

## How to deal with clients who expect you to work for free

By [Lydia Smith](#), [Yahoo Finance UK](#) 23 August 2020



It can be difficult to turn down unpaid work, particularly if you're just starting out and need to boost your CV. Photo: Getty

“I do want to inform you that this role does not come with a commission or payment, but you can use it as part of your resume. I hope you understand.”

This is just one of the real quotes collated by the Twitter account [For Exposure](#), followed by 231k people.

And while very few people can afford to work for free, being asked to is unfortunately the reality for many freelancers and self-employed people — particularly in creative industries.

“Musicians should pay streamers for the fact you help them by playing their music albeit in background to an audience who if they like it might buy it later,” another reads. “Instead they throw a hissy fit because you played it. Now they have lost potential sales.”

Unpaid work is any scenario in which a business exploits an individual for commercial gain by not paying for services that have been provided by that person. It doesn't matter whether you're an artist, a musician, a designer or a writer - if you are providing someone with a service, you should be paid for it.

"Careers that are seen as a hobby or a passion suffer from the assumption that if you love what you do, clearly you won't mind doing it for free," says Karin Peeters, a counsellor, psychotherapist and life & executive coach at [Vitalis Coaching](#).

"Careers in the healing professions have a similar dilemma. I hear fellow coaches and psychotherapists say 'How can I ask for money if I am just helping someone to feel better, that should come from the heart, shouldn't it?'"

There are multiple problems with working for free. Firstly, unpaid work not only devalues you, but also your competitors and the industry you work in. If you're willing to work for free, it suggests what you do isn't actually worth paying for — despite your years of qualifications and training.

Because why should clients pay for a project like a new website or an article, when someone else will do it for nothing?

Secondly, unpaid work — often couched as working for exposure — has a seriously damaging impact on the relationship between workers and their clients. It creates an environment in which the person providing the service feels used, which is never a positive thing. And when only a few people can afford to take unpaid work, it contributes to a serious lack of diversity in many industries.

It can be difficult to turn down unpaid work, particularly if you're just starting out and need to boost your CV. And with many people facing financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic, it can be tempting to agree to work for less. However, it's rarely worth your time. So what should you do if a client expects you to?

Working on your self-esteem is crucial to knowing your worth, which is essential when it comes to working for yourself. "Confidence means your trust in yourself to perform a certain task. Self-esteem means to have a solid foundation of self-worth," Peters says.

"Remind yourself it took years of study, high qualification fees and that your passion is actually a skill that not everyone possesses, and is therefore of value. Your talent might come naturally to you, but it's an asset that others don't have - they have their skills, for which you pay them in return."

It's also important to decide your fees before advertising any work too, so clients have a clear expectation of what they will be paying for your services. If your fees are flexible, have a minimum that you will work for and stick to it.

"I have found being upfront about this does help. In the majority of cases, people will just accept it and go ahead and find someone who will," says life coach Lisa Phillips, of [Amazing Coaching](#).

"Be firm but kind and tell people that you do not take on work where there is no fee involved. Tell them if they still want you to work for them, then you will send them your prices."

“Have your fees, terms and conditions clearly set out in writing and if someone asks for your prices, email it to them. This stops you accepting fees that are less than you deserve.”

And finally, don't be afraid to say no. The kind of clients who expect to be given a service for free are unlikely to be the kind of repeat clients you want to build a strong working relationship with.

“You need to value your own time and experience, even if other people don't. Believe in yourself and that you can attract the right type of clients for your business,” says Phillips.

“Don't fear you will miss out on that great opportunity or exposure if you turn them down.”