

# **NO-STRESS NEGOTIATION**

**for well-paid  
freelancers**



The following 7 points are based on my practical application of the ideas found in Jim Camp's Start With No. Camp's book is the best guide to negotiation I've ever found.

Within Camp's system, you can feel good about negotiating. In other words, negotiation doesn't have to be this confrontational, stressful bogeyman.

But Camp's system is also incredibly effective. It's not effective for squeezing out \$75 out of a specific cheap client who doesn't value your work. But it is effective in keeping you on track to making good money and working with quality clients.

In short, follow these principles. They will help you build your career as a freelancer, and save you from scraping by and hating your life.

[**NOTE from March 2023:** I wrote this guide back in 2019, while I was still on Upwork, and while I was regularly applying to new jobs and talking to 2-3 new potential clients every week. There aren't many things that I think I was better at 4 years ago than today – but this kind of cold-lead client communication and negotiation is one of them. I was simply getting a lot of regular practice then, and I was very sharp.]

## 1. The biggest negotiation lever you can pull right now

I'm constantly applying to new jobs. I'm always willing to hear out potential clients when they approach me with a new project. I've also got my own side-projects projects that I'm working on.

One reason to do all this is that I don't know where opportunities will come from and which ones will be profitable. But another reason is that it keeps me from being needy.

I used to think there's no difference between "needing" and "wanting" something. There's a big difference. It's like two separate parts of the brain get engaged when you need something as opposed to wanting it.

Being needy doesn't just feel bad. It also looks bad. How successful can you be if you're so desperate for this one negotiation to succeed? And if you're not successful, what's the reason for it? It must be that you're not very valuable.

"But I am valuable!" you might say. And you're right. But if you appear needy, you won't appear valuable in the eyes of the people you negotiate with. And that's why the biggest negotiation lever you can pull right now is to contain and eliminate your neediness.

The fix is twofold. One part is to change your behavior. Here are a few needy freelancer behaviors and the fixes for them:

- Apologizing for being new and inexperienced -> Frankly explaining your experience IF the client asks you about it
- Responding to the client as soon as they contact you -> Having a set time of day when you respond to client inquiries
- Gushing over a client's project description and saying you would be perfect for the job -> Highlighting why you're interested and why you might be a good fit

(Of course, tailor this to your personality. If you're naturally enthusiastic and bubbly, fine. There's a difference between bubbly enthusiasm and desperate, clingy need.)

The other part is what I mentioned at the start. Always keep yourself open to other opportunities, even if they don't seem very promising. Have your own projects, and work on them constantly.

This will actually eliminate neediness. It will put every new opportunity in perspective. And it will subtly signal to potential clients that you are somebody skilled and valuable, because you will be ok with or without them.

## 2. An easy way to make the right decision when the negotiation gets heated

A while back, I took on a project that caused me a lot of stress. The fault was my own – I had accepted the job because the money was good, even though the client failed to meet certain criteria I've developed over time.

For example, I normally don't accept rush jobs. I don't enjoy the stress they bring. Plus, rush jobs tend to signal bad things about the client.

I also don't work with clients who aren't likely to get value out of my copy, regardless of how good I make it. That could be because they have a bad offer, or because they don't have any traffic, or because they don't know what they're doing and they won't even use my copy.

Well, this client failed to meet both of those common-sense criteria. And so, all along the way, I cursed myself for ever having accepted their project. What's more, the big money I was promised also became uncertain.

Long story short, the project finished. I managed to do a good job with the copy in spite of the rush. I delivered the work, the client paid me as agreed, and they were satisfied with the result. It even seems they got their money's worth, in spite of fundamental problems with their marketing efforts.

So what's the lesson? Here's my interpretation.

I got lucky this one time, and the project worked out well. I might not be so lucky the second or third time. Maybe I won't be able to do as good of a job in a crunch. Maybe the client will change their mind half-way through and say, "You know what, we don't need this any more, sorry." And in any case, the stress I went through wasn't worth the extra money. So the conclusion for me was that I should have done the right thing and stuck to my principles.

And don't just keep your principles in your head. Advertising legend David Ogilvy wrote that having a set of written principles was "invaluable in keeping a complicated enterprise on course." Jim Camp called this having a mission and purpose, and he said writing it down is essential. It's something you should consider, too, because it's an easy to make the right decision when the negotiation gets heated.

In case you're curious, here are the basic principles that I work by:

1. Do everything in my power to write copy that creates a 10X return for my clients
2. Work with clients who will actually publish my copy and run traffic to it
3. Work with clients who are selling a great product or service
4. Work with clients who treat me with respect
5. Work with clients who see me as a partner rather than as an employee
6. Have enough time to do the work to my standards
7. Get paid fairly for the value I bring

So what does getting "paid fairly" mean? All I can tell you is my own experience. For a long time, I simply had a menu of fixed prices for the services I offered to clients. They were non-negotiable.

Sometimes, clients balked at my prices or tried to haggle. I would tell them I completely understand if my prices are out of their budget, but that it doesn't make sense for me to work for less. In the vast majority of cases, the clients accepted this and agreed to my rates. If they didn't, or if they continued trying to haggle, I politely let them go.

These days, I also combine fixed prices with a small percentage of the revenues generated by my copy (aka royalties). Yes, a part of this is being paid fairly for the value I bring. But it's also about working as a partner, and about having a real incentive to produce the best possible results with my copy.

### 3. How to NEVER wind up with a disappointing negotiation outcome

Right now, I'm waiting to kick off a project with a new client. He first contacted me almost a year ago. We exchanged a few emails, he seemed interested... and then he disappeared.

About three months ago, he got back in touch with a project I would love to work on. At first, the project was scheduled to kick off right away. Then it was postponed for a month. And now here we are, and I'm still waiting.

Just so we're clear, I don't think this client is stringing me along. It's just the chaotic nature of running a business. But from the freelancer's perspective, this kind of situation can be frustrating – and it can put you in a tight spot with negotiation.

Here's the worst-case scenario: You get invested. You start thinking about the outcome and the good things it would mean for you. You spend time communicating with the client, maybe even suggesting ideas or answering detailed questions. You keep thinking of the money and opportunities this will unlock when it all goes live.

Then, after a long time has passed, the client comes to you with a much different offer than he initially made. You feel trapped. On the one hand, the offer is disappointing and not what you wanted. On the other hand, you're already in so deep you find it hard to say no. And it's better than nothing, right?

Like with neediness, the fix for this is two-fold. One part is simply a mental change – you eliminate expectations. You can't be disappointed if you have no expectations.

It's easier to do than you might think. Just keep reminding yourself that nothing is given before the contract is signed, the money is there, and you begin work. (In fact, nothing is ever given, even when you finish the project. Clients can

always change their mind for some reason.) This simple reminder is often enough to prevent hope from setting your mind on fire.

The other part of the fix is to focus on your own processes and behaviors rather than outcomes. The fact is, you can't make any one deal happen – because it doesn't depend only on you, but on the client as well. But you can focus on constantly looking at new opportunities, on doing good work, and on communicating with clients in a professional, non-needy way.

If you do these two things, you'll save yourself a lot of mental energy. If the negotiation starts to go in a way that doesn't work for you, you'll find it much easier to stick to your mission and purpose. And that means you'll always come out with an outcome that you don't regret.

#### 4. How to get most anyone to do most anything

The key to getting most anybody to do most anything is simple: *You just have to make them imagine an outcome they want, and then tie that into what you want them to do.* Let me give you a couple of examples.

Back in 1992, Sylvester Stallone starred in a movie called *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot*. I've never seen the movie but apparently it was a disaster, with an 8% rating on Rotten Tomatoes. Sly himself said it was a terrible decision and the worst movie he's ever made. So why did he do it? Because he thought Arnold Schwarzenegger was interested in the role. As the no. 2 action star in the country, Stallone wanted to screw Arnie in any way possible.

Example 2: Right now, all around the world, a small group of men are signing up to give blood for the first time. These men never reacted to all the public service pleas to give blood. So why are they finally doing it? Because they believe

hair loss is caused in part by iron accumulation, and giving blood is a good way to get rid of excess iron.

In both of these cases, the same thing happened. Somebody mentally saw an outcome they wanted (Arnie flummoxed; hair loss arrested). This caused them to do an otherwise unlikely thing (public humiliation on hundreds of movie screens; willingly giving up a pint of one's own blood).

So if you can make somebody visualize that they're getting what *they* want by doing what *you* want, you're riding high. The trouble is, figuring out what people really want and then painting that picture in their mind is hard work. (That's why advertising and marketing are such tricky and in-demand professions.)

But here's some good news: in a one-on-one negotiation, you don't have to know what the other person wants. You also don't have to paint that picture in their minds. Instead, you can ask them to do all that work for you. How?

It's simple. You pose open-ended questions.

For example, potential clients will often ask me about my background and why I am a good fit for their project. But I don't know enough about them or what they really want. And even if I did, it will be hard for me to paint that picture of success in their mind. So I will usually respond by saying something like,

*"Happy to tell you about my background. But I want to make sure I'm covering stuff that's relevant. So can you tell me what's most important for you on this project?"*

Most clients will happily answer. You'll then have a bit of information about what they care about. And they will have a vague picture of the outcome they want in their mind.

As the next step, you ask them follow-up questions, also open-ended. When the client answers you, the picture in their mind becomes clearer and more lifelike. And once the picture

in their mind becomes real enough, you will often hear the client say, "Ok, you've convinced me. When can we start?"

The thing is, you didn't convince them. Not really. They convinced themselves.

## 5. The magic word to make you a master negotiator

Maybe you noticed a little trick I used in the last section. When the client asks me a question that I don't think I should answer, I ask them a question of my own.

This is a Jim Camp technique called *reversing*. And it's a tiny illustration of a much bigger principle that's right in the title of Camp's book, *Start With NO*. Here's what that means.

In any negotiation, just because the other side asks you to do something, that doesn't mean you have to accept. You can say NO. And this doesn't mean the end of the negotiation. You simply come back to them with another way to move the negotiation forward.

So the client asks you a question. You decide it's not in your interest to answer. And you effectively say, "No, it doesn't make sense for me to answer that question without more information. Here's how you can help me get the information I need."

Maybe the client will answer your question. Or maybe they will decide to get back to you with another question of their own. Either way, the negotiation continues.

So don't be afraid to say NO. Here are some common client situations where this comes up:

*We need this in a week. Can you meet that deadline? ->  
No, I'm afraid I'm busy with another project right now.*

*I could get it to you in two weeks' time. Would that work?*

*Can you throw in 2 extra emails for this project? It should only take a tiny bit of your time. -> Sure, I can write that up. But I don't think this is part of the original scope we agreed on. If you'd like me to do it, I would ask \$xxx for them and I could get them to you by next Thursday. Does that work?*

*Can you also help us out with social media updates? -> No, I'm afraid that's not something I specialize in. But if you need sales emails or advertorials, I can definitely help with that.*

In the same vein, stop being afraid to hear NO. This is particularly relevant when you're talking to potential clients, and you want them to hire you. For example, I've told potential clients:

*"Honestly, you could hire somebody else to do this for you. I specialize in sales copywriting. And that's why I charge a lot. There are probably people out there who will do a good job for you for less than I would charge."*

This isn't a tactic. It's my honest opinion, going back to the mission and purpose principles I've laid out above. In response, clients will sometimes thank me for my honesty and find somebody else. Other times, they will decide to hire me even though I'm more expensive. And still other times, they won't hire me for this job – but they will find another project where it pays to hire me.

As Jim Camp says, the negotiation doesn't end with NO. It starts with NO.

6. A surefire way to make a negotiation fail

One of the most famous copywriters of all time was a man named Robert Collier. About 100 years ago, he wrote hundreds of sales letters to sell everything from wagon-loads of coal to women's pantyhose. He made his clients millions of dollars in the process – back when that meant something. And after all this experience, here's one of Collier's big conclusions:

*"As to the motives to appeal to when you have won the reader's attention, by far the strongest, in our experience, is Vanity. Not the vanity that buys a cosmetic or whatnot to look a little better, but that unconscious vanity which makes a man want to feel important in his own eyes and makes him strut mentally. This appeal needs to be subtly used, but when properly used, it is the strongest we know."*

Jim Camp calls this *being okay*. We all want to be okay. And like Collier writes above, this might be the strongest human need.

The tricky thing is, if you are feeling okay, odds are that your negotiation adversary is not feeling okay. If you start *feeling important* and *strutting mentally*, it makes you feel good. But it makes your adversary feel small and threatened. And that's a surefire way to make a negotiation fail.

So how do you avoid this from happening?

Well, instead of following your instinct to try to be okay, you consciously decide to *be unokay*. Here are a few ways to do that with clients:

- Ask clients for advice and approval, even when you don't really need it
- Couch your recommendations: "I could be completely wrong with this, but it seems to me like..."
- Use simple terms and explanations, instead of technical jargon that you take for granted

All this might seem obvious. But it's incredibly important. In fact, after reading Jim Camp's book several times, I think

this simple idea is the most profound thing I've gotten from Camp's teachings.

Won't being unokay make you look inexperienced and unprofessional? No. You can communicate your experience and your knowledge in lots of different ways. Through sample work. Through case studies. Through good ideas and a clear understanding of what the client needs.

Being unokay and allowing your client to feel okay just takes the edge off in the negotiation. And it might even make you look more professional – because you won't be so desperate to impress.

## 7. How to develop the strength to stand your ground in ANY negotiation

In November 2019, MMA fighter Jorge Masvidal took part in the biggest MMA bout of the year. How did Masvidal prepare to get kicked and punched in the face by another very dangerous man for 25 minutes?

By training hard, of course. But there was something else, too. During his intense training schedule, Masvidal also found time to go volunteer in a homeless shelter. The question is why.

Well, according to Jim Camp, the most successful people do these kinds of things to *pay their success forward*. Doing generous, unsolicited things for others gives successful people self-esteem and confidence. They know that, whatever happens in the octagon or at the negotiating table, they are good people and they deserve to succeed.

The fact is, all of us have complex self-images. For the most part, these self-images are not obvious to us. And usually, being a good person (for example, by paying it forward) is all you need for a self-image that allows you to succeed.

Sometimes though, doing good isn't enough to give you self-esteem and the strength to stand your own ground. So how

do you figure out what your self-image is, and how do you go about changing it?

I don't have a simple answer for you. But I can recommend two resources to help you get started.

The first is a book called Psycho-Cybernetics. It was written by a plastic surgeon named Maxwell Maltz. Maltz noticed most of his patients were positively transformed by plastic surgery, but a few weren't. So he started digging into this conundrum. The result was a very practical guide on how to create positive changes to your self-image.

The second resource is a book called Reinventing Your Life. It was written by two therapists, Jeffrey Young and Janet Klosko. Much like Maltz, they saw that a few of their patients weren't helped by therapy. They discovered these patients were stuck in lifetraps – self-defeating, long-running emotional patterns. This book lays out 11 of the most common lifetraps, and gives you step-by-step recipes to escape them.

Maybe you think this has nothing to do with successful negotiation. And you're probably right. But if you haven't achieved success yet, in spite of lusting after it for a long time, could something be holding you back? If you find that that's true, then try *paying it forward*. If even that fails, try the advice in the two books I listed above.