



## Show Notes

### Season 3, Episode 9:

How to have awkward conversations

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## What's in this episode?

Hosts Rachel Smith from [Rachel's List](#) and journalist and content creator [Lynne Testoni](#) talk about those awkward conversations – about rates, being paid and when your clients/editors aren't happy with your work.

- The longer you're in business, the more you have to have them
- It's great to rip the bandaid off and do it rather than dwelling on them
- It gets easier the more you have awkward conversations
- The anticipation is often worse than the reality
- In this environment we don't want to say no to work.

### Two strategies to try:

#### 1. The 'Yes but...' strategy

If you don't find it easy to say no – try “yes, but” ....”yes I can do that rush job, but I can't get it to you until Tuesday”; “yes, but I charge more for keyword research”; or “yes, that's the sort of extra services I offer as part of a retainer”.

#### 2. The 'If you.. then I' strategy

Rach interviewed Gavin Presman a while ago who is a master negotiator – he wrote a book about it, and [here's the post on the Rachel's List blog](#). His tip is to use the 'If you ... then I' method. I find that often works.

*'If you can find room to move in the budget, **then I** can pop it on my schedule and get started immediately'. You state what you need (the right word rate), then what they'll get (you prioritising their project).*

### Awkward conversation 1: Reducing your rates

A pandemic doesn't mean you need to work for free! Or for reduced rates. If you do take a cut in rates – because you really want the work, be aware that it might be difficult, even impossible to go back to your previous rates with the same client.

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An alternative to cutting your rates is offering to reduce the scope of work – less/shorter articles, no keyword research, online research instead of interviews.

One tip on this actually comes from Lynne's husband, who is a salesman. When it gets awkward – he stops talking and lets silence reign. Inevitably the other person starts filling the silence and often comes around to your point of view. It works really well because it shifts the attention away from you to them. Otherwise, I have been known to start blathering on and conceding lots of things in a desperate attempt to fill the silence.

Similarly, if a client says you're too expensive the 'pregnant pause' works well. Takes the power out of it, takes the emotion out of it.

You can also say, 'No problem, I understand. If things change on your end with the budget I'd still love to work with you so please do keep me in mind' – and that is a nice way of saying sorry but I'm sticking to my guns. Clients may come back to you later because you haven't closed the door.

### **Awkward conversation 2: Chasing invoices**

This is a tough one. You deserve to be paid for your work, but it's yucky to be continually chasing invoices. Always get 50% upfront from new clients, especially small business. That conversation is much easier at the beginning than after you've done the work.

Kate Toon also mentioned a great tip on the [Hot Copy podcast](#). She used to have a separate email address of a non-existent bookkeeper. We can't remember her name but let's call her 'Moirá'. Moira used to send grumpy emails to clients following up on invoices and being a little bit rude. Kate said she could be quite forthright as Moira, rather than as herself.

Being super direct – 'Can you please let me know when X invoice will be paid?' sometimes works. Don't be apologetic. Also go via accounts if you don't want to have the awkward conversation with an editor. Accounts are used to it and you can just get the information you need and negotiate directly with people who can ensure your invoice is in the system and on the way to being paid.



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#### **Awkward conversation 3: Scope creep**

We get it – things change along the way when you are working on something, but it's not right when those changes end up creating a lot more work – more than you expected or quoted for.

We like being positive and flexible but you have to work out when you're being taken advantage of.

Get into the habit of just not allowing it. If a client or editor adds something onto the job say, 'Well another two interviews will take time' or 'That's no problem to add a FAQ page to your website, it will be an extra half day so let me know if you want to go ahead and I'll send over a revised quote'. Don't allow the wiggle room.

#### **Awkward conversation 4: When they aren't happy with your work**

This is the time to get on the phone. People are nicer on the phone than over email and it's easier to get to the bottom of it. You might find it comes across quite harshly on email but on the phone it ends up being quite a small issue or something that's easily fixed.

When working for a new client/editor, mention that you're open to feedback and set the scene by saying that sometimes it takes a couple of goes to get the tone right the first time. That takes the emotion out of it and makes it a business decision.

Look at the feedback without emotion. Are they right? Did you rush that job, forget to do a good spell check, not read the brief thoroughly? If you did, take that feedback onboard and fix it.

#### **Awkward conversation 5: You've stuffed up**

We all make mistakes, that's part of being human. Come clean as soon as you can. Confessing up front tends to be harder in the short term, but better in the long term. Ring up, apologise, confess. Most people take it well.

Far better messing up with digital than with print as they're more easily fixed!



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### Awkward conversation 6: Firing a client

A conversation many of us have to have (often multiple times) during our career, is firing a client. At Rachel's List, we have [a script in our ebook about this](#). Being professional is often better than being honest (ie, steering away from 'You're a nightmare and I don't want to work with you any more'). Also it lets you extricate yourself in a way that keeps the door open. Eg:

1. Money excuse: As of next month, I'm making some financial changes across the board in my business, including raising my hourly rate to \$[double/triple what you're currently paid]...
2. Change in focus excuse: I'm sadly unable to continue writing for your charter boat fishing business as I've decided to focus solely on my growing portfolio of homewares clients...
3. Professional porky-pie: I'm unfortunately unable to continue writing for you, due to a large ongoing copy project I've just taken on that will absorb all of my time going forward...
4. Not a good fit excuse: I want to thank you for choosing me to work on your project but at this time, I feel that perhaps another freelancer might be better suited to your needs.



### After the conversation

- Phone a friend to debrief (Lynne)
- Go for a walk, exercise, shake it off (Lynne)
- Go to bed and do a primal scream (Rach).

Want to grab the [25 Scripts for Freelance Success ebook](#) for just \$5? [Go here](#) to grab it and use the code EBOOK5. It's packed with scripts for awkward conversations so hope it helps you out!

That's it for this episode. Hope you've found these show notes useful. Cheers, Rachel and Lynne

Got a question? Email us at [thecontentbyte@gmail.com](mailto:thecontentbyte@gmail.com)