Working all hours is not conducive to a healthy lifestyle or a successful freelancing business.

The goal should never be to work more.

The goal should be to do the things that allow you to work less.

Seeking balance as a freelancer will help you to keep this in your sights.

A "healthy body, healthy mind" approach to freelancing has been my key to finding balance as someone who runs their own business and wishes to retain active home and social lives alongside it.

When you work by yourself for long periods of time, your thinking can become particularly insular.

This is what makes gaining perspective from other people and the world outside of your bubble so important.

I can't stress enough the need to have a life outside of work as a freelancer.

Place an equal importance on family time, going out with friends, your non-work interests and activities.

Your professional output is not the only thing that defines your identity. You are what you create in life across the board, including the family you nurture, the friendships you fashion and the hobbies you enjoy.

As I have touched on throughout this book, freelancing is not just a way to do business. It's a way of life.

Freelancing can offer unrivalled levels of autonomy, agility and flexibility to a person's life, but that does not always come caveat free.

When you choose a career in freelancing, you need to understand that it will effect other aspects of your life in one way or another.

Separating work from your family life becomes more difficult.

This considered, you need to work smart alongside working hard.

Using a semi-flexible routine, as I wrote about in the "Introduce Structure" chapter of this book, can pave the way for this.

Be smart with your time during work hours. Spend it effectively and at maximum effort.

Be smart with your time outside of work hours too.

With hustle culture being prevalent within entrepreneurial circles, freelancers often place a low priority on self-care.

I implore you to make it a priority.

You can't be a better freelancer if you're burnt out.

For that reason, being aware of, and caring for your mental health is so important.

On a day where you're not feeling work, you're allowed to pack up early and sit in the garden.

I advise you to get the often-pushed idea that, "if you're not constantly grinding as a freelancer you can't be successful" out of your head. It's simply not true.

Sometimes you might have to give yourself a little push to complete a project that you're not particularly fond of.

But that's not the same as feeling completely mentally drained. Pushing through in this instance would not be smart.

I remember jQuery being an in demand skill when I first started my web development career.

I'm not saying that jQuery is useless now, or that people won't get hired for being good at it, but the demand that once was is no where near that of now.

As vanilla JavaScript advanced, and more modern frameworks like React and Vue became popular, demand moved away from jQuery.

Simplistically, freelancing follows a supply and demand equation.

If no one is asking for what you're supplying, then you're not relevant in the marketplace.

Always keep up with your target audience's wants and needs.

Follow the money within your industry and don't be afraid to reinvent yourself to stay relevant.

It's wise to be proactive when you identify an area that you could improve upon.

Consistently improving your knowledge within your specialist area will have a direct affect on your profits.

This is because the higher your level of expertise in a field, the more you can charge for your services.

A smart way to hone your skills is to give priority and concessions to paid projects that allow you to learn on the job.

That way, you'll not have to forgo client work to spend time learning unpaid.

With that said, time for your advancement should always be included in your schedule. Even when it means forgoing paid work. The short term loss, will be far outweighed by the longer term gains.

Freelancers who regularly seek knowledge and improvement often get the best clients.

Their value is increased by appearing at the forefront of their industry.

Become that freelancer in your area.

There's *always* more to learn.

9. DO A GOOD JOB, HONE YOUR SKILLS AND STAY RELEVANT

DOING A GOOD JOB

Your best marketing tool as a freelancer is doing a good job.

Do a good job, and people will hire you again.

Do a good job, and people will recommend your services to their colleagues, friends and family.

No matter what you might think, this sadly does not go without saying in the freelancing industry.

Many freelancers are not doing the best jobs for their clients.

Whether that be through biting off more than they can chew, poor punctuality or sporadic communication.

There are freelancers out there that will leave a poor impression on their clients during and after their project.

Use this to your advantage.

If you consistently do a good job as a freelancer, you'll stand out.

Freelancing is a service industry and many forget that.

Without happy clients, you'll get nowhere.

1. You don't have the skills needed to perform.

2. Someone else can do cheaper than what your time is worth.

Some tasks may fall within both of these categories. Some tasks might be one offs, with others being ongoing jobs.

Freelancing is a lifestyle choice as much as a career choice. This is why I consider both life and business based tasks in the following example scenarios:

• Producing copy for your marketing material.

• Building your portfolio website.

• Taking headshots for use on your social media profiles.

• Managing your accounts.

• Cleaning your house.

• Property maintenance.

• Gardening duties.

• Walking your dog.

Outsourcing these tasks reduces your load, allowing you a clear run at doing what you do best.

The caveat here's that you may gain some benefit from these activities which may mean you want to retain them.

This is where automation saves the day again.

Social media scheduling tools such as <u>Buffer</u>, <u>Meet Edgar</u> and <u>Hypefury</u> will ease time pressures here.

The ability to post batched updates on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram to an automated schedule frees you up to work at the same time.

The most time consuming jobs for a freelancer outside of their regular work are often the financial ones.

Bookkeeping, quoting, estimating and invoicing — all the things that drain a freelancers's time.

I remember manually invoicing clients when I first started freelancing over ten years ago.

Luckily, as time moved on, software like <u>FreeAgent</u> and <u>Xero</u> came about to make this side of freelancing easier.

You'll never have to manually chase an invoice again using these tools.

You can send your invoices via email and the software will automatically detect whether it has been paid or not.

If not, an email prompting payment will go out to the client.

It's small tasks like this that stack up, leading to inefficiency.

Automate them to get the most value from your time.

For instance, a reply to an initial enquiry via your website's contact form will likely have the same structure dependant on the enquiry's viability.

Using the canned response feature within your email client (Gmail for one has this) to set up templates for typical replies is a huge time saver.

Building on with the enquiry form example, you can also set up basic replies for leads that:

• Request information on your services.

• Require additional project detail.

• You would like to set up a call for.

• You'll not be able to take on due to capacity or budget reasons.

These templates should require only small tweaks on an individual basis (always address people by name).

Making use of email templates will highly improve your efficiency within your inbox.

Remaining on the topic of email automation, I encourage all freelancers to collect email addresses from their prospects.

You should have a mailing list sign up form on your website even if you're not looking to actively engage right at this moment.

8. AUTOMATE AND OUTSOURCE

Efficiency is the overall route to success as a freelancer.

The quicker you can complete a project, while retaining a high level of quality, the more money you'll make.

The more projects that you can handle at once, while ensuring client satisfaction and preserving balance, the better.

Your efficiency will generally improve through experience. For instance, the first time you build a specific feature for a website will take longer than the 10th time you do it.

While efficiency born through competence can take months and years, there are other avenues that will bare fruit faster.

AUTOMATION

Automating appropriate tasks will do a lot to reduce strain on a freelancer, thus allowing you to focus your time on what you're best at. IE, your most saleable core skill.

You can define an appropriate task for automation to be anything outside of your primary skill set.

Think about the common day to day things a freelancer does outside of their usual work. Here are a few examples:

You're not able to attend the gym on Tuesday, but you can switch this to Wednesday ensuring your weekly exercise plan is fulfilled.

You have an important client call coming up. So you schedule this for 09:00 Wednesday with the early morning slot beforehand being used to prepare for the call.

You have an incoming project that would require you to work hours in addition to your normally required amount.

With a schedule like this, you have capacity on Fridays to consider taking this on.

You could work on the project during evenings and weekends too, but I'd not recommend making this a week on week habit.

You should attribute many of these blank slots to family, social and health based activities.

Freelancers are susceptible to placing mental and physical health at low priority.

Utilise a routine like this to place importance on activities that will improve your health in both of these instances.

The example I have shown does not just contain the semi-flexible routine theory.

It's a solid baseline for your daily timings in general.

• I cook dinner every day except Saturday for 1 hour.

Work Hours

I need to work a minimum of 30 hours a week to cover my living costs and achieve my business goals.

Family And Social Life

As a family we like to eat together most weekday evenings.

Weekends are generally family time, although on occasion, I'll go out with friends or do some additional work.

Other Factors

I aim to work out 4 times per week for 1 hour.

Once you've completed this exercise, you can translate the results into a weekly schedule:

7. INTRODUCE STRUCTURE

The day I started making a proper living from freelancing was the day I introduced structure into my life.

Freelancing is often seen as a solution that will allow you to make good money working 2 hours here and 3 hours there, with a couple of days off in between.

Unfortunately, this is not typically the case.

To be a better freelancer, you'll need more structure.

But I'm not talking about complete regimentation.

A primary asset of a freelancing career is flexibility and this should be embraced.

Luckily, I have found there to be a sweet spot between complete regimentation and retaining daily wiggle room during your weeks.

I call this the semi-flexible routine.

Routines, in general, are a good idea in both business and in life.

Adding structure to your days allows you to get more out of them.

Performing a task or set of tasks, to a set routine, allows you to action the work more efficiently.

With that said, you should always start higher than your bottom line when negotiating both terms and price.

In addition to the terms olive branch example I mentioned earlier, be savvy when providing the initial figures in your quotes.

You should know what the minimum amount you can take a project on for is.

Taking this amount into consideration, it would then be smart to factor in an additional 10-20% contingency for negotiation purposes.

The final and most powerful technique that I use when negotiating freelance projects is, being prepared to walk away.

When you're prepared to walk away from a negotiation you're in the power position.

If you're desperate for the work, you're far less likely to able to hold your ground.

This tactic is easier to execute when you don't need the money.

Admittedly, this can be an incredibly tough position to attain when you're first starting out.

However, it's still important to mention as a goal to aim for because it works so well.

To get yourself into a spot where you're financially secure enough to use this strategy, keep these points firmly in mind:

When you feel liked by the person you're engaging with, you feel confident that the negotiation will go well.

If you're not confident in your offering how can anyone else have confidence in it?

When pitching your services during negotiation you have to come across in an assured fashion.

Don't be afraid to big yourself up and shout about your previous wins. But do so with tact.

Be firm but fair.

It's significant to not be overwhelmed in negotiation, but it's also important to be reasonable.

Depending on your specific circumstances, a "the price is the price and the terms are the terms" approach, can do a lot for increasing your perceived value.

With that said, it can be advantageous to make concessions when your potential client makes them also.

A small bargain can do a lot with regard to good will.

It can also be the difference between getting a project over the line or not.

Everyone likes to think they have got a good deal and freelancing clients are no different.

6. BECOME A NEGOTIATOR

There was a time when I'd instantly dismiss a freelance lead if they wanted to meet or call.

I hated negotiation in person and on the phone. Over email too if I'm completely honest.

Nowadays, it's one my favourite parts of a project. Because I got better at it.

With negotiation, confidence is everything.

Confidence comes through competence and competence comes through practice.

To reach your goal of becoming a better freelancer, you'll have to negotiate effectively and regularly.

Learn to embrace it rather than avoid it. As early as you can in your career.

New freelancers are often taken advantage of because they are simply not negotiators.

They have had no experience of having to win their own business.

Perhaps they came from an agency background or a job where negotiation was never required.

On a personal level as a freelancer, for the clients themselves and on a per engagement basis.

A one size fits all solution is not always attainable in practice.

Not all freelancers are in the same circumstances and not all projects are the same.

You don't *have* to apply the same pricing strategy to every engagement.

With the pros and cons of these strategies discussed, I'll summarise.

The overall key to pricing freelancing projects is to understand all possibilities and apply a relevant strategy to the current set of circumstances.

Have your pricing preferences:

• Move away from billing time as quickly as you can.

• "Day rate" equates to 1 day, not 8 hours.

• Fixed price project work as your default.

• Value based approach for suitable client types.

• Take on retainers in an advisory capacity.

Be open to deviation within reason:

• To get your foot through the door.

The example we are using with 3 options is in line with the "goldilocks" principle. That being that the middle option is often "just right" for clients and is the one most regularly chosen.

Alternatively, you can pick percentages based on how you personally want to price this particular project.

You might want to charge more for a specific project because it's not particularly interesting to you. Or perhaps the work needs to be completed quickly so you'd need a premium for that.

Some clients will always choose the lowest price and some will be quick to pay the highest price to ensure quality and protect more of their own time.

Either way, the idea behind value based pricing is that you can easily justify these percentages.

After all, your figures are calculated based on a cut of the direct value your client's business will gain in return for your services and that's what clients ultimately want from the freelancers they hire; a return on their investment.

I'm a proponent of value based pricing generally.

It's a smart way to price for freelancers as it usually means that no money is left on the table.

Plus the client gets a clear return on their spend.

Even so, it can scare off some prospects.

It can be defined as pricing a project based on the value of the final outcome to the client. Not on time or production costs.

A freelancer arrives at an informed price by running an analysis of the client and the requested work's financial benefit to them.

For instance, if you're building a new website for a client with the goal of increasing the number of enquiries they receive.

You would ask yourself, "How much is each enquiry worth to them?".

Then, "How many enquiries should they expect to obtain in a year as a direct consequence of my work?".

The following example skips out the research phase as it's highly specific to your individual client.

However, let's say your research points towards an average lead being worth £500 to them and you estimate to land them 5 leads per month through the new website you'll build:

£2,500 x 12 months = £30,000 of value in a year.

It then seems reasonable to price the project at 10%, 25% or even 50% of this value depending on your level of involvement.

Due to your price being based on a percentage of the value you expect to deliver and the associated effort required, proposals are often sent with multiple options for the client to consider.

The fixed price modal is commonly the pricing strategy that works best, for a number of reasons.

Primarily, it saves you a lot of time.

Gone are the hours spent on admin. There are no hours to log.

Estimating individual tasks is a thing of the past.

You provide the client with a price that you're willing to fulfil their brief for and if accepted, work commences.

Providing a fixed price also cuts down on communication fuelled by lack of clarity.

When you commit to complete a project for a set sum, everyone knows where they stand from the off.

You know how much you'll make from the engagement and your client knows exactly how much their outcome will cost.

There's no ambiguity in the project with regard to money. You can't "go over" so there are no financial fears to allay.

This is a huge bonus.

Having to regularly defend your output is not conducive to a successful project outcome.

Or, a happy freelancer-client relationship moving forward.

Retainers can be a great way to build confidence with clients.

Especially early on in your career when you're looking to prove your worth over a period of time.

Guaranteed work also provides a greater feeling of safety than living project to project.

On occasion, your time may not be filled leaving you to work on something else while still being paid from the retainer.

The good points considered, I have always found retainers based on the sale of time to have all the bad points of billing by the hour and the tying nature of having a permanent job.

You give away a part of your freedom when taking on retainers. This can be debilitating to the long-term growth of your business.

I'm not saying that you should dismiss retainer agreements.

Retainers can be highly beneficial at vital moments of your business' progress.

Nonetheless, be sure that the agreement is right for you at the right time.

Do you need a boost to your business' monthly cashflow? A retainer could be the answer.

DAILY BILLING

Billing by the day, or "day rate" is a bit of a chameleon.

It can work well in some instances, but in others, it's still hourly billing.

Sitting in an office with a client between the hours of 9:00 and 17:00, with an expectation to log 8 hours, is an example of day rate being stifling for a freelancer.

You're essentially billing by the hour at a lower rate (assuming the typical practice of a freelancers' hourly rate being higher than their day rate).

How much else can you do work wise in that day? You have lost all flexibility to continue your marketing efforts and serve other clients.

That's unless you're willing to put in more hours during your down time each week.

But this should never be the end goal nor a regular goal. It's not sustainable and it's not favourable to you becoming a balanced freelancer.

An agreement to work on a specific project, on a set day, independent of location, with a clear definition of what progress looks like, is an example of when day rate can work well for a freelancer.

A 3 or 4 hour job often comes with as much administrative work as a month long project.

You'll likely require multiple of 3 or 4 hour long jobs per week to stay afloat.

Each with their own contact that you'll need a line of communication open with.

On the flip side, the month long project has just one client attached to it. One set of documents, one point of contact.

This is far easier to facilitate as a freelancer.

On the subject of administrative documentation, billing by the hour brings with it extra paper work; namely, estimates and time sheets.

Estimating freelancing projects, in my experience, is largely useless.

In reality, estimates are used as a vehicle to help freelancers calculate a price for the work and to help clients get their head around why X costs Y.

The process is flawed for a few reasons.

Estimates are rarely accurate.

Things nearly always take longer than expected.

In many projects, there's too much out of your control as the freelancer to provide any realistic form of a timeline.

Set aside time to share what you know alongside your "day-job" every week.

Make yourself known, persistently raise your profile and keep marketing always.

Consistency, quality and authenticity are your best friends when looking to achieve this.

Here in lies a common trap that many freelancers fall into.

When they take on a project or client on day rate, they apply 100% of their work time to that engagement until it's finished.

This is a mistake for three reasons.

While ever you're stacked up with client work, you're leaving yourself with no time to work on:

• Your personal development.

• Sharing your expertise to raise your profile.

• Engaging with more potential customers.

Holding back 20-30% of your time to work on your own business is what you should be doing.

The more time you have to increase the value of your personal brand, the better quality engagements you'll attract.

The type of engagements where you're seen as an equal partner, not just a pair of hands.

The type of engagements where clients will pay a premium for someone of your calibre.

Following the news within your ideal clients industry is just as vital as keeping up with things in your own.

As a rule, you should aim to be proactive with your client profiling before you need to be reactive.

Identify your ideal clients and go after them.

3. PROFILE YOUR IDEAL CLIENT

Once you have a well defined, viable position as a freelancer, you can profile your ideal client.

Profiling your client means getting to know your target audience and the similarities most members of it hold.

Your marketing materials can then be tailored with greater confidence based on the knowledge gained from this exercise.

Pursue answers to these questions:

• What do the businesses requiring your ideal service look like?

• How do they shape up in terms of their structure?

• What are their day-to-day pain points?

• Who are the decision makers within these firms?

• And most importantly, where do they hang out?

A major benefit of scoping down your offering is that many of your clients will look the same.

There are often consistent trends between not only the make up of the businesses, but their needs.

It will commonly become apparent that many of the businesses in similar sectors have the same regular issues.

Unless you have an incredibly high profile, it's extremely difficult for a freelancer to market themselves effectively when their target audience is wide.

Put yourself in a client's shoes; they need a new website, and they want to hire a web developer.

They start fishing (searching) in a pond (Google). You're a fish (web developer) in the pond, but your problem is, there are thousands of other fish in the pond who look just like you.

Now imagine the CEO of a tech startup searching for a headless WordPress website to be developed for their business.

They are fishing in a much smaller pond and you're the biggest, best-looking fish in there.

You need to define a clear, well refined position for yourself before you make any time or monetary investment in your marketing efforts.

If exploring this in-depth becomes confusing and you're not sure whether you're getting anywhere, take a step back and think about this equation:

If you can't tell a potential client what you do in one sentence, you still have work to do on your positioning.

The moment you can write a one liner to put in your LinkedIn bio that accurately describes your offering based on your findings, you're getting somewhere.

- What do you do better than anyone else?

- What do you enjoy working on most?

And lastly, answer this question:

Who do you want to work with in particular?

Here are some thought provoking sub-questions:

- In which sector do you have the most experience and/or interest?

- In which sector do you have the most contacts?

- Is there a big enough market for your ideal service within this sector?

The answers to these items should form the basis of your position when marketing yourself.

Note: Take extra time to explore position viability.

Here are some market research ideas that you can use to look into this:

- Search Google trends for common terms relating to your service and chosen industry.

- Search Quora, Reddit and industry forums for the common questions that people are asking within the sector.

- Seek out appropriate business owners and ask them if they employ freelancers with your talents.

Taking responsibility for your development becomes a habit. A habit that you can transfer to other areas of your life.

These habits will help you to become a better freelancer.

Things you can do to start:

• Assign blocks of time to work on a side project.

• Commit to writing a blog post every week.

• Promise yourself you'll read one book per month.

• Set aside proper time for regular exercise.

• Share dates of when you'll finish your plans with others.

• Digest the remaining chapters of this book as a priority.

Whatever specific task you choose, the point of this chapter is that you become a doer.

We all know someone who would have been "the most successful person in history" if they were not full of excuses.

Don't be like them.

Employ a less talk and more action approach on the road to becoming a better freelancer.

Hold yourself accountable to achieve progress.

Your future self will thank you for it.

1. HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

When planning to make any change in life, the first thing that you need to do is to hold yourself accountable.

Only one person can directly improve your circumstances and that's yourself.

The problem is, change is hard.

Change takes effort.

Many people, no matter how much they *think* they want to move forward, won't put the required time in.

Or, they will start like a house on fire then burn themselves out after a short period of time.

Self improvement comes with pain and sacrifice and the goal of becoming a better freelancer is no different.

Here are some examples of the choices someone striving to improve their freelancing will have to make:

• Working extra on an evening to create a personal portfolio website, instead of watching TV every night.

• Getting up an hour earlier each day to workout, instead of staying in bed.

If you're reading this book, I'm assuming that your freelancing career is yet to take off.

Maybe you're on the cusp of quitting your job to become a freelancer or perhaps it's ticking over nicely and you're ready to move things up a gear.

The good news is, if any of these apply, there's value in the following chapters for you.

In this book, I'll detail 10 steps you can take to become a better freelancer.

Each step is candid, market relevant and actionable by anyone interested in freelancing or freelancing already.

If you're serious about getting ahead in your freelancing career, read on.

This book holds the precise action I take to create a well-paid, efficient and flexible life as a freelancer.

Prepare to be armed with the knowledge to get paid what you're worth, work smarter and find balance through freelancing.

10 STEPS TO
BECOMING
A BETTER
FREELANCER

How to get paid what you are worth, work smarter and find balance.

Tom Hirst