

High-Performance Freelancing

FROM THE 2009 FREELANCE WORKSHOP

By Nick Sidorovich

Debra Gordon's tongue-in-cheek presentation, "How NOT To Be A High-Performing Freelance," highlighted common mistakes that hinder the productivity and earnings of freelance medical writers during the AMWA-DVC Eighth Annual Freelance Workshop. Gordon identified the following points as "What to do if you don't want to succeed."

- *Don't Identify Your Goals* – A freelance must have specific goals for self-employment, whether they are related to making your own schedule or making more money.
- *Don't Identify Your Strengths and Weaknesses* – Consumer health is an area that Gordon has mastered as a writer, but other areas such as regulatory writing do not interest her. Writers need to know the kind of writing they are best suited for in order to perform well.
- *Don't Run Your Business Like a Business* – Using a home phone line that your children often answer does not present a professional image to clients. Gordon maintains a separate phone line for her business and answers it herself.
- *Don't Build A Professional Website* - Presenting a professional image includes having a website that is not cobbled together in amateurish fashion. Gordon recommends using a professional to design your website. To keep the cost of hiring a web designer down, prepare your own website content. To increase awareness of your website, include your domain name in your email signature.
- *Don't Continue Learning* – Knowledge gained through conferences and AMWA certification courses will positively impact your performance as a medical writer. For those considering pursuing a degree, Gordon recommended that they speak with others familiar with that degree program to determine whether it helps a writer gain practical knowledge. Earning a credential in order to place a few letters after your name has limited professional value if the credential is not backed up with useful knowledge.
- *Don't Track Your Time or Bill On A Project Basis* – Gordon urged freelances to bill clients on a project basis but keep track of the hours worked on the project for your personal information. This information will help you estimate fees for future projects based on the hourly rate of pay you want to

earn and how long you think the job will take. Gordon uses separate software to track work time and business finances.

- *Don't Diversify* –The week this workshop was held, Gordon was working simultaneously on a sales module, a consumer book, a disease overview, a CME monograph, and a CME needs assessment. She warned that it is financially risky to have any one client represent more than 25 percent of your business.
- *Don't List Yourself in the AMWA Directory* – Listing yourself in the AMWA directory only costs \$75 and will get your name seen by your target audience – people looking for medical writers!
- *Don't Refer Work to Other Freelances* - Referring fellow freelances for jobs you are either too busy or otherwise unprepared to take often results in them returning the favor.
- *Don't Say No or Listen to Your Gut* – If you sense that a job - or client - may be too difficult, say no! Furthermore, don't allow yourself to be micro-managed by a client. You must set boundaries and not allow a project to become a round-the-clock job.
- *Don't Take Breaks or Take Care of Yourself* – After working in the morning for a few hours, Gordon then goes to the gym at 11 a.m. to exercise. Later in the afternoon, she will take a brief nap to refresh herself before resuming her schedule.

Gordon said that she doubled her income last year despite the recession. “There are no shortcuts,” said Gordon. “I work hard.”

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The AMWA-DVC Eighth Annual Freelance Workshop was held on April 17th, 2010 in Plymouth Meeting, Pa.