



19 Tough Questions to Ask About Your Freelance Business.

**(If you're not asking the tough
questions, you're not achieving
your full potential.)**

Nick Usborne

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**(If you're not asking the tough questions, you're
not achieving your full potential.)**

Nick Osborne

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How to use this document.

When it comes to transforming any business, the key to success lies in asking the right questions.

The questions in this document are drawn from the hundreds of coaching sessions I have held with my clients.

As a coach, I know that real progress takes place not when I offer advice, but when I ask a question that opens a new door in my client's mind.

Work your way through the following pages slowly. Find the questions that really resonate with you right now. Not all of them will.

But when you find a question that connects with where you are with your business right now, spend some time thinking about it.

Above all, use the areas I have left for your own answers and notes.

I haven't attempted to provide answers. I have just tried to ask the right questions.

It is by answering the questions yourself that you will get the greatest value.

In particular, spend time on the second question I ask on each page: "If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?"

Answering the question is the first step.

Taking action when you don't like the answer is where the real magic lies.

Nick Usborne
NickUsborne.com

Do you think big, or small?

Many freelancers focus simply on meeting the bills each month, with maybe a few dollars left over for vacations or savings.

That's thinking small. That way of approaching your business just gives you the minimum. And when you set your ceiling at the minimum, you won't meet your bills when you have a bad month.

When you think big, you are reaching way beyond the income you need each month. You may not always achieve your goals, but even a bad month will more than meet your financial needs.

Take some notes about how big YOU think. Are you a small thinker or a big thinker?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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What are your goals?

Do you have goals for your freelance business? If not, you should.

Without goals, you are like a boat with no destination, going around in circles, being pushed around by tides and winds, with no direction or purpose.

To have a goal is to have a destination in mind. That means knowing where you are heading.

And when you know where you are going, you can make much smarter decisions about every aspect of your business.

Do more of what points you in the right direction. Do less of what distracts you.

Do you know where you are going?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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At what distance is your goal horizon?

Too many freelancers think only two or three months ahead. They focus on doing the work they have right now and finding work for the next two months.

That may put bread on the table, but it means you will always be a slave to the next few jobs.

Other freelancers plan one, two, or three years ahead. They are building a business, developing new services, exploring new opportunities, and finding ways to create an enduring business that doesn't require their hour-by-hour attention.

Do you work month by month? Or are you planning a few years in advance?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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How do you differentiate yourself?

The last thing you want to do is present yourself as "just another writer or copywriter."

When you fail to differentiate yourself, you condemn yourself to being one of thousands of other freelancers, all fighting for the same work and all applying downward pressure on pricing and value.

If you want to increase your perceived and real value, you have to stand out from the crowd. You need to stand alone in a place in which you have established yourself as an authority, or THE authority.

Have you successfully differentiated yourself? Have you used your unique STORY to set yourself apart from the crowd?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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Which job over the last 3 years did you enjoy the most?

When you work on projects you really enjoy, you will do better work, be more productive, and enjoy life more.

Think about the projects you have worked on over the last three years. Which of them stand out as having been a real pleasure?

Once you have identified one or more, ask yourself why. Try to figure out what it was that made those jobs more fun than others. Was it the client? The medium? The industry?

Once you have a clear picture of why, then look forward and figure out how you can focus on getting a lot more of that kind of work.

Do you know what kind of projects you enjoy working on the most?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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What is your core area of past knowledge and expertise?

Few of us become freelancers without any kind of previous work history. Most of us have built up a body of experience, knowledge, and expertise.

What is yours? What do you know about? In particular, what do you know that could set you apart from other freelancers?

Maybe you have a background in software sales. Or in the financial industry. Or in sales. Or perhaps you have strength in dealing with customers. Or you know how to talk with CEOs.

Whatever that core set of knowledge and expertise is, are you taking advantage of that strength? Are you leveraging it to grow your freelance business?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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What constraints do you place on your success?

The limits to our level of success as freelancers can almost always be found inside ourselves. Often we constrain ourselves.

For instance, you might say, "I hate making cold calls." Or, "I don't want to travel for work." Or, "I have to finish work by 3:30 to be with my kids."

These are all constraints. Some can and should remain in place. Others should be questioned, because they can place severe limits on the amount of success you can achieve.

What are your constraints?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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How quickly do you deal with problems?

We all face problems in business from time to time.

Maybe we have an unhappy client. Or the tax man is hassling us. Or the number of inquiries we are getting is slowing to a trickle.

The key to your success is not to avoid problems, but to make sure you tackle them head-on. Deal with them. The tougher the problem, the faster you need to tackle it.

Unresolved problems become a drag on us, psychologically and emotionally.

Take control of your problems. Be proactive. Don't allow your problems to take control of you.

Do you have any problems that need facing and dealing with right now?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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Are you proud of your website?

These days every freelancer needs a website. It's your calling card and your brochure. It's where prospects first learn about you. It's where you can generate leads for new clients.

But what kind of impression does your website give right now? Does it make you look good? Will it impress prospective clients when they first look at and start reading your home page?

From what I see, most freelance sites give a pretty poor impression. Their creators may do great work, but their sites don't give that impression.

How impressive is your website? Are you proud of it?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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Are you productive, or just busy?

Starting tomorrow, for one week, keep a precise timesheet of how you spend your time each day, in 15-minute increments. Be accurate. Be obsessive. Just for that week, make a note of how you spend that time.

At the end of each day, review how you spent your time. How much was billable? How much was necessary administration? How much was spent on acquiring new work? How much was spent on email and phone calls? How much time was wasted?

At the end of the week, do a master list.

Look at how you spent your time and then be brutally honest with yourself.

Were you truly productive? Or were you just busy?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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What is the central flywheel of your business?

In other words, what is your core competency? What are you best at? Where do you excel?

This is the driver of your business. This is the foundation of your success.

Look after it. Nurture it. Feed it with new knowledge and fresh challenges.

By all means, explore new directions and opportunities. But never ignore the value of your core strength.

Always nurture the thing you do best.

What is the flywheel of your business, and are you taking care of it?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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Do you try to expand the scope of every project?

“Would you like fries with that?”

You should be applying that same principle whenever you land a new assignment.

It takes a lot of work getting a new client or project. So don't just limit yourself to the first description of the work you're being asked to do. Think of ways to expand the scope of the project in ways that add value for the client and increase revenues for yourself.

“When I write that web page, would you like me to also optimize it for the search engines?”

Do you make a point of trying to expand the original scope of every new project?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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What have you outsourced lately?

As freelancers we tend to be more than a little tight-fisted. We don't like outsourcing and paying others for work we could do ourselves. Even if we do it badly.

Resistance to outsourcing can seriously constrain the performance and growth of your business.

Don't use a template header for your website. Hire a designer to create a unique, professional look. Don't spend hours on bookkeeping, when you could be using that time working on paying projects. Hire a bookkeeper. And so on.

There are not many professional services we need for our freelance business. But for those services we can outsource, we should. There are always better and smarter ways for us to use that time.

Do you outsource?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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Do you estimate for hours worked or value delivered?

Freelancers who estimate work based on value, and not on hours worked, always earn more.

If you are writing a single email, don't estimate the job based on the fact that it will take you two hours to write. Estimate it based on its value to the client. Or a combination of the two.

For instance, I would always charge more for a 300-word sales email than for a 300-word customer service email. The value of the former is much higher, even if it took me the same amount of time to write.

Do you estimate based on hours worked, or on value delivered?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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When did you last get noticed?

To grow and succeed as a freelancer, you have to promote your services.

Beyond your usual promotional efforts, what do you do that really makes a splash?

What do you do that gets you noticed? You could speak at an industry event. You could publish a book. You could write a controversial blog post. You could climb a mountain in support of a charity.

It isn't enough to do the same old things to promote yourself. To separate yourself from the crowds of competing freelancers, you sometimes need to make a bigger splash.

What have you done lately to really get yourself noticed?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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If you had to double your fees, how would you double your value?

Imagine I were to threaten you with dire consequences if you didn't immediately double your fees. The threat is a bad one, and you feel you have no choice.

If you double your fees overnight, and you don't want to lose all your clients, how would you double the value you deliver? What could you do to make your clients feel it was still a good deal?

Maybe you could double your perceived value by giving talks, authoring books, or teaming up with someone who has a massive reputation in your industry.

Or you could expand the scope of your services, offering design in addition to writing.

It wouldn't be easy, but if you HAD to, how would you do it?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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Where is the bottleneck in your business?

Every business, large and small has a bottleneck. It's the thing that limits the growth of every other thing you do.

For instance, refusing to outsource anything is a bottleneck. The speed at which you type is a bottleneck. Constraints on the type of work you do could be a bottleneck. A perceived ceiling on what you can charge can be a bottleneck.

What are the bottlenecks in your freelance business? What limits you and holds you back?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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What is your next milestone?

You have one or more goals for your business and your life.

But you can't get there in one leap. You need to set milestones along the way. Each milestone is a marker that helps plot the route to your final goal.

Without milestones, ambitious goals can seem unattainable. But with milestones you see that you can actually get there just one step at a time.

If you have a goal, what milestones have you set?

Which is your next milestone?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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What does your business look like in 3 years from now?

Visualization can be a remarkably powerful tool.

Try to see your business three years from now. Imagine your workspace and your desk. Imagine your client list. Imagine and visualize how your business has grown.

What kind of work are you doing (it should be the work you enjoy doing most)? How much money are you making? How much vacation are you taking? How will you be perceived by your clients and your peers? What is there, as part of your business, that you haven't even started work on yet?

Try hard to see it. Paint a picture in your mind.

What does your future look like?

Your answer:

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If you don't like the answer, what are you going to do about it?

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To summarize... If you have answered just 1 of those questions thoroughly and honestly...

Asking the right questions, especially the tough ones, can be a transformational process for any company.

If you have had your eyes opened by answering just one of the nineteen questions I have just asked, you could see a significant change for the better in your freelance business.

If you answered five or even ten of them in a way that opened your eyes a little wider, you could be on the path to a far more profitable and enjoyable future.

Keep this document. Print out the sheets. Shuffle them and come back to them on a regular basis. A question that didn't really connect with you today could suddenly become a game-changer three months from now.

And if you feel you could use some one-on-one help in answering some of these questions, be sure to [**find out more about my coaching service**](#).

Yours truly,

Nick Osborne

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