Lesson # 15
Confessions of a Reluctant Elancer who Soared to the Top
Part 1 of 2

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Foreword/Winton’s Note

This interview for me was so interesting because she articulated very well what many people struggle with most on Elance and job networks in general... doubting her competency.

In this document you have a great opportunity to walk through this struggle with her and see how she overcame this very real problem.

Hanging out my shingle...

In January 2008 I decided to go solo and hang my shingle at Elance.com since the feedback at my former company from business owners was uniformly exemplary and I felt certain I could make more money working independently from my own home.

The first year was brutal. I only made about $2K but that’s because I was so green, my fear of disappointing a client held me back and I hesitated to bid.

Plus, I didn’t yet have anything in my Portfolio and didn’t have much client feedback, so the bids I did offer were passed over by project managers who were looking for tried-and-true providers, not novices.

Slow out of the Gate

My first six months, I studied the website, talked to other copywriters and people “in the know” about the company, read a lot of feedback at the site’s Water Cooler, and in general, just fretted about whether
or not I was really ready (competent) to take the plunge. (Most writers are their own worst critics.)

I started in the Writing and Translation category and eventually began to dabble in the Sales and Marketing category when I realized that there were good writing projects in that category too, provided you have a decent working knowledge of sales writing. I choose to do both because I’m a writer and wanted to spend my time writing as opposed to doing anything else during working hours.

At that time, I used the free option on Elance that allowed me to bid three bids per month. Very quickly I began to invest money and buy more connects. For several months I paid out close to $50 each month to be able to bid on everything that looked like something I could do well, without much luck.

I remember I was getting 2-3% of the projects I bid on and I was only charging $20/hour, so I wasn’t being very smart about it. These days I charge $45/hour (still very low for a well-qualified copywriter, even at Elance) and get from 30-40% of everything I bid on in the Sales and Marketing category and almost 20% of everything I bid on in the Writing category.

**My first 6 months...**

During the first 6 months, I got a lot of great client feedback but I really wasn’t earning a decent living. I estimated it would probably take me as many as two years to hit my stride on Elance, but I surprised myself...

By the middle of 2009 I was awarded Premier Provider status at Elance (after just over six months of receiving almost 100% five star feedback) and buyers began asking me to bid on their projects. I actually broke even and had to pay some taxes for 2009.
This year I’m doing better as I’ve raised my rates to more closely match other Premier Providers’ hourly fees. Oddly enough (perhaps counter-intuitively), raising my rates has brought me many additional requests to bid, from business owners who, I surmise, thought I must not be very good (despite the posted certified test results and all those client kudos) if I was “only” charging $25 or $30/hour. That was quite a wake-up call!

These days, however, I mostly do a jobs at a fixed rate. There are times when an hourly rate is the only way to go and I will take those jobs that pay a substantial amount per hour.

I will not, however, under any circumstances, agree to a Work View situation or a Time Tracker arrangement. If a buyer insists on one of those two working arrangements, I decline. A job is worth what it’s worth. Every job is worth my best effort, or I don’t take it. So I don’t need a “boss” peering over my shoulder. (Even as a kid, my dad said I should always work by contract because I was such a powerhouse dynamo and got things done well at near warp speed.)

**Benefits of Working on Elance**

Elance keeps the books so I don’t have to. No office politics. No commute. I’m my own boss – a real live entrepreneur. I can work day and/or night, evenings and/or weekends and because I love what I do, I work a lot – and am rewarded for it.

I get to choose the jobs I’ll be working on. I get paid several times a week as I complete projects. I have regular clients that I enjoy working with, and have the option of never again working with the few who are not enjoyable to serve.
I get to write for people all over the world, so my service rates aren’t limited to economically-stressed Tacoma, Washington. I’m at home and can watch the property and keep it safe. When nothing is coming in for an hour or more, I can mow the lawn, walk the goats, pet the cats and dogs, read another blockbuster work-related book (copywriting, social media, sales and marketing) without guilt or reprimand. There are so many perks that it’s hard to pick just a few. I could go on and on.

I have looked at the other copywriting websites, even tried a few, and quickly decided they weren’t for me, so I hope Elance remains healthy and stays independent so I can always rely on it.

Advice for the Newbies

There are several pointers that pop into mind immediately...

1. Take the online Elance tests that you know you can ace so you’ll have certified test results that prospective buyers can see.

2. Only bid on projects you know you can hit out of the ballpark so that your client feedback is uniformly great.

3. If you have some good work to show starting out (even before you’ve landed your first client) be sure to put it in your Portfolio. I didn’t think to do that, even though I had some great copywriting examples, and believe that’s why I was so slow out the starting gate.

Each time you get great feedback, ask the buyers if you can post the work you did for them in your online Elance portfolio. Most will say yes (unless they’ve asked you to sign a Nondisclosure Agreement),
especially if you let them know that by posting it, more people will see it.

4. Always be sure your project is funded BEFORE you start work. Not everyone is honorable. There are “grab and go” people out there who will rip you off if you give them a chance and, **unless their money is in escrow** before you deliver the goods, Elance has no recourse and can’t help you go after what you’re owed.

5. If you’ve bid on a project and it isn’t awarded to anyone within a month, check back to see if the buyer is still considering his or her provider options or if the project has been delayed or abandoned. In either case, ask the buyer to please officially cancel the project so the providers can get their connects back and move on.

**My Road to Success**

If I had to do it all over again, I would be far more confident of my ability to serve people well. I wouldn’t be so timid. I’d bid on more projects. I’d also be less hesitant to tackle a new type of project. I had clients actually talk me (all but beg me) into taking their projects because I was so hesitant to accept anything I wasn’t absolutely sure I could do adequately. Inevitably, I earned high ratings on every one of them.

I also wouldn’t hesitate to let a buyer know, “I’m a great writer, and I’m insanely interested in your topic...I’m not the expert on it – you are – but I would love to work with you anyway of you’re willing to take me on as a sort of apprentice and talk me through what I don’t yet know about what you do. If you can provide talking points for this project, I can make the copy sing and dance and do its thing.”
I’ve worked this way on a lot of intriguing projects and it has always turned out very well.

In light of my current success, I think it was necessary just to have to muddle through the way I did until I came to the conclusions that I did along the way.

It’s hard to bestow to beginners the kind of courage they need to proceed. It’s something each person has to develop on his or her own. One thing I did that I haven’t mentioned yet that helped a lot is that I posted my best client feedback near my monitor as mute encouragement.

I still have two of them affixed there. One reads, “You are a one-of-a-kind genius. I love it, love it love it. Excellent work. These writing pieces are equivalent to paintings by DaVinci. I had an instinct about you that you’ve very well confirmed. Excellent job.” The other one—from a teacher, no less: “Holy S#$t! Excuse my French, but – OMG! You are just amazing!”

After you’ve received a few like that, your confidence will get up there where it should be, believe me! I never expected to get such great feedback, earn Premier Provider status, or to rise in the copywriting ranks so quickly.

One day not long ago I looked myself up at Elance (the way a buyer searching for a provider would) and found my profile listed in positions 3 and 8 under Copywriters. It took my breath away...
**This Week’s Assignment**

1. Upload any current or previous work you’ve done to your Elance portfolio.

2. Include at least one tested skill, one self-rated and 1 or 2 items in your portfolio to round out your profile.

3. Determine your hourly rate (but don’t post it, you only want to work on fixed price jobs UNLESS you are building your first recommendation) – both what you’d like to be making now, as well as six months from now. Compare yourself to other providers in your category and set concrete goals for your earning potential.

*See you in 7 days... Keep an eye out for the conclusion of this interview that will divulge advanced earning tricks that most bidders would never think of!*

Best Wishes For Your Barefoot Lifestyle,

**Winton Churchill**

Winton Churchill

Publisher, **Barefoot Consultants, Inc.**

P.S. If you are a member of the Inner Circle, I’ll be glad to help you figure out which categories you should be bidding in, which Elance skills tests will boost your profile, and how to craft your service description with the most lucrative key words for you...

Schedule your appointment here (https://my.timedriver.com/G6RWM) and we’ll work on it together...
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**Lesson 4**
[How To Reveal Your Most Marketable Skills For The Global Market (Part 2 of 4)](#)

**Lesson 5**
[How To Reveal Your Most Marketable Skills For The Global Market (Part 3 of 4)](#)

**Lesson 6**
[How To Reveal Your Most Marketable Skills For The Global Market (Part 4 of 4)](#)

**Lesson 7**
[How To Improve Your Elance Profile So You Attract Better Global Project Assignments More Easily (Part 1 of 3)](#)

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Lesson 9
How To Improve Your Elance Profile So You Attract Better Global Project Assignments More Easily (Part 3 of 3)

Lesson 10
How To Bid And Win Projects On The Networks

Lesson 11
How To Explode Your Visibility and Chances for Success Using Project Board Aggregators

Lesson 12
An Elance Pro Shares Her Secrets (Part 1 of 2)

Lesson 13
An Elance Pro Shares Her Secrets (Part 2 of 2)

Lesson 14
7 Common But Critical Mistakes New Bidders Make on Their Elance Bids and How You Can Avoid Them