

EXPLORE YOUR ENTHUSIASM

EPISODE 148: SHOULD YOU WORK FOR FREE?

Most of the conversation in the craft world says: NO. Don't work for free. Don't give it away. Just Say No.

And I agree. Most of the time.

In today's episode I'll tell you when you SHOULD work for free, and how to decide if you should take the "opportunity" or not.

This came up because I saw a conversation by [Luvvie on Twitter](#), about conferences that don't pay speakers. It was retweeted by my pal Kim Werker, with whom I've had many frustrated conversations about craft conferences that don't pay speakers. I absolutely don't take any more teaching jobs that don't pay, because it's like this:

These events not only use your content to get more attendees, but they also use your audience. It's like if I co-created a course with Joeli or Stacey Trock (which I've done!), asked them to spread it to their audience... then didn't pay them for their content or their marketing. That would be INSANE. No one would take that deal. Yet we're all asked to do this at conferences which charge the attendees and don't pay the speakers. And some of these are in-person events, even really big fancy ones!

But there are also a ZILLION online conferences or summits who ask their speakers to "contribute"... and then the organizer sells the package. I get 2-4 emails a month asking me to "contribute" my "brilliance" to these conferences. I say no, except in a case where it's going to result in a high quality product that I would invite my audience to even if I wasn't involved, or I really like and know and respect the people who are doing it.

Here's the thing: these online summits are great marketing tools, when you can line up a bunch of A list speakers who all tell their audiences to buy it. So I get why people are ORGANIZING them, but I don't get why I would do it, if there's nothing exchanged. If I just wanted a platform to talk for an hour, well, that's why I have a podcast. :)

But you are probably not too interested in speaking at conferences - you're wondering if you should barter your item, or if you should agree to create a tutorial or pattern in exchange for "exposure."

THE EASY ANSWER IS NO. DON'T DO IT.

End of podcast!

But...there are good reasons to work for free. So how do you decide which is which?

1. Work for free to get started.

If you want to edit videos...

If you want to tech edit...

If you want to work with someone and you don't think you have anything to offer them to make the exchange fair...

In those cases, work for free in order to prove your worth, then move to paid work.

SO if you're a tech editor or even a designer and you want to work with a magazine or a yarn company - offer to do one job for free, and if they like you they can hire you.

2. Work for free if it's YOUR idea.

If you want to be on a specific platform like a magazine or conference stage or something, then it's already doing something for you - it's paying you in the experience you want to have!

3. Work for free if you are really passionate about the mission.

I would teach for free on a conference that benefitted something I care deeply about. Because that's the equal exchange: I want to benefit that organization, so I give of my time and resources

Don't work for free if:

1. It's someone else's idea and something that will benefit them. Really, this is the catchall for everything else we're going to cover. If someone comes to you and asks you to work for free, on something you wouldn't have approached THEM to do for free, don't do it.

This is especially true if they have a business that will make money off the work YOU usually get paid for.

For example, if a conference doesn't pay me to teach classes that usually I get paid to teach.

If a magazine or website or blog wants you to give them a pattern or tutorial that you usually sell.

2. If the other person is going to sell the thing your free work is a part of + you won't be compensated, don't do it.

3. Don't do it if they promise "exposure." You can't pay the bills in "exposure." If you really want exposure, don't take what's offered to you, identify platforms that have the audience you want, and you offer to work for free for them.

The reason I can say with authority, don't take a deal when someone approaches you and asks you to work for free, is that in all of the instances I've ever heard of, you are being approached to begin with because you already HAVE an audience, and they want to use your name to promote your thing.

So in summary, say no when asked, but pursue opportunities to work for free in order to prove yourself, in the very very beginning!

I hope this has helped you decide when you should (and shouldn't!) work for free!

If you wanna learn more about charging fairly for your work and tracking your profitability, head to TaraSwiger.com/pay, where you can sign up to learn more about my Pricing 101 class, which is coming soon! And if you've been thinking about the Starship, which comes with access to ALL my classes, head to taraswiger.com/ss to sign up and be notified when new spots open.

SHOULD YOU WORK FOR FREE?

(If the answer to 1 or more of these is No, then NO.)

Is it an equal exchange of energy, money, and desires?

Was it your idea?

Is this a platform or audience you REALLY want to work with?

Are you excited about it?