even if it's just a quick call or a PDF outline that you share when the project is complete, it's worth your time to provide some next steps. Think about:

- How will the work be used? How will it be marketed? Offer suggestions, examples, or case studies.
- How will the success of the work be measured? What are they tracking to see how users or visitors respond, such as open rates, page views, product sales, etc.?
- Now that this project or step is complete, what is the next goal they should pursue?
- What backups, updates, change requests (paid), or feature add-ons do you recommend?
- Do they require a retainer for ongoing work? (This can be a sweet and guaranteed income source).

You should also create a personal follow-up schedule to check in with each client – not because you're the nicest freelancer on the planet (which I'm sure you are), it's because those check-ins lead to more work. Yes, you're making sure everything is on track and functioning properly, but it's also a reminder that you did some great work, and you're available for more if and when they need it. Checking in can simply mean sending an email that says, "How is [the project] going for you? Is there anything else I can help with?"

If you get into the habit of doing a little extra work at the end of each client project, they'll keep you in mind for something awesome down the road. And it's much easier to work with a previous client (who already knows your process, deliverables, expectations, feedback requests, etc.) than to "train" a new one. You've already taught these people how to be great clients.

Happy, successful clients send more work your way. Happy, successful clients have lots of eyes watching to see why they're thriving and who helped them along the way (i.e. you). Happy, successful clients reach more people, and if those people need to hire someone with your skills and expertise, you'll be the first person they consider. It's in your best interest to create happy, successful clients.

Like a parent giving the car keys to a teenager, you can't just say, "here you go – have fun!" when you hand over your finished work. You need to set the ground rules, do some careful teaching, and explain their responsibilities. In the long (or short) run, they'll be thankful you did – and they'll be way less likely to crash the project.

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