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By Bob Brolhorst

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Have you ever been in the situation when a friend or a close business associate calls up and ask for some advice and all of a sudden we're doing the work for them? I was in that situation once, only I was the one that asked for help and my friend was the one doing all the work, and she's undercharging me! I'll tell you why and how you should avoid the same pitfalls.

My friend likes what she does. She works full time at a totally different job than internet advertising. Writing ad copy has always been a hobby of hers but it's something she would like to add to her own business. Well, I liked a few ads that i have seen her write and I asked her if she would be so kind as to take a look at some of the ads that I wrote and sent out. I had done it myself just to save a few dollars. Well she got back to me within the hour with some great ideas and charged me what I thought was an especially low rate. After doing this for me on more than one occasion she called me up late one night and wanted to know if it was alright with me if she raised the rates a little bit. Then thinking to myself I had realized what I had done.

The moral of the story is this: Start with a set price and tell your customers exactly what that price is for, and that any extra changes or adjustments would cost more. My friend was having so much fun that she forgot just how valuable her service was. If She's a professional copywriter and does extremely good work, then she needs to be paid what it's worth.

I've made the same mistake. I can't even add up all the money I could have made if I had charged for all the time I spent on a project to make it "just right." Yes, we all want to have fun at what we do and put in the extra time to make it "perfect," but we have to be paid for what we do so well, otherwise we'll never survive.

You picked the business you did because it's something you enjoy doing or you're particularly good at it. Charge a fair price and charge for your time. Remember you have to pay mortgagage, buy food, and keep shoes on your feet.

Realize that you can have fun and be a professional, too.

I took an example from a friend of my that is a mechanic for an auto dealer. What he showed me was an estimate sheet for the type of work that they perform. I set up a similar estimate sheet, listing the items that I do and how long each task takes, and the amount you charge for each of those tasks. When a customer calls and wants items 1, 3, 5, & 9 you know exactly or close to what you need to charge them. I always put in a disclaimer of plus or minus 10% for any unforeseen costs.

As long as you can have fun at your job you will be better at giving your customers what they want and need. If you start undercharging then the job will become a chore and the fun will cease, but keep in mind to make your products or services reasonably priced so as not run yourself out of something that you enjoy.

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