

No -- I Won't Work For Free 'For The Exposure'



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Dear Liz,

My boyfriend Tom is a jazz musician so I know all about the idea of working for free 'for the exposure.'

Tom gets hit up all the time to play at events for no money because supposedly 'the exposure' will be good for him and the other members of his combo.

They used to take some of those non-paying gigs until they figured out it's a waste of their time. Now they charge \$1,000 per gig which gives each of them \$250 and makes the gig worth their while.



I had never heard of this practice being used in the business world until it happened to me recently – twice!

I used to consult for a global consulting firm and now I work for myself as an independent consultant. I do a lot of projects with two friends of mine, but each of us has our own separate business.

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I love my job. It's a great mix of creativity, hard work and just enough travel. Recently I helped a client firm create a fantastic recruiting event that brought them 32 new hires.

Two weeks after the event, I got a call from an HR VP at another company. I haven't done any work for this firm.

The HR VP had heard about the recruiting event I designed and orchestrated. She said "We'd love to have you create a small recruiting event for us at no charge to our firm – in exchange for exposure to our senior team."

I was floored.

I said "I'm sorry I can't help you. My services are fee-based." It was a short conversation.

Then a month ago I got an email message from our local Chamber of Commerce asking whether I wanted to present a full-day workshop to a local firm for no fee – for the exposure again!

I called our Chamber Director to complain about that one.

She said "I am sympathetic because it's ridiculous for a successful firm to expect a consultant to present a full-day workshop for free – but I also guarantee one of our local consultants will take the offer. There might even be competition for it."

I think it's disgraceful that firms who pay for every service from landscaping to window-washing without complaint would expect a consultant to put on a full-day workshop for free.

What's your opinion?

Thanks Liz!

Arnette

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Dear Arnette,

I think it's disgraceful too, but it is worth noting that jazz musicians and consultants have something in common.

They both live in the world of high flames, where people bring out their passion. Authors, poets, dancers, sculptors and many other folks inhabit that world, too.

These folks are often viewed as desperate for opportunities to play, sing, dance, consult, or speak in public — so much so that they are invited and expected to perform for free in exchange for 'exposure' to other people.

Every public speaker knows that speaking for free only gets you 'exposure' to more and more people who also expect you to speak for free!

Photographers and graphic artists know it. Dancers and actors are invited to perform for free all the time. It's awful that so many people devalue creative arts and creative business services like event planning.

I've never heard of an electrician being asked to wire an office building for free 'for the exposure,' but who knows? Maybe someone has tried that, too.

The way to stop this practice — or at least to sail above it in your own life — is to do exactly what you did.

Sweetly and without hesitation, let the delusional person on the other end of the phone know that your services are strictly fee-based.

The old adage is true: you really do get what you pay for.

The only way to maintain, much less increase, the value of your services, time and genius is to insist on their value whenever it is in question.

That means never, ever giving your work away for free — not unless it's a philanthropic donation you make because you want to, not because you think you need 'the exposure.'

Keep growing your flame, Arnette!

The higher your flame grows, the more people will crowd around you asking for donations of your time and energy toward their goals.

Soon you will have six or eight email templates at the ready, each one in a slightly different but perfectly polite way saying "Go jump in a lake!"

Your heart will sing every time you hit "Send" on one of these well-mannered brush-offs.

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The more of them you send, the higher your flame will grow. Then the real clients — the people who matter to you, that is — will show up in droves!

All the best,

Liz

Liz Ryan

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