MODULE #6: TACKLING AND OVERCOMING TRICKY FREELANCING PROBLEMS

IN THIS MODULE: Freelancing can be wonderful when it's going well – but it can be tough if things go wrong. You don't have any colleagues to turn to for help. In this final module, we're tackling some tough freelancing problems.

Being your own boss is great. I love it so much that I've only been employed for fairly brief periods of my life. I worked full-time for nearly two years when I was 21–23, and I worked for a remote company full-time during 2020, when I was 35. The one thing I miss most about those times is having colleagues – particularly people I could turn to with problems!

When you're freelancing, you might have friends or mentors you can turn to for advice, but solving the problems in your business is down to you.

And when you run into problems, or feel upset or stressed, you might start to wonder if freelancing is really a good fit for you after all.

I find it helps to keep in mind that *everyone* has bad days at work.

As a freelancer, you might have some days when it feels like things just aren't going well. Maybe:

- You're working really late to meet deadlines, because you took on too much work.
- A project that you quoted for based on your assumption that it would take three hours actually takes six – halving your effective hourly rate.
- You lose an important file / signed contract / etc and spend ages searching for it.

Thankfully, a lot of these problems – while annoying! – are relatively short-lived. They might waste a few hours, but they're fairly straightforward to resolve with a bit of work.

Some issues, though, are a little harder to fix. I've picked some to focus on in this module that can be particularly stressful:

- A client doesn't pay … and stops responding to you
- A client isn't happy with your work … and wants revisions
- You can't meet a deadline (or you've already missed one)
- You're procrastinating a lot and not meeting your income goals
- You don't have enough work coming in
- Your client is too demanding and you want to part ways

Problem #1: A Client Doesn't Pay … and Stops Responding to You

This is a situation that a lot of newer freelancers worry about – even if it's never happened to them.

By way of reassurance, I want to tell you about my own experience with this one. In 15+ years of freelancing, I've only *once* had a client who didn't pay in full.

It was for a small sum (around $300) and I eventually managed – through annoyed persistence! – to get half of the amount paid.

The frustrating thing is that if I hadn't known which client wouldn't pay, I could probably have guessed it would be that one. They were a new client without an established internet presence and – in retrospect – without a viable business. I should have asked for half the payment up front, or written a single piece and got that paid for before I wrote multiple pieces for them.

So what can you do if something similar happens to you?

- **Persist in asking for your money.** Even if the client isn't replying to emails, you can keep following up. (You could also turn to other channels, like direct messaging them on social media.)

- **Call them out publicly.** I wouldn't recommend this if you want any chance of salvaging the relationship for the future – but if you've not been paid, you probably don't want to ever work with this client again. Posting on a social media platform to publicly let people know that the client hasn't paid you can (a) help you get the client's attention and (b) warn other freelancers away.
- **Ask for part payment.** While it's definitely not ideal, if the client clearly isn't going to pay the full amount they owe you, ask them to pay *something* – perhaps half.
- **Write off the debt.** Sometimes, pursuing money you're owed might take up so much of your mental energy (not to mention your time) that you'd be better off chalking this one up to experience and moving on.

While I don't use formal contracts (unless my client asks me to sign one!) I am now more cautious about working with brand new clients. For their sake and mine, I generally arrange to do a single, short trial piece and get paid for it before doing additional work for them.

Problem #2: A Client Isn't Happy With Your Work and Wants Revisions

Another worry that a lot of freelancers have is what to do if a client simply doesn't like the work they've turned in.

Again, in my experience, this is extremely rare. I've occasionally had a client ask for fairly extensive revisions, if we simply weren't on the same page with what their requirements were. (For instance, I might have not quite hit the "voice" they wanted.)

If this happens to you, remember, it's not because you're a bad writer. Sometimes, a client has wanted me to edit things in a way that I feel (when being as objective about it as possible!) makes my piece less well written – but it makes it better for their purposes, such as meeting SEO requirements or simplifying the language for the non-native English speakers in their audience.

I've *never* had a client be nasty about this. Usually, they're quite apologetic about asking for rewrites.

Some freelancers anticipate this problem in advance by offering a set number of rounds of revisions, so that edits can't drag on indefinitely. I've never needed to do this – and if anything, I think it might put into clients' minds that they're paying for rounds of rewrites that they don't need to use.

Instead, I generally say something along these lines when turning work in to a client:

I'm very happy to make any changes you want. Of course, do feel free to make any edits on your end as you see fit, too.

In most cases, clients will make their own tweaks and edits, without involving me further. In a small number of situations (usually when it's part of the client's internal process), I'll receive my draft back with editorial suggestions or requests for edits. It normally only takes a few minutes to address these.

Ultimately, if things really don't work out and a client isn't happy with what you've produced even after revisions, you always have the option of refunding them and parting ways. Obviously, you want to avoid that if possible (and I've never had to resort to it!) – but knowing that you have an "out" if necessary can make things less stressful.

Problem #3: You Can't Meet a Deadline … Or You've Already Missed One

As a freelance writer, you'll generally have deadlines: a date by which your client needs your piece to be turned in. Sometimes, you might set the deadline yourself.

In a few cases, you may not have a specific deadline, but you'll still want to be reasonably proactive about handing in work. While some clients may be fairly

open to when you want to turn work in, unless it's a huge project, they'll likely want it within a matter of days or weeks – not months.

So what can you do if it's clear you aren't going to be able to meet a deadline?

First, you should communicate with your client as soon as possible. Even if you think you *might* be able to just about get the piece to them by the deadline, it's best not to leave it till the last minute. The sooner you let them know that you won't be able to make the deadline, the easier it will be for them to rearrange things on their end.

If you've already missed a deadline, you might be feeling upset, embarrassed, or guilty about it. **But you do need to be brave and actually contact your client!**

Let them know you're sorry about missing the deadline, and that you're going to have the piece to them as soon as you can. Give them a new date when they can expect it. Make this date realistic: don't promise the piece tomorrow if you have yet to start on it.

Sometimes, if you can't meet a deadline, it makes sense to give the client the work you've completed so far. Perhaps you've not finished the email copy for their latest product launch, but you do have the sales page ready for them to review. Or maybe you've only written the first six sections of a ten-section blog post, but they could at least take a look at those while you write the rest.

I've very rarely missed a deadline as a freelancer. And on the handful of occasions where some emergency has cropped up (or the even fewer occasions when I've simply got a deadline wrong) my clients have been really understanding and nice about it.

So if you're in a situation where you're about to miss a deadline (or you've already missed it), please just let your client know. Of course, you don't want to get a reputation for turning in work late – so make an extra effort with that client's pieces over the next few weeks and months, to make sure they're on time.

Missing a deadline won't ruin your career. But it is a signal to check whether there's something you need to do differently in your business. Maybe you missed it due to a completely unforeseen emergency – like your child suddenly becoming seriously unwell – but if you missed it because of disorganisation or the pressure of other work, look at what changes you might need to make going forward.

Problem #4: You're Procrastinating a Lot

I think all writers procrastinate at least a bit. Freelance writing can be hard work – and sometimes rather tedious, if you're writing yet another piece on a topic you've covered lots of times before. It's natural to sometimes find it hard to stay focused on work.

If you're procrastinating a lot, though, that can become a problem. Perhaps you're wasting half your working hours scrolling through social media or checking the news headlines. You're struggling to stay focused for more than a few minutes at a time.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, I find that when this is happening for me, it means I need *more* breaks from my work. If I don't take proper breaks, then breaks just end up happening all the same – but in an unsatisfying, guilt-ridden way! I find myself going off-task much more quickly than usual, because I haven't taken a proper break.

So if you're having a day when you're procrastinating a lot, take a real break away from your screen, for at least half an hour. It might seem like a waste of time – but let's be honest, you're probably going to waste more than half an hour procrastinating if you stay at your desk trying to work.

Some other things you can try, if you struggle with procrastination, are to:

- **Split big tasks into smaller chunks.** Sitting down to write a whole article might seem daunting – but you could break this into little tasks, like writing the outline, looking up some statistics or quotes, writing the first section, and so on.

- **Use a timer to stay focused.** I use Clockify when I'm working, to keep track of how long different freelance tasks are taking. Sometimes, I also set a timer for 10/20/30 minutes, to help me really focus and see how much I can get written during that time, before taking a brief break.
- **Switch between different types of work.** If you're working on the same thing all day, you might find yourself getting bored. You could try mixing it up by spending, say, an hour on a project for one client, then switching to another client's work for the next hour.
- **Give yourself deadlines for different project milestones.** If you're working on a big freelancing piece with a deadline that's a long way out, it can be tough to stay focused – because if you end up procrastinating for an hour today, that doesn't feel like it's making a difference to the end result. By setting smaller deadlines for different milestones (e.g. writing the first chapter of an ebook), then you can create a greater sense of urgency and focus.

Problem #5: You Don't Have Enough Work Coming In

When you're early in your freelancing career, you might go through times when you don't have as much work coming in as you want.

This isn't a problem exclusive to new freelancers, either. Perhaps you've been freelancing for years and a couple of your long-term clients have both ended their partnership with you at the same time. That can be seriously detrimental to your cash flow.

So what can you do about it?

- **Take on a part-time job.** If you're freelancing full-time, you might find it takes off some of the pressure if you get a part-time job. In my first year of freelancing, I spent a couple of afternoons each week childminding. It was easy and fun work, and it meant I had an additional, reliable source of income while I built up my client base.

- **Keep applying for new freelancing gigs … but also look for work in other ways.** Gigs that are advertised on freelancing jobs boards tend to get a *lot* of applications, and you might find it's a lot easier to land work through word of mouth (ask your clients for referrals) or through sending pitches to websites or magazines that use freelancers.

- **Network with other freelancers.** When I get asked to take on work that's not a good fit for me, I almost always recommend another freelancer who I know covers that type of work. Over the years, I've come to know quite a lot of different freelance writers. By building relationships with other freelancers, you could well find that they send potential clients your way.

- **Look for projects you could do alongside freelancing that might bring in money in the longer term.** While this probably isn't a good option if you need money *right now*, if you've got enough money but simply have extra hours available, you could build a blog, try out affiliate marketing, or even write a book. These things might not pay off in the next few weeks or months – but they could end up bringing in money years down the line.

Problem #6: Your Client is Too Demanding and You Want to Part Ways

Over 15+ years of freelancing, I've worked with a lot of different clients.

Most of them have been a great fit: easy to get on with, pleasant and friendly in their emails or messages, prompt at paying,

A very small number of my clients haven't been a great fit for me. They might have been perfect for another freelancer – but not for me.

They've requested editorial revisions seemingly for the sake of it, taking up hours of my time, or they've wanted a bunch of little tasks doing that fall more into a "virtual assistant" than "freelance writer" roll, or they've wanted to communicate mainly by phone rather than by email (I'm happy to do

occasional calls when needed, but I'm not a big fan of chatting on the phone unnecessarily).

Ultimately, they've ended up being clients who enjoyed working with *me*, but who I don't want to continue working with.

So what can you do if you're in that situation?

First, remember it's entirely up to you who you work with. Just because a client is lovely and friendly and regularly says how much they like working with you, doesn't mean you need to carry on working with them while silently wishing they'd find someone else.

If you do want to continue working with that client (or if you need the money), **one thing you can try is to set different or better boundaries.** If there's only one main issue, like your client sends repeated emails and expects an instant response, you might be able to improve things by letting them know, "I'll always aim to respond to emails within 24 hours, but if it's truly urgent, please text and I'll get back to you as soon as I can during my working hours (9am – 3pm, EST, Monday to Friday)."

If you want to stop working with them, aim to give them some warning: a month is great, if you can manage that. This gives your client time to find someone else to work with, and gives you a chance to wrap up your remaining work with them without feeling rushed.

You don't need to give a long or apologetic explanation. I find that a phrase like, "I'm turning my attention to other projects" or "I'm going to be focusing purely on X type of work going forward" works fine. You could also use a change in your own circumstances as a good point to stop working with them – perhaps you're expecting a baby, your partner is starting a new job, or you're taking on some caring responsibilities.

What if your client insists they want to keep working with you and tries to change your mind? I try to see this as a great opportunity to practise saying "no" and meaning it! You're likely to resent it if you agree to carry on – even for a fairly short period of time beyond what you'd planned.

A final option, if you feel it's worth it for you, is to raise your rates significantly for that client. Choose a rate that would make the annoying parts of working with them seem worthwhile. Maybe your client will be happy to pay it – in which case, you'll at least be making good money. Alternatively, they'll part ways with you – in which case, you're now freed up in terms of time and mental energy to replace them with a new client who's a better fit for you.

How the Assignments Work

For each module, you have an assignment to carry out. Obviously you don't *have* to do it – this isn't school! – but you'll get the most out of the course if you work through the assignments along the way.

Each assignment has a suggested length (e.g. 30 minutes) to give you a rough idea of how long it's likely to take, if you do it in full. Don't worry if you only have a little bit of time to spare: even 10 minutes is well worth doing.

ASSIGNMENT (20 minutes)

Your assignment this week is in two parts:

#1: Identify the biggest problem or struggle that you're having with your freelancing. It might be one of the problems we've covered (or something similar), or it could be something completely different.

#2: Spend 15 – 20 minutes brainstorming ways you could address that problem. Then, choose at least one of those things to try this week.

If you'd like to share what you're struggling with or ask for extra ideas, come on over to the Aliventures Club group on Facebook:

facebook.com/groups/aliventuresclub

Module #6: Further Reading

All of the further reading is optional, but if you want to find out more about something we've covered, it's highly recommended! If you find other useful resources, you're very welcome to share them in our Facebook group.

What is the Worst Problem Freelance Writers Face? Laura Spencer, Writing Thoughts

This handy introductory post links to a bunch of Laura's other posts about common freelancing issues, including things like coming up with ideas and handling loneliness. It's well worth a glance to see if there's anything here relating to worries or struggles that you currently have.

10 Challenges of Being a Freelance Writer, Diane Kelly Levey, DianeKelly.com

This post takes a realistic look at some of the downsides of being a freelance writer. It might seem a little disheartening – but it could also be a useful read if you're worried that everyone else is somehow finding freelancing easier than you are! While there are loads of wonderful things about freelance writing, there are definitely some challenges too, and it can help to know that lots of freelancers are going through the same things as you.

Ghosted: What to Do When a Client Doesn't Pay Up, Christina Majaski, FreshBooks

This post has practical, step by step advice on what you can do if a client doesn't pay up. If you're in that situation, hopefully you'll find this reassuring and useful – and there are also a bunch of useful tips on what you can do to protect yourself in the future.

Where Next?

You've finished the course! Congratulations. ☺

Don't forget you can access everything (including the bonuses) here:

aliventures.com/freelance-confidence-course

You'll always have access to the most recent version of the course, and all bonuses – including ones I add in the future!

I'd be really grateful if you could fill in the post-course survey here:

https://forms.gle/cegjKhDM69MFDydg8

This helps me know what might need tweaking in the course, what extra bonuses you'd find useful, and more. Of course, you're also very welcome to email me at any time (ali@aliventures.com).

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