

Saying No To Good Opportunities

By Kimberly Stevens

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Tracey started her video production company 2 ½ years ago, and after struggling through the start-up phase, she was finally reaping the fruits of her labor. When we talked, it was clear that she was ready to move onward and upward but didn't know how to go about doing it.

"I am so busy these days, but I'm still not getting the level of work I want," Tracey told me. "I really want to get in with some bigger companies, but I'm always scrambling to get my current projects done."

"When I first started my business, I just wanted to get some clients, any clients. Now, I have people calling me up to do jobs for them, but those aren't the jobs I want anymore. I mean, I need them, but I also want to start doing bigger projects for bigger clients."

"All the people calling me are small business owners I've met at the networking meetings I attend. I know we talked before about the fact that I'm not going to meet the reps from the big companies there, so I need to develop a different marketing strategy to reach them, but I just don't have the time. I keep thinking I'll reach a point where I've got things under control, so I can start pursuing the bigger guys, but I never get there."

It was clear that Tracey was exhausted from going through the same cycle over and over again, so I thought I would give her brain a reprieve by taking her back in time. "Do you remember when you told me about that guy that you met at a networking meeting last year? He was hounding you about making him a video, but you really didn't see the opportunity there. He didn't seem to have any money budgeted for it and didn't have a clear concept of why he needed it and what he would use it for. You just didn't feel like he was a good prospect, so you told him that you were

too busy to take on his project.”

“Yeah, what about him?”

“Well, there was a time when you would have seen him as a viable prospect. You would have set up a meeting, spent a few hours going to/from the meeting, spent a few more writing up a proposal, placed numerous follow-up calls only to learn that there was ultimately no chance of getting a dime from this guy. Over time, you learned to qualify prospects, so you didn’t waste your time. By the time you met that guy, you already knew how to spot a bad opportunity and had developed the ability to say “no” to them.

“He was easy to turn down. He just didn’t have a clue. There was no way he would have ever turned into a paying client, so it wasn’t hard at all to tell him that I couldn’t help him out. But, I’m not talking about people like that. The people calling me are good prospects, but the projects they need me to do are just small. I just want to start getting some bigger projects too.”

“Well, you say you’ve been trying to get around to marketing to bigger companies for the past eight months, right? But yet, you continue to go round-and-round hoping that you’ll suddenly find the perfect moment to work on your marketing strategy to reach the bigger companies. It hasn’t happened yet so, just for a moment, let’s assume that this cycle will continue indefinitely. What do you think it will take to break it?” I asked her.

“I don’t know. I keep waiting for the right time when things slow down, so I guess the cycle will end when things slow down enough for me to think about it. I was hoping the summer would give me a break, but it didn’t. Maybe the holidays?”

Tracey was doing what a lot of us have done at some time or another. She was letting her business run her instead of her running it. So, the summer didn’t break the cycle and the holidays won’t break the cycle. SHE needed to break the cycle.

What I asked her to do is to start to distinguish between good opportunities and great ones. She’d learned awhile back how to say “no” to bad opportunities. What she needed to learn to do now is how to say “no” to good opportunities, so she could say “yes” to the great ones.

Most of her incoming phone calls were good opportunities, but the great ones were ones that she would need to put effort into pursuing. There was an opportunity lost during the eight months she filled with small projects. She lost the

opportunity to be making contacts at the bigger companies, to be doing jobs for the bigger companies, and to be adding higher level projects to her portfolio.

Over the next month, we assessed the reasons behind why she was letting her business run her. Was she ready for the transition or was she rushing it? Maybe she really wanted to just stick with doing what she knew she could do well. Bigger clients could potentially require her to do things she didn't have experience doing yet. Is that scary, I asked her.

It also takes a different approach to reach and pitch bigger clients. Was she uncertain about what marketing methods to use to reach them? Or did she know that cold-calling was the best way to reach her target market but didn't want to have to make the calls? Or maybe she was afraid of meeting with some big executive of a multi-million dollar company.

After working through some of the potential blocks, Tracey laid out a plan for marketing to the big companies in her area. She contracted an assistant to make the preliminary phone calls to qualify prospects and set up meetings. Once the meetings were set, Tracey felt fully confident in presenting her services to the decision-makers. Within 2 ½ months, she had two new "bigger" clients and was outsourcing some of the smaller jobs to colleagues she had met through her networking meetings.

Take a note from Tracey -- learn to say NO to good opportunities, so you can say YES to the great ones!

Are you saying "yes" when you should say "no"? Here's how to find out. Ask yourself the following questions:

- * What is your vision for your business?
- * What is missing where you are now?
- * What needs to happen in order for your vision to become a reality?

The process to follow is to:

1. develop a crystal clear vision of what you want your life to look like
2. use your life vision to create the vision of what you want in your business
3. make a list of what actions you need to take in order to go from where you are now to where you want to be
4. take consistent actions toward your vision
5. evaluate every new opportunity to determine if it moves you closer to your vision

It's a BAD opportunity if:

- * you don't feel good about the work you'd have to do
- * you wouldn't be paid fairly

