4 Ways to Hone Your Soft Skills as a Freelancer

In an increasingly crowded marketplace, you have to be the whole package.

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Whether you're side hustling or at it full-time, freelance business owners can and should build incredible soft skills. Whether you decide to stay in business for yourself or ultimately leverage these into a full-time position, with honed soft skills, you'll be competitive in the market.

Employers are increasingly struggling to find the right fit when it comes to soft skills. Three in four reported that recent college grads just didn't show up with them. And even if you're working freelance for these companies, you still need to be able to leverage soft skills to get the job done, especially if you want the opportunity of repeat work. And trust me, you want that.

Soft skills include non-technical aspects that are essential when working with a client or as part of a team — collaboration, prioritization, time management, communication and critical thinking. Coming to the table with the technical ability to do the job plus soft skills can make you an in-demand freelancer overnight.

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Take notes

Listen carefully to read between the lines. In open communication, clients and team members will often let slip valuable details that tell you exactly where other people fell short. When taking your notes about potential projects or expectations, make a note of these.

If your prospective client was completely annoyed that their last freelancer ghosted them, make a point to send your recap email and proposed next steps within a few hours after the close of the meeting. It shows you listened and that you're organized. There are so many people who don't listen for these clues, much less use this knowledge to their advantage. You'll stand out from other freelancers for doing this, and it takes so little effort that it's a no-brainer.

Ask for feedback

Clients not giving you feedback? You're missing out on the chance to hear constructive criticism and to apply more objectivity to your own work. At first, it really stings to hear someone say that your work product isn't perfect. But adapting to hearing reasonable feedback and being easy to work with are as rare as diamonds in some freelance niches. Being able to hear feedback and not take it personally makes you that much easier to work with, and opens all kinds of doors.

When I embarked on writing my first book as well as preparing for my first TEDx talk, I was beyond grateful that I'd had years of people critiquing my work. It had fine-tuned my ability to know what to push back about and what really was fair feedback that would make the final product better.

If your client doesn't give you feedback, ask for it! Even if they don't have any negative feedback, it's so helpful to know what they love about working with you. This information can be

turned into testimonials or even used when pitching future clients. Think about how great and honest it would be to share in your newest pitch that clients say you're the easiest contractor they've ever worked with. Let others sell your soft skills whenever you can, and that feedback loop is where you pull that data.

Hone your time management skills

Being able to keep your own business streamlined makes potential freelance clients want some of that magic in their own company, too. If a client asks you how you prioritize things, be able to provide specific answers. "I get up early and work all day long" or, "I just do one thing at a time" won't cut it. Talk about how you use systems and structure to determine not just what you'll do first but how you'll do it, what tools you'll use, and how you'll make the process faster without cutting corners.

When clients ask about this, use specific cases. Talk about how you recently helped another client hit a goal before a deadline or with way less stress than the client expected. This is a form of social proof that is really powerful even if it's not directly coming from that other client.

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Always be learning

No one is perfect, but the more you can seek out learning opportunities, the better your soft skills will be. Look for learning options that allow you to strategize, work with or communicate with others. This could be as a mentor or even in a group learning environment. It can help to make up for lack of work experience when you're first getting started, too.

Soft skills can even infuse your personal life with more

success, but they’re becoming increasingly crucial in the professional world. Pack the one-two punch of ability and soft skills to generate retainers, referrals and testimonials in your freelance business and you’ll become an asset for your clients and their businesses.

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