10 Truths Learned From A Career Of Freelancing

Lessons learned over 7 years of contracting
First... About Me - My name is Samuel Levy

I am a:

Software Developer
Digital Nomad
Freelancer
Computer Guy
Nerd

1998: First program
2002: First website
2004: University
2006: Started getting paid
2011: Started Freelancing
2015: Started Company
2018: Still going...
My First Office
My Current Office
Let’s talk about Freelancing
Truth #1: Freelancers are cheaper than employees

Employees:
- Cost 2-3x their salary
- Keep costing money when they’re not working
- Aren’t feasible if you only need a small amount of work

Freelancers:
- Only cost their rate
- Stop costing you money when they stop working
- Are available for small jobs, and on demand
Tips:

Businesses:

Use freelancers to add capability

Consider the costs of hiring - freelancers will almost always be cheaper

Remember: They’re adding value to your business

Freelancers:

Your starting rate should start at 2-3x your “employed” wage

You can’t bill full time hours, so the hours you can bill must cover the ones you can’t

Try to bill enough to pay yourself a salary, including superannuation
Truth #2: A 6 hour task will cost you the whole day
Tips:

CHARGE
A
DAY
RATE
Truth #3: You're a business, not an employee
Negotiation is fine, but you cannot dictate a freelancer’s terms
Truth #4: Unreasonable requests deserve unreasonable rates
Tips:

Freelancers:
- Set business hours, and charge a premium for work outside those hours.
- Implement an “emergency” / “priority” rate to compensate you for the extra time you have to spend to catch up on other projects.

Businesses:
- Try to plan ahead.
- Give 1-2 weeks lead time for changes you know are coming.
- Feel happy that your tasks won’t be dropped because someone else was bad at planning.
Truth #5: You have to make time for downtime

If you hustle too much, your brain will fall out.

Burnout is real, and can cost you hours, days, or weeks of work.

You can’t produce good work if you’re not taking care of yourself.

There will be times when there’s no work, and times when there’s too much work.

If you don’t accept the former, you won’t handle the latter.
Tips:

- Plan for 2-4 weeks off each year, bill accordingly
- Make a schedule, and *stick to it*
- Find a hobby that doesn’t resemble work
- Use slow periods to learn and do housekeeping
- *Relax.*
Intermission

Schrödinger

Spiny

Norman

Scotty
Truth #6: You have to be honest, up-front, and candid

The worst time for a client to find out about a delay is after the due date. The second worst time is the day before it’s due.
Truth #7: Hungry doesn’t mean desperate

Some contracts are just trouble

Some projects are just doomed. Some clients won’t listen to good advice.

Don’t ignore red flags

If something seems off, move on. There’ll be someone else. Time spent chasing invoices is time that you’re not doing anything productive or billable.

“No client” is always better than a “bad client”
Truth #8: If you can’t do it, somebody else will (and that’s OK)

Know your limits

A project isn’t the time to experiment - learn in your free time; bill what you know.

Outsource is not a dirty word

You are outsourcing. Sub-contract others to fill gaps in your skill and knowledge.
Truth #9: Your project is more important to you than your client

Every business owner is focused on running their business. Their business is selling widgets. Your business is making websites.

Be proactive about keeping the project moving

Your job includes managing the client. Don’t harass them, but make it clear what you need. Clients will get distracted by their own business. Keep them on track.

The only time that the client cares more than you is when it’s COSTING THEM MONEY.
Truth #10: Freelancing isn’t free

Watch out for the following:

- It’ll be great exposure!
- You’ll get equity!
- We’re a charity!
- I’ll pay you after we make money!
- You’re my son!
- You’re my Neighbour’s friends grandson!
- My Nephew could have done it!
- WordPress is free!
Tips:

- Be upfront about your prices and other costs.
- Sell by the value of results rather than the path it takes to get there.
- Remember that “Free” products are there to reduce costs, but still take time.
- Don’t be afraid to walk away from a bad deal.
- If you’re really desperate to give away free work, contribute to WordPress or other Open Source projects.
Questions, comments, praise, abuse?

Thanks for listening.
Helpful links for freelancers

Rate calculators:

- [https://whatismydayrate.com/](https://whatismydayrate.com/)
- [https://hourlyrate.beewits.com/](https://hourlyrate.beewits.com/)

Support:

- [https://www.reddit.com/r/freelance/](https://www.reddit.com/r/freelance/)
- [https://digitalfreelancer.io/chat/](https://digitalfreelancer.io/chat/)
- [https://www.reddit.com/r/digitalnomad/](https://www.reddit.com/r/digitalnomad/)
- Mike Monterio - “F#@% you, pay me” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVkJVr6c1U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVkJVr6c1U)

Me:

- [https://www.determineddevelopment.com/](https://www.determineddevelopment.com/)
- [https://linkedin.com/in/samuel-levy-3a419517/](https://linkedin.com/in/samuel-levy-3a419517/)
- [https://github.com/samlev](https://github.com/samlev)
- [https://blog.samuellevy.com/](https://blog.samuellevy.com/)

This talk was originally a post on Reddit, which turned into a blog, which turned into a lot of discussion, and people asking me to create a talk.