

10 STEPS TO BECOMING A BETTER FREELANCER

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

Tom Hirst

INTRODUCTION

I never thought I'd be a freelancer.

To be honest, when I left education, I didn't really know what a freelancer was.

Working remotely for big brands around the world didn't enter my thinking as being in the realms of possibility.

After applying for a local web development role and narrowly missing out, I pondered what my future held.

I decided to offer my services on a freelance basis, landed my first client and the rest, as they say, was history.

More than a decade later, I consistently make a great living from my freelancing business year on year.

All with the freedom to enjoy quality time with my family, have an active social life, travel at my leisure and take care of my health.

But I didn't always have great clients who pay well, a flexible work routine and control of my day-to-day life.

It's taken years of work to build a successful freelancing career and find a healthy work/life balance alongside it.

Deeper into my career now, I'd love to share what I have learned with you so that you can apply it to your circumstances and improve them.

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.

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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.

- Pushing beyond the fear of picking up the phone to call clients, instead of sending an email.
- Setting aside time to put in place the theory within this book, instead of staying in the comfort zone.

Without hard work, focus and commitment, you'll not become a better freelancer.

You'll have to take the tough route sometimes and you'll always have to put the work in.

I only started making a proper living as a freelancer when I introduced structure into my life.

Structure that I enforce by holding myself to account.

To keep my mind and body healthy I hold myself to account to 3-4 gym sessions per week.

This goal is rarely missed.

When I noticed the web development market shifting towards JavaScript, I put a plan in place to get better at it.

Now it's one of the main programming languages that I get hired for.

In an attempt to find a fulfilling route into helping others get ahead by sharing my expertise, I made a promise to myself that I'd start a mentorship programme.

I launched it within a month.

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.

2. REFINE YOUR POSITION

Now that you're engaged on your journey to becoming a better freelancer, it's time to look at your position on the marketplace.

Being aware of your positioning is vital.

It's imperative to get this right as it will form the basis of your entire freelance offering moving forward.

To help you understand how your target audience sees you currently and how this could be better refined, here's an exercise to try out.

Firstly, answer this question:

How do you describe yourself professionally?

I'll hazard a guess that the outcome is quite broad.

It's a common mistake that many freelancers make.

The hard facts are that you'll need to be super remarkable to stand out using general positioning.

Now answer this question:

What does the ideal service you'd like to offer look like?

To help you come up with something, think about these items:

- What is your most saleable skill?

- 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.

- Connect with freelancers who are already operating within a similar niche.
- Test cheap marketing techniques before you go the whole hog.

Always perform the required due diligence on a position before you commit to it entirely.

As it's best to offer specialised services (as we will cover in more detail later), the market does not have to be huge.

But it has to be there.

If your research turns up potential clients that you're confident you can service, you can start moving forward.

Based on your now refined position, let's say the professional description of yourself has changed from “Web Developer” to “Headless WordPress Developer for tech startups”.

This is far less general, which can be scary.

It's easy to think that by narrowing down your offering you're cutting out much of the population.

It's easy to think that because that's exactly what you're trying to achieve.

A well refined position is far more targeted.

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.

It should be as concise as, “I help X achieve Y with Z”.

I'll close this chapter with a quote that seems apt to remember when thinking about positioning:

“You can't please all of the people all of the time.”

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.

A huge advantage to a freelancer focusing on a specific sector is that your value within it increases after each engagement.

Deliver results and your position as an expert in the field will be further firmed up.

Businesses within similar industries talk.

In my experience, it's a misconception that people withhold information on which freelancers they work with in fear of improving their competitors.

Depending on the size of the overall market, many people in it will have worked between companies too.

Do a good job for one major player and in addition to having the perfect case study to present to another business in the niche; you have opportunities via existing contacts when staff turnover occurs.

Profiling your ideal client should be a habitual process.

Things should not necessarily have to change regarding your service or the marketplace.

You should regularly set time aside to research your customers so that you can better tailor your market efforts towards them.

With that being said, any change in the sector that could effect your clients buying power, you need to be aware of.

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.

4. MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN

One measure of success on your pursuit to becoming a better freelancer is how much of an expert you're perceived as when pitching your ideal service to your ideal client.

An expert has unique knowledge.

An expert has specific experience.

An expert is not a commodity.

Thus an expert can charge more for their services.

The best way to build your expertise within an industry community is to produce regular, quality, targeted content.

This might seem like a lot of effort. I agree; it takes a great amount of hard work and commitment. But it works.

If you don't tell people what you do, how will they know?

High quality freelancing projects are not just going to fall into your lap.

Especially your first freelance project — you have no traction via word of mouth at this stage. You're not known.

You should be actively raising your profile as an expert freelancer at all times.

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.

And this is exactly what you need to strive for to obtain greater success as a freelancer.

Here are some actionable ideas that can help to make you known as an expert freelancer within an industry:

- Have a high quality web presence that's well branded.
- Write in-depth, knowledgeable articles for your blog.
- Guest post on well known blogs in the sector.
- Write case studies that show how you delivered results.
- Make true connections with people you find interesting on social media and offer them value and encouragement.
- Collaborate with other freelancers working on similar things.
- Speak at industry relevant meet ups and events.
- Talk about what you do day-to-day. Everywhere.

Once you've made yourself known, the aim is to keep yourself known.

Being the first person someone associates with a service when they need it requires you to be consistently visible.

Sure, retaining a prominent profile is easier for someone who has been in the game for a few years.

But your profile can diminish over time as quickly as you've built it up.

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.

5. UNDERSTAND PRICING DEEPLY

A common stumbling block for freelancers is knowing how to price their work.

What we first need to talk about is the different types of pricing.

The following are all relevant methods of pricing freelancing projects:

- Hourly billing
- Daily billing
- Retainer
- Fixed price
- Value based

HOURLY BILLING

Generally, billing by the hour is hellish for a freelancer.

I'll explain why.

Providing an hourly rate for your services often leads to smaller engagements.

Smaller engagements are hard to manage for a solo-business owner.

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.

Concerning time sheets, billing by the hour, comes with it a necessity to log every task you perform.

Let us say you work on a project for a few hours. You now have to spend additional time, that you may or may not get paid for, logging these hours to justify the time spent.

Even if you do get paid for it, this is not the best use of your time or talents.

I have never understood the thought process of a client hiring a skilled freelancer only to pay them to do admin.

Finally, here's the most important reason why freelancers should avoid billing work by the hour.

The more times you perform a task, the quicker you'll get.

This does not alter the value of the final result of the work.

However, when charging out your time by the hour, your payment for the same task will become less and less over time.

Hourly billing does not work in the favour of experienced and efficient freelancers.

Avoid it where possible.

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.

These engagements can often be agreed through trust via your preceding reputation. Or, once you've worked with someone for a while, their first hand experience of you delivering results.

It's not a measurable amount of time worked in a day that you're selling here, but the overall outcome of that day.

If your client is happy with that outcome, then you've done a good job.

Plus, paramountly, you've retained your flexibility and balance.

The flexibility you need to improve your freelancing business and the balance you need to make the most of life alongside this.

RETAINER

Another pricing methodology for freelancers is the retainer.

Here's how a freelancing retainer often looks:

A client "retains" X amount of hours from you per month that they guarantee to pay you your hourly rate for.

Whether they fill the time with work or not, you get paid.

Hours usually have to be "spent" during the current month and can't be rolled over to the next.

This commonly feels like a good deal to freelancers.

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.

Are you looking to move your personal brand forward while continuing to servicing clients? You may need more agility at this time.

In my experience, the best type of retainer agreements are advisory based and separated from selling hours.

Such as, a guarantee of availability (within reason) for consultancy services spanning the current month at a fixed price.

With engagements like this, you can retain greater parity between security and freedom.

You gain a regular income stream without having to commit to a precise amount of time worked or a specific schedule.

Place importance on this kind of retainer where possible.

FIXED PRICE

On the opposite end of pricing freelance projects, you have the fixed price model.

An example of a fixed price freelancing project would be, a clearly defined scope of work that you guarantee to complete for a set figure.

You might even offer packages to clients, in which they can choose a set of outcomes for a clearly displayed price.

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.

You choose a career in freelancing for the autonomy, not to have to justify every extra hour you need to work on something.

Fixed pricing completely removes this headache from your client interaction.

“I’ll deliver project X for the price of £Y and it will take as long as it takes”.

It can be as simple as that.

If required, suggest a loose timeline for completion. For instance, “Within 3 months” should nothing change scope wise.

You could even pick a hard date in the future. Just make sure there's plenty of contingency factored in.

The key is to keep your client happy and retain your freedom at the same time.

Again, this is a realistic goal when your relationship is founded on trust and/or you’ve previously proven your worth.

VALUE BASED

Finally, we have value based pricing.

This holds many benefits of the fixed pricing approach, with some differences.

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:

$£2,500 \times 12 \text{ months} = £30,000$ 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.

3 options is often the best route to take when quoting the service based projects that freelancers undertake.

You can think of this as, “Good, Better and Best”, “Bronze, Silver and Gold” or any other common tiering terminology.

The 10% (Good/Bronze) price from our example, would typically be the “DIY” option.

A freelancer would build the website with the client also having some work to do alongside. This could be setting up the hosting package and writing the content for their new website in house.

The 25% (Better/Silver) option would include everything from the 10% (Good/Bronze) offer, but the freelancer takes care of the DIY work too.

The 50% (Best/Gold) option would include everything from the 10% (Good/Bronze) offer and everything from the 25% (Better/Silver) offer, plus plenty of bells and whistles to further increase value delivered.

This could be, sourcing and managing other freelancers to create assets or provide services to compliment the website, adding an additional feature that you think would be of benefit, or an inclusion of monthly reviews for the website after it has gone live.

What percentages you choose is down to the pricing theory you want to follow.

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.

Value based prices are often substantially higher.

Unique research is required when using value based pricing as businesses and projects will differ.

You can mitigate sticker shock by pricing as appropriately as possible based on your aforementioned analysis.

However, in my experience, you'll lose more pitches using this technique.

With that being said, as a consequence of the higher value engagements often gained via value based pricing, you don't need the same number of wins anyway.

Successfully executing value based pricing is easier when you're further along in your freelancing career.

Particularly when you're well known within a sector and when your reputation for providing a specific, expert-level service precedes you.

That's not to say that you can't try it out earlier if you have the confidence to do so.

PRICING SUMMARY

The main thing I have learned in over a decade of pricing freelancing projects is that it's a highly individualistic process.

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.

- To suit your current circumstances.
- To use pricing terms as an olive branch during negotiation.
- Because the scope of work suits a particular pricing style.

Be aware of your current position:

- Are you new to freelancing?
- Are you established as a specialist provider?
- Are your living costs increased at the moment?
- Do you need a cash flow injection?
- Do you have more/less work time available right now?

Taking into consideration these metrics when pricing projects will give you the best chance of being effective.

Pricing is difficult. Place importance in the deep understanding of it to become a better freelancer.

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.

They might be a brilliant designer, developer or writer, yet totally inexperienced in terms of direct client contact.

In truth, having a solid core skill is not enough to maximise your freelancing potential.

You need to hone your business skills in equal measure to give yourself the best chance of getting paid what you're worth.

You need to hone your negotiation skills particularly.

There are a number of negotiation techniques that have helped me get ahead during my freelancing career.

First things first, being likeable is supremely important.

This can be harder to convey for remote workers, which many freelancers are, however it's still possible.

Be attentive, courteous and punctual during all contact.

Whether this be in a face to face meeting, during a video call or via text based communication.

Add your business connections on social media to build trust.

You can also build rapport by discussing non-work topics, providing it's genuine and respectful of the other person's time.

Being likeable comes from showing your human side.

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.

This brings me to the next negotiation tactic; bargain on terms not price where plausible.

Being quick to reduce your price, especially by a generous amount, often leaves a bad taste.

Largely because your prospect feels as if they were being taken for a ride initially.

To avoid this scenario, look to accept a concession on payment terms as opposed to the project price itself.

For example:

If you ask for a 100% payment up front initially, you can fall back to terms of 50% up front with 50% on completion.

That way you appear reasonable while retaining your value.

It's crucial to be aware of your market rate at all times.

Ask yourself, “What are other freelancers with my skill set commanding?”.

Also, “What is a common full-time salary for someone at my level of proficiency?”.

Keep on top of your research in this area to prevent yourself from being too cheap or too expensive.

Hitting the sweet spot with your pricing during negotiation will improve your prospect conversion rate.

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 be 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:

- Save more than you spend.
- Keep marketing even when you're booked up with work.
- Look to gain more leads than you can cater for.
- Become indispensable to your clients.
- Raise your rates regularly.

Future negotiation will prove easier as a result.

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.

Ultimately, routines and structure allow you to get more things done in less time.

This is an imperative trait of a successful freelancer.

You might ask, “How does one take advantage of these positives while holding on to the agility self-employment provides?”.

This is where a semi-flexible routine comes into play.

The best way to explain this is to show you an example of what yours could look like.

Firstly, ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my current daily and weekly commitments?
- How many hours do I want (or need) to work each week?
- How does my family and social life look?
- Are there any other factors I need to consider when planning work?

Be frank and honest with your answers. They will lay the foundations of a realistic schedule for you.

Find below example answers to these questions:

Commitments

- I do the school run every week day at 08:00 and 15:00.
- I walk the dog every day for 30 minutes.

- 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:

	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
06:00	Alarm	Alarm	Alarm	Alarm	Alarm	—	—
06:30 - 07:30	Exercise	Exercise	—	Exercise	Exercise	—	—
08:00	School run	School run	School run	School run	School run	Alarm	Alarm
08:30	Start work	Start work	Start work	Start work	Walk dog	Walk dog	Walk dog
12:00 - 12:30	Walk dog	Walk dog	Walk dog	Walk dog	—	—	—
15:00	School run	School run	School run	School run	School run	—	—
17:00	Finish work	Finish work	Finish work	Finish work	—	—	—
17:00 - 18:00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	—	Dinner
18:00 - 22:00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
22:00	Bed	Bed	Bed	Bed	Bed	Bed	Bed

With structure in place like this, you have predefined slots for all your non-negotiable commitments coupled with space throughout the week to adapt on the fly if and when needed.

Scenarios and solutions when you need to pivot on your schedule could include:

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.

A major turning point for me was doing away with the all-nighters and turning myself into a morning person.

The performance increase I get from consistently waking up at 06:00 after 6-8 hours sleep is incredible.

I accredit a large amount of my success in freelancing to this.

Earlier in my career, I used to think that all-nighters were the holy grail for getting more done.

After starting to wake up earlier, I realised that a consistent sleep pattern is the true key to clarity and productivity.

Using a routine that has ample time for rest factored in will offer a direct benefit to your business achievements.

All things considered, your routine should be an iterative project in its own right.

After setting this up, it could take a few weeks or months to perfect.

Don't be afraid to tweak your routine by moving things around to best suit your current situation.

What is most important is that you have *some* structure.

Have your days outlined by the week, with fail safes for the unexpected and contingency for the commonly foreseen.

A semi-flexible routine will help you tame procrastination, maximise your output and promote balance.

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:

- Client communications
- Social media management
- Quoting
- Invoicing
- Banking
- Bookkeeping
- Marketing

Many tasks and subtasks within these areas can be automated.

The solutions don't have to be particularly advanced.

Although you can come up with custom workflows, many tools are already available to assist you.

Real world examples that you can put into place within your freelancing business include:

Setting up keyboard shortcuts for the repetitive tasks that you perform on your computer.

“Launcher” software like Alfred for MacOS and Wox for Windows allow you to do this.

Freelancers will often send many similar emails.

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.

Email is a low-cost and personal marketing avenue, which makes it a worthwhile investment for freelancers.

You can automate your email advertising with marketing platforms like Mailchimp, Convertkit and Drip.

Examples of automated emails freelancers can send include:

- Notifying your mailing list each time you publish a new blog post.
- Onboarding new clients with detail about how you can best work together.
- Checking in with old clients to see how their project is going, ask for a testimonial or check whether they have any new projects they require assistance with.
- Provide an instant response to enquirers that request work to be completed within a timeframe or budget that does not fit in with your current lead time or rate.

A freelancer's social media marketing efforts can be automated too.

In line with the “Make Yourself Known” chapter of this book, it's important for a freelancer to be sharing their knowledge on a consistent basis to be seen as an expert within their field.

Social media is a great platform to do this.

However, keeping up with posting on multiple platforms will take a lot of time out of a freelancers' day.

This is where automation saves the day again.

Social media scheduling tools such as [Buffer](#), [Meet Edgar](#) and [Hypefury](#) 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 [FreeAgent](#) and [Xero](#) 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.

OUTSOURCING

The best use of a freelancers time in terms of direct profit is to perform your most valuable and saleable skill for the maximum amount of time feasible.

Let's say you have taken on a fixed price project.

The faster you can complete the project (*always* retaining quality), the more profitable it becomes, because you're then free to work on something else.

The best way to get quality projects out quickly is through medium to long periods of deep work.

A full day of focus on a specific task will do more for productivity than short stints of work.

So with this in mind, what can you do to make this a possibility?

You can look to outsource tasks that deter your focus.

These two things are often overlooked by freelancers as they see them as not being available. But that could not be farer from the truth.

I encourage freelancers to use other freelancers and service providers regularly.

Even though you're used to being the one hired, you can still hire people yourself when it makes sense to do so.

Think about tasks that:

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.

Building your own portfolio website might mean you get to learn more about programming and I know people who enjoy gardening as an escape from the office to clear their head.

From a personal perspective, although the gardening is not for me, I like to walk my dog myself as this forms a vital part of my exercise routine.

With this considered, if you don't like performing a task that falls into one (or both) of the aforementioned categories, and/or you get nothing from it, outsource the work.

Aside from freeing up your time, the main benefit of delegating business tasks to other professionals is that you'll probably get a better end result.

A perfect example of this is through hiring an accountant.

Your books will be in better shape having a trained eye cast over them and a good accountant will save you far more than they cost you.

Concerning life based tasks, I completely understand the benefits people may attain from doing these themselves.

However, I'd evaluate whether these tasks are the best use of your time in regard to working smarter as a freelancer.

You can't do everything yourself and you don't have to. Prioritise what you're best at.

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.

You gain a portfolio of happy clients by consistently delivering quality in a professional manner.

A client who sees a return on investment, as a direct result of your services, will be a pleased one.

While hitting key performance indicators might be the easiest route to a successful client engagement, don't forget the basics too. No matter how good your service offering is.

Doing a good job also means being punctual, professional, communicative, respectful and humble at all times.

Do a good job and more work will come your way.

Do a bad job and that's all you'll be known for.

HONING YOUR SKILLS

Always have an eye on your personal development.

Some industries move faster than others, but there's always more to master, whatever your talent.

You should encourage self initiated learning and make time for it within your schedule.

Look to further existing skills through new techniques, software and systems. Study new skills that supplement your core skill.

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.

STAYING RELEVANT

When you're full to capacity with work it can be easy to rest on your laurels.

I advise against this at all costs.

There's a fragility to freelancing that can trip you up if you don't mitigate it.

Projects can dry up and a client can call time on your engagement whenever they feel like it, no matter how sure it might seem.

That's why it's super important to stay relevant within the eyes of your target audience. Even during the busy times.

You should still be posting on social media, writing articles and sending out emails. Every day you don't, your notoriety slips a little.

Protect yourself from this scenario by being proactive as opposed to reactive when work dries up.

Another way to stay relevant is to follow industry demand.

Assuming work has taken a down turn and your service offering is not being taken up as often as it once was.

Ask yourself, “Have things have changed or moved on?”.

Here's an example from the programming industry that I'm familiar with:

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.

10. SEEK BALANCE

You can't become a better freelancer if you're not balanced.

Health should trump all if you want to be successful.

Think about how your computer performs when it has been left turned on all week.

It gets sluggish.

The same happens to us.

Our performance dwindles when we are overloaded.

Both your computer and your mind need to be switched off every once in a while.

This is where achieving a balanced lifestyle will help you become a better freelancer.

A mantra that will stand you in good stead is to work hard and smart in the time you've set aside to do so.

To make a great living as freelancer you're going to have to work hard.

The ideology that you can earn six-figures from the beach working one day per week is fictitious.

Reaching your freelancing goals will take time and consistent effort.

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.

The smart way forward would be to take as much time away from work as you need to recharge your batteries.

As soon as you feel burnout coming, you need to nip it in the bud by taking a break and prioritising your time for the things that have a direct benefit to your mental health.

Your business can wait.

Managing my health takes the highest precedent throughout my weeks and this improved my freelancing fortunes tenfold.

Two areas that I identified were causing me trouble during my early career were my sleep pattern and my lack of exercise.

I'm here to tell you right now that pulling all-nighters and skipping exercise to work more is not the route to a successful career in freelancing. Or a well rounded life for that matter.

Everyone manages their mental health differently. The 5 changes I made that benefited me the most were:

1. Aiming for 6-8 hours of sleep every night.
2. Waking up early every morning at around 06:00.
3. Working out in the gym 3-4 times per week.
4. Ensuring I take a walk every day.
5. Prevent myself working weekends, unless absolutely necessary, then this time would be limited to 2-3 hours.

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.

Your friends will drop in expecting you to be available for a coffee or lunch when you're working from home.

Plus, it will always be tempting to answer those late-evening emails.

The key is to not let freelancing be to the detriment of other areas of your life, but to use freelancing as supplement to them.

You can do this by setting boundaries with others and placing them on yourself too.

If you're at home working, use a dedicated workspace and make it's purpose clear to everyone in the household.

When you're in the office you're working and equally, try not to bring work into the leisure areas of your house.

Always be fully present when spending quality time with your family.

Don't be afraid to put off the friend that wants to play golf with you on their day off until you're off too.

Remind yourself that the world won't end if you don't reply to an email as soon as you receive it.

Balance is found by working hard and smart in the time you've allocated to do so while actively engaging in regular, non-business activities alongside this time.

Most importantly, balance can only authentically be achieved when unproductivity guilt does not creep in to these activities.

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.

CONCLUSION

I hope you found 10 Steps To Becoming A Better Freelancer valuable.

Furthermore, I hope that you can start taking action on these principles today.

If you have a colleague, friend or family member that you think would like this book, I'd love it if you could tell them about it.

I love helping others through sharing my experiences in freelancing and I do this actively on [Twitter](#). Follow me to pick up more tips.

The ideas and concepts within 10 Steps To Becoming A Better Freelancer are precisely what have lead me to a well-paid, 10+ year career in freelancing.

I expand on all of this theory within my mentorship programme for freelancers, in which I help people get further ahead faster through tailored direction and support.

You can partner with me directly to improve your freelancing game by [clicking here](#).

It could be the difference between your journey to being a better freelancer starting now, or never.

Thanks for reading!