

## **BYOB(P) Bring Your Own Business Problem**

TechWrite STL meeting

March 12, 2019

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Many thanks to our members and colleagues who joined us for lunch and a great conversation! Here are several business issues that we discussed, and a summary of suggestions we offered for how to cope successfully with them.

### **How do you set an hourly rate?**

Always a hot topic, and one that generated a lot of discussion. Suggestions included:

- Consult a salary survey from a professional organization, and use it as backup to support the rate you are quoting. Examples include surveys by AMWA (American Medical Writers Association) and EFA (Editorial Freelancers Association). Members noted that the EFA survey is somewhat out of date.
- Rates tend to be higher on the east and west coasts.
- To determine an hourly rate, take your highest salary. Add to it the value of the benefits you would receive as a paid employee.
- Be aware of the pay range that is customary for your industry. You may feel you are worth \$200/hour, but if the industry standard is \$20/hour, well....

### **How do you get paid on time?**

- Always create a written agreement that describes the project in detail, including your rate, how often you will be paid, and when. Some people do this in an email; other create a letter of agreement.
- In your agreement, link your pay installments to what you produce. For instance, specify that you will be paid when you turn in specific pages or chapters, rather than being paid after they have been approved. You have no control over when they will be reviewed or approved, so waiting for that could delay your pay indefinitely.
- Never, never act desperate to be paid. You don't want to give the impression of someone living hand to mouth (even if you are).
- People suggested the following statements: "I need to focus on my paying clients." "My CPA doesn't want me to do any more work without getting paid."

### **How can you get good feedback from clients?**

- Unlike employees, we do not receive evaluations. So how can you get feedback on your performance? Ask for it. Encourage your clients to write a testimonial or letter of reference.
- Some freelancers have evaluation forms that they ask clients to complete.
- After you finish a project, ask your client: What did you like about what I did? What would you like me to do differently next time? This lets them know you are flexible and willing to adjust your work style to theirs.
- However – do not imply that you did anything wrong!

### **How do you fire a difficult client?**

Life is just too short to work with difficult people. If they call, you might say:

- "I'm tied up for the next few months."
- "I'm no longer available."

- We all agreed, however, that you don't want to burn any bridges. After all, the difficult people might leave the company and their replacements could be a dream to work with.

### **How do you handle downtime?**

Some freelancers love downtime and consider it a vacation. Others feel at loose ends or worry about ongoing expenses.

- One member started a gardening business that she can do in her spare time.
- Another has "downtime gigs," such as substitute teaching, that bring in some money without requiring a long-term commitment.