

Editorial

We had a longer than expected Easter break in Poland. Due to the Icelandic volcano ash plume in European airspace we had an extra week away. We considered driving back, but there wasn't much point when the ferries would have been so busy with all the other people who "have to be back at work on Monday". We didn't fancy driving all that way in our Polish Daewoo Lanos either. It's a good local runabout, but not so comfortable for really long journeys like that.

We **didn't** have to be back at work on Monday. We had our computers with us and could work where we were if needed. So we awarded Tomek an extra week off school and elected to sit and wait in the comfort of our Polish house. This is an interesting application of the kind of freedom I will be talking about in this *tranfree* edition's main article. Other people in more "normal" jobs might be forced to make superhuman efforts to get back home quicker.

(If anyone's interested in butterflies, check out the photos in [my photography blog](#) for some recent shots).

I hope you enjoy and benefit from *tranfree*

Alex Eames

<http://www.translatortips.com>

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Understanding the FREE in Freelance

There seems to be a certain amount of confusion out there about what the term **freelance** actually means.



So let's find out where the word came from. Looking up freelance on <http://www.etymonline.com/> gives...

also free lance, free-lance, "**medieval mercenary warrior**," 1820, from free + lance; apparently a coinage of Sir Walter Scott's. Figurative sense is from 1864; specifically of journalism by 1882. Related: Freelancer. The verb is first attested 1903.

So basically you are a **warrior who will work for whoever pays the best**. If you substitute warrior for translator, does that measure up to your reality? **Are you a translator who will work for whoever pays the best?** Hmmm.

Wrong Attitude

A lot of people have a very wrong attitude towards what it means to be a freelancer. They don't seem to be living the part, although they probably harbour, somewhere at the back of their imaginations, the dream of somehow being FREE. But they don't actually live it out. They feel enslaved to accept the rates and onerous terms, that anyone wielding a job tries to slap upon them.

Now it may be partly to do with fear, or inability to negotiate, but I think it's also partly to do with not quite having grasped what the FREE in freelance actually means. Think for a moment. What are the benefits of being freelance? You are FREE to accept or reject any project which is offered to you. You are FREE to set your own rates (the client is FREE to accept or reject them). You are FREE to work (or not) for anyone you choose. You are also FREE to persuade clients to accept your higher rates and that **you are worth what you are asking for.**

Your Self-Worth Really Matters

But you won't be able to do that unless **you truly believe it yourself.** In sales and marketing, a lot of importance is attached to your self-worth. It's talked about a lot in marketing courses. It's something very personal and it fluctuates during your life, according to your levels of confidence and your (often most recent) experiences. That's a bit like a free market. Free to rise and fall according to changing times, circumstances and situations.

One online portal has a facility letting translators apply to agencies by email. The subject line of those emails is automatically set to "*application for a freelance position*". This could well be a linguistic error, but it also shows a lack of understanding of what freelance is. **Freelance is a position in the marketplace, not a position in an organisation.** If you look at recruitment ads in newspapers or online, they'll often say "position of marketing director" or "position of salesperson". When you're a freelancer, **you don't have a position in someone else's company.** You are not in their company. You are... What are you?

You're FREE. Remember the FREE in freelance! You are not ensnared or imprisoned or closely tied to an employer. So you don't have a position in the organisation. You are an outsider.

You're a freelancer, a FREE agent. You are FREE. That means you are FREE to accept or reject any terms, any payment levels, any projects – and let's go further. You are also FREE to reject any crap from clients. If you decide "I'm not taking that" you can say "bye bye. I'm not working for you any more. Get lost!" I've done it before. And believe me, people aren't used to it.

Real-World Example

We once did a project for a fairly large multi-national company, in the financial sector, working on press releases. It was over the weekend. It was a major announcement about the merger of two large financial companies. (I won't give any more details in case you start trying to guess who it was). We had the chief executive of the Polish branch on the phone telling us how he wanted this translation done. To a small extent he was being helpful. But he was also being condescending, rude, arrogant and upsetting us. So in the end, one time he phoned and said "I'd like to speak to your wife please" and I said "well she doesn't want to speak to you because you're being rude and we don't have to accept work on these terms. So if you want to be like that, you're probably better off doing it yourself." It was quite empowering to be able to say that because – let me tell you – chief execs of large multi-nationals (even the lowly national branch CEOs) are not used to being talked to like that. And it's very good for them. ;)

I did let him speak to my wife briefly after that. He was much more polite and friendly. When we'd finished the piece we were working on we decided not to take any more work on that project. He either did the rest of it himself or found somebody else he could bark at. 😊

What I said to my friends when I discussed it with them was "well he's chief executive of one company, I'm chief executive of two companies." There you go. **You've got to think of yourself as the CEO of YOUR company, and NOT as a low-life sub-contractor.** This puts you on a level with the top people in large organisations. In fact, many of them will envy your freelance status because you get to work from home. They don't get to see their kids from the time they get up – early in the morning to beat the rush hour traffic – to the time they come back late at night, if at all (perhaps they'll have to jet off overseas to a meeting)? They may not see their children for several days at a time, whereas

YOU get to watch your kids grow up. YES. Many of them are envious of YOU. Don't you forget it. It's empowering.

Employment VS Freelance

What's the difference between employment and freelancing? Well the difference is huge actually. Your client won't pay you any benefits and won't deduct any of your taxes. They won't pay any of your insurance or pension contributions. They won't give you any perks. You tell them how much you want them to pay. If it's too much, They'll negotiate or walk away.

A freelancer is a FREE agent - a separate business. You are your own person, an independent unit. That's what the FREE in freelance really means.

- You set your own rates
- You accept/reject projects you want/don't want
- You negotiate terms
- You are FREE to succeed or fail on your own merits

But do you know what? **Not everybody can handle the responsibilities that go with freedom.** "Freedom is a battle that must be fought and won each day" (Sartre). It's the ultimate performance-related pay, but not everybody can cope with it alone. Not everybody is cut out to be a business person. But don't worry, help is at hand. 😊

View From The Other Side

When we were operating as an agency, we used to ask translators what they wanted to be paid. If it was too high, we wouldn't work with them. If it was a level that we could still make a decent profit on – by which I mean selling the translation for twice what I bought it for – then we went with them. We gave them what they asked for. And they were happy to take that money. Nobody was abused, nobody felt bad about it. It was profitable for both sides and that's how ANY business transaction should be. If both sides don't win – and don't profit from a transaction - that means one side is getting a raw deal, which is not sustainable and doesn't work in the long term.

Let's remember some of the other elements of being FREE - some of the best sides of being FREE.

I'm FREE to go and do my supermarket shopping or go to the gym in the middle of the day, **any day of the week** if I want to. And that means **I can choose the best time** to go, when it's not busy.

I'm FREE to organise my time and use it wisely – if I wish.

I'm also FREE to waste it. Isn't that great?

I'm FREE to practise my hobbies whenever I want and not have to feel bad about it.

I'm FREE to do unusual things that other people can't do. FREE to spend many weeks per year in another country in our second home.

I'm FREE to organise my life the way I want it to be.

So are YOU, but you may not have quite captured the “dream” yet. It isn't just a dream though. It can be a reality. And for many people – many successful freelance translators – it IS their reality. It can be yours too. But it does require work, effort, sometimes a little bit of luck. But ALWAYS a lot of skill and a lot of hard application over a sustained period of time. And that's where many people fall by the wayside. Some FREE lance warriors get defeated and captured in battle. But don't let that drag YOU down. You can do it.

Alex Eames is the founder of www.translatortips.com ,
editor of *tranfree* and author of the eBooks...

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