

The 6 Biggest Teacher Freelancing Mistakes

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Do these 6 freelancing start-up and running mistakes cost you your livelihood?

Of the [410,000 new companies](#) founded in 2009 in Germany – it's small businesses with 20 employees and fewer that weather the global crisis best.

I don't know the exact percentage, but I am sure many small and one-person "[Ich AGs](#)" business enterprises out of the German 2004 boom period are a part of these figures.

Quite impressive, isn't it?

It gives food for thought. "Ich AGs" are freelancers and they are surviving despite a global recession. Yet there are some that don't survive... why?

What are unsuccessful freelancers *not* doing, that successful freelancer teachers *are* doing?

I believe there are six major freelancing mistakes that can cost a freelance teacher their students – and their livelihood.

How 6 freelancing mistakes cost many freelance teachers their livelihood

Most freelance teachers have their core students – not too many, but enough to survive. Enough to give hope – enough to help you believe that you can earn a living from your teaching skills. Yet at the same time, you feel your career as a freelance teacher is going nowhere fast. You are working more and more; your free time becomes less and less, yet your income remains stagnant. How come?

Perhaps you are guilty of incurring one or more of the six most common mistakes freelance teachers make? The first error is the most important and the most significant.

What is the biggest freelance teacher mistake?

The most important and the most significant freelance mistake is not treating your freelance teaching as a business. You are not treating your freelance teaching as an authentic, real business in its entirety. Instead, somewhere in the back of your mind, your teaching career is still regarded as a hobby.

It is a hobby in your mind because your business stops at its administrative (tax, social security, etc.) responsibilities. It remains a hobby in your mind until you learn there is more to the freelancing business than in just finding students and paying your taxes.

A freelance teacher must use a concept – a three-pronged pillar system – to ensure his business strategy succeeds:

1. a defined purpose behind your business and teaching activities (a structured plan to help you and your business keep focused),
2. managing your students and customers, (a structured system for your students and customers care, guidance and protection plan)
3. a marketing and sales plan (a structured system that answers the *how, what, where, when* and *why* in your teaching business, which also plans for reoccurring income).

Without a three-pronged pillar supporting the roof of your teaching enterprise, the business will either stutter until it stagnates, or fail outright. How fast this happens, depends on whether the freelance teacher makes one or more of the remaining mistakes...

Which other four serious mistakes undermine your professionalism and your work

The three-pronged pillar concept to your teaching business is going to change the way you perceive your job as a freelance teacher and the way you see your *worth* as a freelance teacher in the global market.

Your *worth*, and how you see your *worth* on the market, is important to your survival and existence as a freelance teacher. Your livelihood depends on it; your customers and students depend on it too. The one cannot exist without the other. Let's talk about these four mistakes that can destroy the *worth* of a freelance teacher in a global market.

Four serious mistakes that undermine your worth and your work in a global market

The four undermining mistakes are:

1. Charging too low prices (includes discounts)
2. Being too much a generalist and not specialising
3. Not gratifying a student-customer's self-esteem and satisfaction
4. Not being a professional (in 3 particular areas).

Charging too low prices (includes discounts)

The most aggressive and insidious is the factor of pricing. Too many freelancers *undercharge* in the hope of winning a new student. This creates a snowball effect:

- Your services are seen as inferior or sub-standard. The time-aged adage: what's free (or almost free) isn't worth anything and not worthwhile to have or hold.
- You can raise the prices once they see the quality of your teaching later. *No, you won't* and *No, you can't*. Why? Because you set your maximum price when you made your cheap offer.
- You are creating a Lose-Lose situation by undermining the market price. Nobody wins when a student and customer finds cheaper and cheaper alternatives. Why Lose-Lose? Because the service "freelance teacher" will also have lost its reputation for good, solid, and quality work.
- Lost reputation. Some freelance teachers have studied hard for qualifications. Others have long years of practical experience. All want recognition and appreciation for their work and effort. But who will qualify or give honest value for money when there is no reward in sight?

In the long run, it's the student and customer who will lose out both financially and in lost time. He's at the mercy of cheap-priced teachers who have to cut corners and costs by giving sub-standard and inferior lessons. And a cheap freelance teacher loses too, as he slips into a soul destroying suction made out of a feast or famine cycle and a work and life balance disharmony.

- Discounts. What discounts? *Never* give discounts. For the same reasons. Instead, *add* to your service. Your marketing and sales strategy will plan for the times you need or want to add more prestige and quality to your offers.

Being too much a generalist and not specialising

When you have a heart problem you'd make an appointment with a heart specialist, not a general practitioner, wouldn't you? Do you think your students and customers are going to do anything different? Fact is, people turn to specialists in times of need. And specialists demand – and get – their fees. But there are other advantages:

- Better prices for your work
- More visibility for your work
- More reputation as your experience and knowledge grow together
- More free time as your research is more focused
- Less work (over time) as tools and knowledge of your trade are recycled
- More fun and engagement as you learn and use more and more your specialised niche

Not gratifying a student-customer self-esteem and satisfaction

Nothing can be so devastating for your students and customers as a teacher who delivers run-of-the-mill lessons. And nothing can feel quite so devastating for a freelance teacher if he notices his customers and students think this – especially if he *has* prepared with his student in mind. So how can you avoid this happening?

- Be a specialist not a generalist
- Recycle student teaching materials
- Individualise student customer materials

Not being a professional

If you are not perceived to be a professional, then your students and customer will not treat you as one. Fact.

- Keep a discreet emotional distance to your students. You will lose your aura of respectability if you become too buddy-buddy with them. Let your students vent or cry on your shoulder, then redirect that energy to the task – the lesson.
- The tools of the trade (equipment): A carpenter can still work well with a large stone and a piece of wood. However, who blames a customer if he starts questioning the quality of the work result?
The tools of the trade do not have to be the most modern, the most “in” or the most high-tech. But they do have to be recognisable as good, solid, tools of the trade, and you do have to show you can use them.
- Appearance: Clothes make people. There are several films and books written on this subject. Appearance sends signals and these can signal if the person is successful and organised. Dirty, untidy and uncared-for appearance and equipment reflect untidiness,

sloppiness and uncaring work. Your students and customers are quick to take judgement of your abilities as a freelance teacher based only on your appearance and the state of your equipment.

- Self-esteem: How do you expect your student and customer to respect you and your work if you are incapable of doing this yourself? Pride and confidence in what you do and who you are immediately reflects in your work when you believe in yourself and what you are doing.

Why underestimating *this* mistake will affect your health

[*John Donne*](#) once said “No Man is an island, entire of itself...”. What he was saying was that human beings cannot survive or progress when isolated from others. The sixth mistake is to believe you can go it alone – and this can bring a thriving freelance teaching business to a grounding halt.

Networking is the name of the game, and it’s the best method to keep in touch with others working in the same niche.

Why go to all the bother of networking? What if you believe you can manage without contact to others in your field? Well, yes it is possible to go without networking – but it will take a lot longer to reach that same efficiency or reach that same high-level in standards and of reputation working in a vacuum. It’s also the fastest ticket to a burnout syndrome. 😞

This is a quote I have taken to heart. It’s African in origin:

If you want to get somewhere fast go alone, if you want to go far go in a group.

You may be a freelance teacher, but you are not alone and you don’t have to be. Find links to clubs or forums where you can contact like-minded colleagues. Here on this website is a forum [The Nest](#) especially for Freelance Teachers. In the Nest you can join with others in your field or niche who have decided to take their teaching further – a profitable business with reoccurring income. If you need support or have questions, this is the place to go to. Just remember, you are among others like you and it’s a safe zone. Remember the saying? Trouble shared is trouble halved.

Summary

In conclusion, six fundamental mistakes can bring down a new freelance teacher enterprise, causing a teacher to lose his livelihood. Yet it can be and has been done.

2004 was the boom period for new and budding entrepreneurs – the “Ich AG” enterprise. These [one-person](#) entrepreneur businesses, the so-called “Me Enterprise,” were supported by the German government and have an over-60 per cent success rate. After a trial 3-year period they were able to support themselves.

By avoiding six fundamental start-up and running errors, a freelance teacher enterprise is achievable.

Action Plan/Next Step

Your first step is to double check if you are guilty of avoiding any of these six errors, or doing any of them. The second step is to then correct the source of the problem: 😊

1. Not treating your freelance teaching as a business: do you have your three-pronged pillar system in place?
 - (1) a defined purpose behind your business and teaching activities,
 - (2) a structure plan to manage your students and customers,
 - (3) a structured marketing and sales strategy.
2. Charging too low prices (includes discounts)
3. Being too much a generalist and not specialising
4. Not gratifying a student-customer self-esteem and satisfaction
5. Not being a professional
6. Not networking

[External link to article:](#)

www.monocle.com/monocolumn/2010/01/17/germans-get-adventurous/

About [John Donne](#)



*No man is an island, entire of itself
each is a piece of the continent, a part of
the main
if a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well as if a
promontory were,
as well as if a manor of thine own or thine
friends were
each man's death diminishes me, for I am
involved in mankind
therefore send not to know for whom the
bell tolls
it tolls for thee.*

No man is an island, entire of itself
