



PWYC

How to Run Profitable Workshops on a
Pay-What-You-Can Pricing Structure

By Tad Hargrave

PWYC

Even after all this time
The sun never says to the earth,

“You owe Me.”

Look what happens with a love like that,
It lights the whole sky.

— Daniel Ladinsky

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Forward by Mark Silver

It was mostly Tad's inspiration that started me on my own journey into letting the client choose what they wanted to pay.

I had long been against it, mainly because of a point Tad makes himself: that so many small business owners have a difficult relationship with money and just end up dumping their unresolved "money stuff" onto their clients. This feels terrible to be on the receiving end of. If you're sitting in a workshop and the workshop leader offloads their own unprocessed, emotional issues about money on you . . . ick. And so sliding scales and pay-what-you-want schemes end up failing miserably.



The truth is that this approach can be based in a core value I think many of us hold: integrity. That we have the integrity to trust our clients to be caring adults, and that we have the integrity to meet people where they are.

It was this that led me to eventually bring almost our entire business into our own version of pay-what-you-can (PWYC). So far it's working stunningly well, but only because so much of what Tad describes in this book is what we're putting into practice.

As Tad says, I don't think this is the best or only model. But I do think it's an underused model, and one that has great potential to make so much of your business easier and more profitable.

A PWYC approach could make your business more profitable?

Yes.

The big thing that I find so inspiring in what Tad has here is the sheer amount of experience and detail he brings. Like with anything, success depends on the care, love and attention we bring to the details. There's no "magic bullet" in business where you can do something without attention and care and be successful.

But, there are ways to bring a natural sense of integrity, love and care to this approach, and be successful at it.

I notice in myself a tendency to want to go on and on with this introduction, detailing the many, many years I've known Tad, and explain the sheer depth of integrity and love he brings to all that he does; his willingness to experiment and try things out; his deep commitment to social justice and community.

PWYC

All of those things are true. Perhaps it's helpful to know those things as you pick up this book and start to read it. But, you don't need to know them once you start reading: what he describes just makes sense. My guess is that, once you finish this eBook it will be hard to imagine ever doing a PWYC workshop the way so many people do, ashamedly pointing to the box at the back of the room and meekly suggesting, pleading and guilting people into giving (or forgetting to mention it at all).

Love is often like that: self-evident once it's pointed out. I hope that this book nourishes your heart and helps your business to fly.

with love,
Mark Silver, M.Div.
Heart of Business, Inc.
Ithaca, New York

Introduction

Imagine this: you teach a workshop where no one pays you before they come (aside from a nominal deposit to secure their spot). Instead, they attend the entire workshop and pay you whatever they want to pay you at the end based on some mix of the value that they received and the amount they can afford.

It's easy to imagine that this feels good to everyone involved.

Imagine further that this pays you very well and that you make more money doing it this way than you had charged the full price upfront.



Imagine further still — instead of demanding money, people pay you simply because they are inspired to do so and then they tell all of their friends about it.

Imagine a way of being generous that doesn't drain you dry. A way of being accessible that honours yourself, the work you do, and the ones coming.

It might seem hard to believe, but that's how I've been running my live workshops since 2002. I have led over a two hundred live workshops using this pricing model. For the first five years of my business at least 90 per cent of my income came from those workshops. And it was a decent income.

Of course, I've learned a lot along the way on how to make the pay-what-you-can (PWYC) model work smoothly and well.

That's what this eBook is all about: how you can lead your own workshops using a PWYC pricing structure without going broke.

I hope you'll enjoy.

Warmest,

Tad

My PWYC Story

One of the inspirations for me to do the pay-what-you-can was meeting a fellow named Gazzo Macée, a British street performer from Oxford.

At 12 years old, I saw him do his show for the first time. He mentored me over the years in doing close-up magic. I only found out, years later, that he's considered one of the top street performers in the world.

I remember at the end of his show he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for watching my show. I think street theatre is one of the most honest forms of theatre because, if you see a show at a theatre, you have to pay in advance, it's very awkward to leave in the middle and there are no refunds. On the street, you get to see the whole show and then decide what you think it's worth. I think this show is worth \$5. If you saw this show in a bar, you'd buy me a beer. A beer's \$5. If you don't have \$5, \$1 or \$2 is fine. If you can't even afford that, please, this show is my gift to you."



And so, with that experience in me, the seed was planted for my career, leading workshops with a PWYC pricing structure. Over the years, people have asked me, "What got you started doing it this way?"

I wish I could say it was there for altruistic reasons.

When I started in 2002, I was in my early twenties. I charged \$1,500 to \$2,000 for a weekend workshop I'd put together on marketing. I came up with those numbers by looking at what my colleagues (who were all much more experienced than I) were charging for their workshops. I probably had no business charging that much. I was just a spring chicken who hadn't done much yet. Ah well. It's what we do when we're young.

On the upside, that weekend workshop also included three hour-long coaching sessions per person after the workshop (which my colleagues didn't include). Being new to the scene and having no reputation to speak of, I struggled to promote and fill those workshops. I tried twice and got three people signed up at my first workshop and none for my second.

A year later, in 2003, after a year of slogging along like this, I went to Fairfield, Iowa, home of the Maharishi University of Management. Half the town are the “roos,” (short for gurus) who meditate twice a day. The other half the town are the “townies” who definitely do not meditate. I had been there, replacing my friend Ocean Robbins as a speaker, for their Eco-Conference. I’d spoken, led a fundraising workshop, a marketing workshop, and a circle for young activists. I became a D-Grade celebrity for a few days in Fairfield, Iowa.

And so, one year later, it seemed to me like a fine place to go and lead one of my first workshops on the road. Two weeks before leaving for Fairfield, my desktop computer (which I couldn’t bring with me on the road) had died. And I travelled to Fairfield a month before my workshop there. So, in the six weeks rolling up to the event, I was both without a computer and on the road, and I couldn’t promote it. Plus, Facebook didn’t even exist yet and people didn’t use the internet as ubiquitously to promote and find out about workshops.

I showed up in Fairfield because I already had my plane ticket, but nobody had enrolled in my weekend workshop. Nobody. We should note that it is always rich when you’re doing a marketing training for which nobody signs up. It would be like walking up to teach a relationship workshop and everyone can see you in a huge fight with your partner outside of the hotel. I imagined people thinking, “What does he know about marketing? He can’t even get anyone to show up for his own workshop.” It was painful. I led two, three-hour introductory workshops. The first one was on the Wednesday night before the weekend. Three people showed up to it. I left that night utterly discouraged and spent the night trying to rationalize it and think positively about it. The next night there were 16 people.

And so I levelled with them, “Look, here’s the deal,” I said. “Nobody has signed up for my weekend workshop. I was here a year ago to speak at your Eco-Conference and lead a workshop. I was so excited to come back but my computer died before I left home over a month ago and I haven’t been able to properly promote this workshop. But I’m here, my plane ticket doesn’t leave until Monday and I’d rather do something useful while I’m here. I normally include three, hour-long coaching sessions post-workshop but I have a thought that wouldn’t include those. Why don’t you just come to the weekend and pay what you want at the end?” Over the next 24 hours, perhaps aided by the fact that Fairfield is a small town and word spreads quickly, 12 people signed up immediately for the whole weekend. If I’d insisted that they pay the full \$1,500 with the follow-up coaching sessions included, I’d have maybe gotten one or two. At that point, it’s not a workshop anymore. It’s a consultation.

I was amazed that 12 people had signed up so easily with virtually no pitch from the front of the room. I assumed I would get \$20 a person. I had no idea what anyone might pay. I'd hoped it might pay for the plane ticket but I was really readying myself to lose money on the whole venture. I had already tried to reframe the whole thing in my head saying to myself, "Okay, it's an investment, I'm here making contacts. This is really about setting the foundation for my next trip," trying desperately to pretend that I didn't feel crappy about it. I can't even remember exactly what the participants ended up paying, but I do remember that they paid enough that I actually made money on the trip.

In 2004, I found myself in Nova Scotia, doing Celtic Studies at St. Francis Xavier University. A fellow named Robert Webber who ran a place called The Yoga Loft in Halifax offered to host my workshops for his community. Since I was in school at the time I knew I wouldn't have any time to properly promote a weekend workshop, and so I suggested we use the PWYC pricing model I'd tried in Fairfield to see if it might work again. Robert generously offered his studio to me for free to do two hour-long introductory workshops in between scheduled yoga classes. Those went so well we ended up doing nine of them. And again, perhaps aided by the small town nature of Halifax, the word spread and the weekend workshop filled up within a couple of weeks. So, we changed the venue to a classroom at the Shambhala School that could hold 40 people. Within two weeks that sold out too. So we booked a second weekend workshop and I just kept doing introductory workshops. And the second weekend sold out as well.

In 2006, I found myself back in Edmonton and decided to focus on building my marketing business full time. My business model was simple, I would go to a town and lead two or three free introductory workshops (usually 2-3 hours long) over a week or two and then a PWYC weekend workshop. That's how I made most of my money.

But it took years before I was convinced that a PWYC pricing structure was a good idea. For years, I told everyone at my workshops, *"Look, this could be a terrible idea. Don't get attached to this pay-what-you-can thing because it's just an experiment. I don't know if this actually makes sense or if this is a sustainable thing. I'll try this for two or three years and I'll let you know."*

And I haven't stopped yet. It works very well for me. In this eBook, you'll learn how to make it work well for you too.

Your Workshop Must Be Good



Perhaps this goes without saying, but nothing I have to say about my particular approach to pay-what-you-can (PWYC) pricing for workshops will be of any use to you if your workshop isn't good. The better your workshop is, the better you will do.

The thing I love about PWYC is that it puts *you* on the hook as the workshop provider. You need to do a good job, like a street performer. You can't go on the street and do a mediocre show, and expect to get paid. You've got to do a really good show. People look at street performers and say, "Wow, they're so good at juggling," as if that's the main trick. No, the main trick, the main skill that they have, is that they got 100 people to stop, watch their whole show, and pay them. That's the art of it. That's their central skill. The way they did that, the fundamental engine of it, is that they gave such a great performance that you wanted to give them your money. You were happy to give them your money. You looked at what they did and you thought, "I couldn't do that . . ." Instead of pressuring people, manipulating people, or tricking people into paying more at the end, the best street performers focus on putting on such a fine performance that the crowds are inspired to give them money. If you come from a place of neediness and scarcity, people will feel it and be repelled.

This is true for fundraising as well. You can't guilt people into giving. Not in the long term. The best fundraisers have no external pressure for people to give, there's just a welling up of desire to help and give.

It's important that we not only deliver what we promise (that's the bare minimum) but that we over-deliver. They come in expecting an eight and we give them a 10. The only time we delight people is when we exceed their expectations.

So the workshop must be good. They must get value from it. That wording is important. It's not just that we need to give value but that they need to get it. This must be our mindset when designing workshops. And so, this must include how you can support them in integrating the content and their experience after the workshop, too. This must include focusing the workshop on helping them solve a real issue in their life and getting them a real result rather than just dumping content on them. That's one of the challenges of a workshop. They leave with all of this information. They don't know how to implement it. Giving information is easy. Helping people get results is hard.

This doesn't need to be overwhelming. It just means choosing a niche, a clear workshop topic and clarifying the promise of it. It means giving enough time for questions and answers during the workshop. It means giving your participants enough breaks during the workshop and a long enough meal time that they can digest the content properly. It means taking 15-30 minutes near the end of the workshop to help them craft their own plans to take home and weave what they got from your workshop into their life. Taking care of these core elements is enough.

Eleven Core Benefits of the PWYC Approach

Benefit #1: The Marketing is Easier

This was an unexpected benefit of the pay-what-you-can (PWYC) model. Over the years, I realized that, if I charged a flat fee of what I thought my workshop was “worth” I would actually make less money in total. I would make more per person but I would have less people. Or, I would have to work so much harder to get the same number of people attending that the profit split over those hours would hardly be worth it. Once the marketing time and expenses were factored in, the workshop would be no more powerful than it already is.



It's like a Rube Goldberg machine, a name given to a machine that is unnecessarily complex (e.g. a contraption the size of a house whose only function is to light your cigarette). It works, but it's hardly efficient.

Why is the marketing easier with PWYC? The first reason is because it lowers or even reverses the risk in the interaction. It says (as street performers do), “I’ll take on all of the risk. Let me do the whole show first and then, at the very end, you pay me what you think it was worth.” Hands down one of the most powerful tools or principles that I can ever give anybody in marketing is this idea of risk reversal. One day, I may write an eBook about it. If people can try out what you’re offering before paying they are many times more likely to buy.

Every workshop I do, I ask people to honestly respond to the following: “I’d like to invite a moment of candour in the room. When you signed up for this day-long workshop, you were given three options for payment. The first was to pay \$200 flat. The second was to give a three-pay of \$67. The third was to pay a \$25 deposit to lock in your spot, and then to pay me whatever you want to pay at the end based on a combination of what you thought it was worth and what you can afford. Most of you chose the PWYC option. So, this question is for you. Raise your hand, honestly now, if you would have come to this workshop if the only way to attend was to pay \$200 upfront.” And then I pause and wait. Slowly, tentatively 10-20 per cent of the hands will go up. Meaning that, by using PWYC pricing I get five to 10 times more people attending. Five to 10 times. Purely based on the pricing.

And I didn’t have to do any gross-feeling, high pressure tactics to get them to the weekend. I didn’t have to manufacture any urgency or scarcity. I didn’t have to use bullshit sales scripts, artificial price inflation and then feigned price dropping and persuasion techniques or social proof. I didn’t have to spend 30 minutes establishing the value of the weekend. I just had to do a good workshop — that’s what established the value of the weekend.

There's less pressure on the sale when you use PWYC. Years ago, my colleague Robert Middleton said to me, "I find in these expensive workshops that when you read the sales letter, it seems there has to be more hype. It has to be more over the top with more miracles and more breakthroughs to justify it. Often the average person isn't necessarily going to get that kind of breakthrough result, but for that price you have to promise the earth, the sun, and the stars. When you charge that amount, you do have to give it some hype. I think there's a way it can sway people's moral compasses a little bit in how authentic they're being willing to be. There's this idea that you're going to get this information from a weekend and it will change everything, when in reality a lot of them are still going to need hand-holding in different places."

Again, to be clear, with PWYC, I make less money per person than I would if I charged "full price" or "full industry rates," but I attract so many more people because the risk is so low. I make about \$100 per person at my day-long events with PWYC. Sometimes a bit more. Sometimes less. "But wait," you think. "That's half price! You're losing money."

No. I'm making good money with very little effort because I don't have to work very hard at all on the marketing. When I was marketing a full-weekend workshop, I would do two hour-long introductory workshops and in essence, my pitch for the weekend was, "So . . . if you liked tonight, there's more of it on the weekend. And it's PWYC. Come."

And now that I have established followings in a number of cities. There are a lot of places I can go — such as Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, London (UK), Edinburgh, etc. — where I can get the word out through my contacts or "hubs" (a concept and practice I describe in my eBook *Hub Marketing*) and I get full workshops without presenting my introductory sessions. This, however, is after a number of years of presenting intros and workshops in these cities, building up and investing in my connections to people and organizations that are aligned with the work I do, and even more years of building up my email list and Facebook following to allow for growing connections between hubs. I seem to have Facebook followers from most of the places I want to lead workshops.

It sounds too simple, I know. But that's the point. It's efficient. Minimal effort and maximum results. Using hubs dramatically simplifies the pitch you make (no need to make the case your workshop is worth the money) and lowers the risk for them taking the step to sign up. It requires even less marketing effort after you've established yourself. It's not that this approach is too simple. It's that most marketing is a Rube Goldberg machine.

Benefit #2: Increased Word-of-Mouth

Another factor that makes marketing easier is word-of-mouth. I believe that people are more likely to tell their friends about a weekend workshop if it's PWYC. Partly because it's novel but also because then they don't need to feel like they're selling something to their friends.

When I go to Toronto to lead workshops (a city where I've led tens of workshops by now), I'll say to the participants, "Raise your hand if you have heard about me before." Almost everybody's hands go up, meaning they didn't just see it on Facebook. A friend of theirs didn't just tell them about it yesterday. They had heard about me weeks, months or years before. Then I'll say, "Raise your hand if you heard about my work from more than three people," and many hands still go up. That's because I've done so many workshops in Toronto. But people go to workshops all the time and don't necessarily talk about them much afterwards, though they seem to with mine. And this ties back into Benefit #1: I don't need to do much to fill my workshops in Toronto. I send out a few emails and do a Facebook ad or two, and I generally get forty people or so. Minimal effort and maximum results.

The fact that it's PWYC, the novelty of that, becomes part of the conversation, and makes that conversation more likely.

Another thing that makes word-of-mouth more likely is that people leave thrilled, by design, about what they paid. I ask them not to pay more than they think my workshop is worth, or can afford. And so, if I do my job properly, they pay an amount they genuinely feel good about. They know that the stated market-value of my day-long workshop is \$200 since I've listed it as an option on the registration form – so they know what I am valuing it at – and actually, I sometimes get people who pay more than \$200. Participants in my day-long workshops don't overpay and don't leave feeling ripped off (even if they pay more than \$200). They leave delighted with what they paid. They leave knowing they got a good deal. Why? Because they chose what to pay. And who doesn't want to tell their friends about a good deal when they find one? It's good to remember that the main driver of genuine word-of-mouth is that people want to help out their friends by telling them about cool stuff.

Perhaps it might also be that, when a workshop is PWYC, it doesn't seem like one is trying to sell one's friends. If someone went to a five day workshop that was \$5,000 and then they try to tell their friends about it, the price might very well become a sensitive topic. Perhaps they know their friend is financially struggling. \$5,000 is a lot of money. Does one even mention the workshop? If one does, does one mention the price? If one mentions the price, then how does one respond when the friend balks and says, "That's too much. There's no way I could ever afford that"? And where does one drop it? At what point does trying to convince a friend they might love a workshop become a sales pitch for something out of their current price range? You see how it could go. And so many people don't bring it up at all because they anticipate where it could go, too.

When a workshop is PYWC, someone can confidently say to their friend, "I went to this workshop. It was amazing. I thought it might be a scam, but I could really just pay whatever I wanted to pay and there was no funny business." The element of "price" and "money" has been largely removed from the conversation. There's nothing to push back against.

Note: I've found the fact of my PWYC workshops makes a direct ask or invitation to people really easy and smooth. If I meet somebody at a party and it feels like a fit to say, "You should come to my weekend workshop," I don't hesitate. Because assuming there's some interest from them, they might ask, "How much is it?" next, to which I can simply reply, "It's pay-what-you-can. You literally just pay whatever you want and are able to at the end." I've had people sign up right then and there because the barrier to entry is so low.

Note: The "able" part is very important. In my work I am often speaking to a community that is cash poor, doing alternative practitioner work, and doing PWYC makes this material accessible for them. They are often grateful, and become dedicated clients over the longterm who may buy my eBooks and programs in the future as well. It's not just pay-what-you-*want* (though that's a part of it). It's also pay-what-you-*can*.

Benefit #3: Goodwill

Of course, the first two benefits are directly tied to this. If you do your job right, people really feel like they are getting at least a fair deal – and potentially an incredible deal. Nobody is going to leave your workshop feeling ripped off. All of this engenders immense good will between yourself and your attendees – particularly those who were only able to attend because there was no financial barrier.

There is just a genuine process of reciprocation. When people receive something good, they want to give something good back. And, if they can't give you the money they'd like to, then one of the ways they can give back is to tell others about it.

There's something wonderful in the feeling of paying an amount that feels "just right" for you. This is what we're trying to guide people towards in the workshop. Not to pay the maximum amount but the amount that's perfect for them right now. An amount that's fair to us offering the workshop but also fair to their own situation and realities. It's like a pair of shoes. If they pay us too much and the shoes are too big, then their affection for us slips off as they walk away from the workshop. If they pay too little, they their guilt will pinch their feet and they will feel uncomfortable.

I suppose there's another angle on this: if you go to a workshop where everyone there has paid \$5,000, you could be excused for assuming that the facilitator is "just in it for the money" and that it's a cash grab. I'm not saying that would be true, but it's understandable that this is where people's minds can go when a workshop is so expensive. People might go to those workshops, but there's not the same level of goodwill. No one is seeing those workshop leaders as a "hero of the common person." They're also far more unlikely to experience a sense of having received far more than they expected or "paid for."

This PWYC approach — the fairness of it — transcends left and right politics. Most people value accessibility. They admire someone being of service and taking a stand for something bigger than themselves. In my experience the concept seems to be universally respected.

Benefit #4: Good Vibes at the Workshop

While we are on the topic of goodwill, it's worthwhile pointing out that PWYC can bring good vibes to your workshops for yourself and the participants. Your participants can, if you frame it well, relax and enjoy the workshop knowing that they can pay whatever feels right at the end, and what they can afford. And also, *you* can also relax.



When I first started offering workshops, the pricing was such big a source of stress. If I was charging \$2,000 for a weekend, I went in thinking “Damn, this better be good. I need to deliver \$2,000 worth of value.” I found myself very anxious during the workshops wanting to make sure that they were getting their value. It’s one thing to care and it’s another to feel panicked about people not getting enough value. PWYC chilled everything right out on both sides. Good vibes.

Benefit #5: Peace of Mind After the Workshop

Years ago, a client wrote me these words:

“Thank you for adding me to your email list even though I didn't make it this weekend. I'm actually listening to your holistic practitioners video while I write this :)”

I just copied and pasted this into my notes ‘Pay what you can is a tactic, an expression of my desire for justice and accessibility.’

I'm feeling grateful for having your free information packaged here in this email and to see a little more how you apply the ‘pay-what-you-can’ (love, love, love paying the perfect amount). I am just emerging from a lot of stuff about ‘what is your value,’ ‘if you don't charge enough you are not valuing yourself’ and in fact my former business partner has just changed her prices to \$300 per session. I have no problem with her charging this and I feel that my value is equal. At the same time, it's like a nice pair of pants that just don't fit right.

I'm feeling like a tree moving from winter — a dormant phase — and seeing all of these buds developing (website development, moving into my business rather than just sitting and staring at her). I say this because I'm grateful to be waking up in fertile soil — and you are one of the elements of this.

Thanks for helping me to believe that there can be a place for 'pay-what-you-can' that does not automatically mean that I don't value myself (I actually think I am kick-ass awesome)."

For people who are starting out leading workshops, there can be this pretense of needing to position themselves as an expert — perhaps even more of an expert than they actually are yet. Sometimes people can be encouraged to charge similar rates to those of the pros because "they deserve it." I was guilty of this kind of "because I deserve it" pricing when I started out. When I switched from that approach to PWYC, it felt so good. I felt a huge weight drop off my shoulders. I didn't need to pretend I was some great, global authority. I didn't need to puff my chest up. I could honestly be right where I was — apprenticing. I realized that I was still learning about marketing and figuring out what my views, my take on it, were. I realized that, instead of setting my price based on what I thought myself or my workshops were "worth," I could let the marketplace figure it out for me. I could get realtime feedback. That was a relief. It had me feel curious but also committed to doing a good job since my livelihood depended on it.

I've done some crap weekend workshops where I tried a new exercise, which turned out to be a disaster. At those workshops, I got paid less, and I thought, "How appropriate. That wasn't very good." You get real feedback on not just what did you *gave*, but you get feedback on what your participants *got*. Those are often two different things. For me, this engendered a kind of thinking of, "How can I put this together to give the most value to my clients?" And then I'd just trust what they paid me. I never left a workshop thinking, "Maybe I overcharged." I never left a workshop thinking, "I'm afraid I didn't give them as much value as they paid for." The participants at my workshops decided at the very end what to pay. So, I got to leave feeling clean. Even if it was a shit or just an "okay" workshop, there wasn't the same level of guilt or shame because at least the money had been dealt with fairly. And as I developed as a marketing teacher and expert, so did my fees develop and increase. And teachers, experts need to develop. You won't be an "expert" right out the gate. But that doesn't mean you don't have some worthwhile offerings to make and put out there, to test and to develop.

And so I get to feel really good about the money I make. I never have to have a second guessing gut discussion with myself of "Was my workshop really worth that? Was I on enough today?" Because the participants said it was. They chose to pay me whatever they paid me, with no pressure from me.

Benefit #6: More People at Your Workshops

Because the risk is so much lower, you will get more people at your workshops. Again, not just 10 per cent more but possibly, 10 times more.

That has many advantages. More people at your workshops means more money. It means exponentially more word-of-mouth to help you fill your future workshops with greater ease. It also, if you have more products and services you can offer (as you work and develop through your career), means more money on the backend. For example, at the end of my day-long workshops I give everyone a 50 per cent off code for my eBooks and home-study courses. That adds a few hundred more dollars to the bottom line of every event. The more people who are there, the more product I sell. But some of those people might also hire me for one-on-one coaching or join one of my online or ongoing programs. They might get on my email list and buy an affiliate offer I send them.

And, the more people there are at the workshop, the more people you're helping. I'm assuming you don't think your workshop is a waste of time. I assume you believe that it's truly helping people. And, if so, the more people who come, the more people who are getting helped. You will leave your workshop feeling satisfied that you've really reached out effectively that day.

The other thing about a lot of people in a room together for a workshop, is that it feels exciting to be there. People often feel more brave to speak up to second someone else's questions – there is safety in numbers. Plus at break or lunchtime there are a bunch of like-minded individuals for them to connect and maybe even network with in their local town or city. And you will get increased energy from a room full of people as a workshop facilitator.

Benefit #7: More Money, More Easily

My weekend workshops last three and a half days. These days, they seem to yield about \$1,000 per person (sometimes in one payment, sometimes spread over an agreed-upon period of months). If I told these same people (who paid me \$1,000 at the end of a weekend workshop) that the weekend cost \$1,000, they likely wouldn't have come, or they might have, but it would have involved a bigger sales conversation, which is a much more challenging thing. Once they're there and once they've "gotten it," it's much easier for them to be generous back to me. If I told them, "You're going to watch this street performer and pay them \$10 at the end of the show," a lot of people might think, "Nah," but then they see it and they're so inspired that they *want* to. And so, with PWYC, because of all of the benefits listed above, I make more money *more easily* than I could if I did it the conventional way.

Benefit #8: Free PR and Media Coverage

If you're the only one in your industry who is doing this kind of pricing, why not wrangle that into some free media attention? Depending on your industry, PWYC pricing might give you immediate differentiation. There may be a distinct lack of competition. After all, who else is crazy enough?

Benefit #9: Staying True to Your Politics Makes You More Attractive

There's something about someone who stands for something, who is willing to take risks for what they believe in, that draws people in. There are a lot of people who talk a good game about their politics, but their pricing makes their work inaccessible to anyone but the rich. As Derrick Jensen (the American author, anarchoprimitivist, ecophilosopher, and radical environmentalist) puts it, "After all is said and done — and usually more is said than done — . . ." People admire those who stay true to their values. We admire people who are clearly in business to make a difference, not a fortune. These people may not have "status" in mainstream culture but they have immense, enduring stature in their own communities. We admire people who have integrity, with the backbone and willingness to sacrifice some profits to do the right thing. If your politics (and the politics of your community) include class analysis, then PWYC will be seen as congruent with that.

Benefit #10: The Opportunity to Do What You Love

I know so many people who love to lead workshops. It lights them up. They'd lead them every weekend if they could. But they can't fill them. They can't get people out. Why? They're charging more than people want to pay. Why don't they lower the price? Because they've drunk the Kool-Aid on "charging what they're worth." They think that if they lower their price then they are collapsing and disrespecting the work.

And maybe that's true. But it also might be true that by lowering prices (or offering workshops on a PWYC basis), by the end of the year they've made more money than they would have without that choice. But even if the money is the same, consider this: would you rather end the year with \$10,000 (having done only one workshop and most of that money coming from other sources) or \$10,000 from having done 20 workshops? If you love to lead workshops, if they bring you alive and feed you, then perhaps the latter is true. You want to spend your days doing what you love.

And, here's the kicker. By doing more of these workshops that you love, you get better at them. Your tenth workshop will, if you're paying attention and learning along the way, be much better than your first workshop. But it gets better. If you do 20 workshops instead of just one, then you've built up more of a following. If you had 10 people per workshop, then you now have two hundred new people who've experienced your work. You have a following. Some of those people might want to sign up for advanced work with you. And your word-of-mouth will be exponential.

Benefit #11: Your Own Personal Growth

If you're looking for a spiritual bootcamp around boundaries and your capacity for receiving, then running PWYC workshops are hard to beat.

If you struggle to say "no" to things that don't feel good, or to say "yes" to things that do feel good, then PWYC pricing will trigger all of that for you.

You may have people who assume that because you run your workshops on a PWYC basis, they can show up late, not take your workshop seriously, ask for refunds well past the stated refund window, and even those who no-show entirely. These scenarios all provide opportunities to say "no" and set some clearer boundaries, both with the clients, and more importantly, with future clients.

And then there will be people who pay you much more than you expected or, if you're honest, than you think you deserve. Others will go out of their way to help you and spread the word about your workshops because of your generous pricing. You might have to take some deep breaths to be able to say "yes" to this generosity and accept it.

And whether people pay you a little or a lot, either scenario can bring up all of your own struggles around self-worth, and wounds related to belonging and being taken care of. It's all good fodder for your spiritual practice and/or personal growth.

Eleven Situations Where PWYC Seems to Work Best

Situation #1: To Get More Clients in the Door

I think that pay-what-you-can (PWYC) is best for people who are wanting to grow their business and attract more clients, versus doing more with the clients they have. PWYC acts to reduce the risk, or barrier to entry, so powerfully that it can be an incredibly effective way to bring new people in. This is especially useful when you have plenty of products and/or services that you know they're likely to buy once you get new people in the door.



Situation #2: To Reward Existing Clients

Having said that, even so, PWYC *could* be used with existing clients. You might say to them, “I’ve created a new workshop. You’re some of my favourite clients, so, before I release this to the wider world, I wanted to offer you this on a pay-what-you-can basis in exchange for your feedback at the end.” You create a beta-test scenario for yourself and your clients benefit, too.

Situation #3: Special, One-Time Day-Long (or Longer) Events

Every once in a while, you might host an event or make an offer on a PWYC basis where it is understood that it’s a one-time sort of thing. It could be a Christmas/holiday offer or a Mother’s Day offer or something you do for your 5th anniversary in business. I think part of the challenge of PWYC comes up when it’s a continual, ongoing thing. For example, I would have a hard time going to a regular PWYC yoga class because, every single class, I’d have to decide what I could give – wrestle with the two demons of resentment and guilt and try to thread the needle of what I want to give. That might feel exhausting and unappealing to me. Maybe if it was “Three Months of PWYC Yoga” I could do it. Or a once-per-month class. But likely not beyond that. If you sold a whole three-month yoga class package on a PWYC basis so I only had to decide what to pay once (instead of 12 times or over 12 weeks) that might feel easier.

It’s important to understand that while there is less *financial* risk for the participants in PWYC scenario, there is more *emotional* risk. You are asking emotional labour of people every time you do PWYC. I think that when considering ongoing PWYC situations, it’s important to proceed with caution.

Another example might be memberships. If you had a Marketing Club that was a suggested \$29 per month and told everyone every month was PWYC, it might probably fall apart. It would also be very intense to administer, and likely very stressful for participants every time having to reevaluate what it was worth or they could afford this month. It asks a lot of people.

I wouldn't recommend PWYC for a one-three hour introductory workshop. For years, I led many of these types of workshops. In the beginning they were free. Then I began doing them on a sliding scale of \$1 to \$40 and that worked well. I tended to make about \$20 per person on that. I think it's because \$20 is an easy, round number. It's easy to whip out a \$20 bill. That's an example where I used a sliding scale, not a PWYC model. Then, I made it a flat fee of \$30 in advance and \$40 at the door. I think that worked just as well. If they're coming to an intro, they may not want to invest that time to even think about, "What does pay-what-you-can mean?" and the stress of, "What am I going to pay?" might actually be prohibitive for an intro. It's actually such a small amount of money and, for most people, it's not going to bother them too much. A flat fee can keep it simpler for smaller/shorter offerings.

Situation #4: People Understand What It Costs Elsewhere

Here's the biggest overall thing that I've found. PWYC seems to work best in situations where people have a really clear sense of what it already costs. If it's a PWYC restaurant, people have a ballpark sense of what they're going to pay at a restaurant on average. If it's an album, people know the average cost. But if it's a marketing workshop or a retreat, or a consultation, people don't necessarily know the average cost of these things, especially if they're new to a field. In that case you have to educate them. More on the mechanics of how to do that later.

Situation #5: Group Events

In the past, I tried doing some one-on-one coaching on a PWYC basis, but I found the pay was too little for it to feel good. I think group events are more financially viable with a PWYC model because some people will pay very little and some will pay a lot (usually based on their financial circumstance) and it all evens out in the end. For workshops where it's not going to be an additional hard cost for you to have more people, PWYC works very well.

Situation #6: No One Else Is Doing It

It tends to work really well in the industries where no one else is doing it. If you're a theatre and you say, "*Cutting edge new thing: We've got a pay-what-you-can matinee.*" Well, everybody does that. It's nothing unusual. But, when I started hosting marketing workshops on a PWYC basis, no one else was doing it. Over a decade later, no one else that I know of does it, and so it stands out in a positive way.

Situation #7: Traditionally Expensive

I think PWYC also does exceptionally well in traditionally high-ticket industries where people are expecting to pay a lot. It's very compelling when you can take something that has a high perceived value but a low per person cost and say, "Hey look, you'd be spending \$3,000 anywhere else for this, but I'm going to offer it on a pay-what-you-can basis." If I went to a five star hotel and was offered PWYC that would be more compelling than going to some dive motel and being offered the same thing. Having said that, if you have a high-ticket program and you can easily fill at the price that you want, then using PWYC just wouldn't make sense for you.

Situation #8: Beta Tests

If you have a new workshop you're thinking of running that you'd like to open to the public, why not run the first one or two on a PWYC basis? It is a great way to get people in the door so that you can work out the kinks in your workshop. It is a great way to get feedback. One of the things I love most about running PWYC workshops is that the payment becomes a built-in feedback mechanism. When I do an off workshop that doesn't work as well, I get paid less. If my workshop bombs, I don't get paid as much as when it goes really well. I think that's appropriate. For years, I led my three-hour introductory workshops for free. No charge at all. And it took me years to find my legs in it all. It took me about five *years* to really sort out my core point of view in marketing. But then, after those years, I hit my stride. I found my groove. My point of view gelled. At the ends of my workshops people started coming up, one or two people every workshop or so, and insisting on paying me. They'd be writing a \$50 cheque and I'd tell them, "No no! This is a free workshop!" and they'd look at me, nod and go back to writing the cheque. To me, that was feedback. That was them saying, "This is really good. It has clear value to me." PWYC can give you the same kind of feedback.

Situation #9: Doing It For The Joy Of It

I remember speaking with Thomas Leonard, author of *The 28 Laws of Attraction*. He told me how, after practicing as a life coach for awhile, he held a workshop and told his team, “I want to offer it for free,” and his branding advisor freaked out. “No, you’ll destroy your brand. People won’t perceive the value.” Thomas shrugged and did it anyway. Just for the joy and fun of it. He sold out the event with people attending for free and ended up selling a tonne of product and coaching packages at the end. This has become a fairly common model in the industry these days – a free weekend workshop that sells people into a larger coaching program.

Situation #10: When PWYC Is Just One Part of Your Business Model

Not everything you ever do needs to be PWYC. For me it’s only one part of my business model. I charge \$300 per hour for individual consulting, and a flat rate for my online programs and products. But I charge PWYC at all of my live day-long and weekend workshops.

There might be a particular branch of your business for which PWYC works really well (e.g. introductory-level workshops or a particular promotion you just want to try with it.) I do not recommend PWYC as an across-the-board pricing approach.

Again, I know some people have successfully used PWYC with one-on-one coaching. Some people do it with products. Sometimes it’s straight up PWYC, and sometimes it’s “pick your price,” where people are given three different pricing options for an eBook, or a sliding scale in which people are encouraged to pay anywhere from, say, \$5 to \$100. Some people, like me, charge PWYC for live workshops. Many musicians release their albums on a sliding scale where you can choose to pay \$1 or more, or \$5 or more, based on what you’re able.

The most important thing about going with a PWYC model is that it’s probably best to pick just *one* aspect of your business and have *that* be the PWYC option that you test.

For example, if you are a restaurant and wanted to experiment with PWYC, I’d say, “Don’t rebrand to become a PWYC restaurant. First, try out ‘PWYC Sundays’ or consider having a rice bowl or specific meal thing that’s always PWYC. See how those go, really look at the cost benefit ratio, and then decide if a fully PWYC restaurant makes sense for you.”

There are certain things that just feel good and right for me to charge a flat fee for (eBooks, online workshops, coaching) and there are some things where it feels better to do PWYC (my live workshop).

My encouragement to anyone considering PWYC is to look at your business model and figure out where PWYC might fit, if at all. Your business model *must* sustain you. It's got to work for you financially, you need to pay your bills, you need to make a living. But I know that, especially for a lot of socially conscious entrepreneurs and holistic practitioners (among others of course), there's often this tension of "How does this sustain me while also being accessible to the people who I'd like to have access to it?" In my experience, that tension never goes away. The thing to consider when trying PWYC, is *would it add more joy and fun to your business and make it more accessible?*

Situation #11: If You're Helping Them Make Money

If you're teaching marketing, business skills or how to make money, my guess is that you will probably do better than people in the categories of health, relationships, and spirituality. This isn't an absolute, and I have no evidence to support it, but this would be my educated hunch. I think PWYC is particularly profitable for me because the nature of my business is helping people to make money in their work, so I think that the "donation" or PWYC portion of their payment is easier for them to justify to themselves and their budget.

PWYC is Not More Spiritual

Over the years, I have had so many people tell me, “Oh, it’s so noble that you offer your workshops on a pay-what-you-can basis,” and maybe there’s some nobility in there somewhere but I also know, as do you now, that there are certainly some selfish reasons to do it as well.

I see people getting inspired and saying, “I’ll do my whole business on a PWYC basis. That’s the ethical thing to do.”

But let me be very clear, there’s nothing more spiritually evolved, authentic, more real, or more ascended about doing PWYC. It’s simply a different business model. It’s a different structure. That’s all.

If PWYC doesn’t work for you and you keep doing it, that’s not noble. That’s you collapsing. If you start doing PWYC-everything and you go broke doing it, how does this help anyone?



Do You Call it Pay-What-You-Want Or Pay-What-You-Can?

I'm asked this question from time to time and my answer is that it's the tension between the two.

We don't have a single word in English that says what needs to be said.

The truth is that, usually, there's an amount your pay-what-you-can (PWYC) participants *want* to pay and there's an amount that they *can* pay. Those two often two different amounts.



At the end of the workshop, I used to ask them to sit in the tension. I would say, "Look, I know there's an amount you may want to pay and an amount you can pay. My invitation to you is to sit in the tension of those and decide on the amount that feels right for you."

I tend to refer to it as PWYC because I think more people are familiar with that acronym. "Can" (as opposed to "want") also invites people to not overextend themselves financially, and that feels important to me as well.

What is the Differences Between PWYC and Sliding Scale?

The only real difference I can think of between pay-what-you-can (PWYC) and a sliding scale, is that the sliding scale states a very specific range of money you'll accept. There is a minimum and there is a maximum.



Whereas with PWYC, typically there's no minimum and there's no maximum. It's 100 per cent up to the person making the payment. There might be an amount that is either explicitly or implicitly suggested as the "market value" of the workshop or offering, but what the participant pays truly is 100 per cent up to them. Nobody is ever going to be turned away for not having enough money. No amount is too small or too large.

I have used sliding scale in my work from time to time.

I have a workshop called *The Hot Box*. It's a very small workshop with a limit of five people. Each person gets an hour to be hot-seated by the group where we (myself and the other participants) ask them "What's your problem?" We take 30 minutes just to understand the hot-seater's issue with no advice allowed. After that half-hour there's a lot of advice given. Because *The Hot Box* was limited to five people, I thought, "Man, if I do pay-what-you-can, and it just happens to be one of those days where everyone pays \$50, I'm going to feel really terrible, especially if I'm paying for a venue, accommodations and my travel to the city to do it." I realized a sliding-scale made more sense with that particular workshop because I was restricting the numbers and I had some hard, bottom-line costs. In the end, I made it a sliding scale from \$250 to \$500. They could pay anywhere in that range and I knew I'd feel good. If everyone paid \$250 I'd both feel and be fine.

So it's important to really take time when developing a workshop, offering, or product to consider what payment structure will work best for it. Really look at your risk – do you have to put out money for a venue, accommodations, workshop materials, travel? How much are you spending on marketing the workshop? How much net income do you *need* to walk out to feel good, and not used? Discuss it with a trusted colleague or two to make sure you don't have blind spots.

What Are Some of the Mistakes You Might Make With PWYC?

Mistake #1: “Put the Money in the Basket”

Energetically, many people are so incredibly uneasy in their relationship with money and they never deal with that and so it gets offloaded onto the gathered participants. “I don’t want to deal with this money so you deal with it,” says the workshop leader’s body language and verbal subtext to the participants.

And, that’s if they even remember to mention it. Sometimes they will utterly forget or they might simply avoid bringing up the money altogether.



Years ago, I organized an event in Edmonton called Green Drinks. When it began, we asked for a dollar or two at the door. We had fifty or sixty people at the first few events. Then we bumped it to a suggested \$5 donation. But the woman who took over the organizing of Green Drinks felt so uneasy about asking for money that she couldn’t even stand at the door as people came in. This also coincided with the attendance at Green Drinks dropping significantly, down to about 20 people per month, and she suggested several times that the low numbers were because we were doing the event too often and charging too much. “Let’s do it every other month instead of every month,” she suggested. “And do it for free.” This was her solution. Instead, we decided that my friend Hannah and I would take back the organizing reigns and we decided to make the price \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door (effectively tripling the price) and went back to every month. Instead of getting only 20 people per Green Drinks event we were getting between 100 to 140 people per event.

So often, there’s a deep awkwardness about money. The energy around the necessary money-part of someone’s conscious, green, holistic, etc. business feels scattered and disorganized.

One of the biggest issues that can arise from avoiding talking about the donation portion is that, even if none of the participants feel awkward about it, they will simply forget to give even though they wanted to because the basket wasn’t clearly marked and no one reminded them. They genuinely think, “I’m going to give \$20.” They’ll have it in their hand and walk right by the basket. They just get caught up in a conversation. They’ll feel bad about it later but it’ll be too late.

Pay-what-you-can (PWYC) requires some intentionality. It can't be treated casually or avoided. I take 5-10 minutes to remind people at the beginning of the workshop that it's PWYC and to describe quickly what that means to me — this is so that people aren't worrying about if they'll pay the “right” amount of the workshop for the entire day, dividing their attention and stressing themselves out. And in the 15 minutes at the end of my workshops, I take time to speak in detail about money and the payment for the workshop (you'll find a transcript of exactly what I say at the end of this eBook). I create a moment to talk about the money. I don't let this go too late in the day because I'm trying to fit in just “one more thing” so there's no time to talk about it — though I used to, and I learned not to.

Part of that learning led me to have a required question in my registration form asking if a participant needs to leave early. This way I know who to speak to at a break about arranging their payment so they don't slip away without having had a chance to pay me. This alleviates an awkwardness for both of us and they can tip-toe out when they need to, confident that they've been able to pay me, and I don't feel like someone's giving my workshop the slip.

If you treat money casually, your participants will treat money casually. And you're the one who will get hurt or feel used up.

Mistake #2: Having No Follow-Up Offers

Another mistake people make is not developing their back end (the “front end” being the initial transaction). Meaning, they run a PWYC workshop and have absolutely nothing to offer people at the end of the workshop. There's nothing else.

Consider what you could offer them: another workshop, one-on-one coaching, an eBook or home-study program, a more advanced group mentorship program, etc. It's true that when you're starting out, you will have less to offer, these are things that you develop over a career. But it's certainly something to be conscious of. This is a good reason to be sure you get permission to add participants of your live workshops to be added to your e-list, so you can continue to connect as you develop your offerings.

It's really important to think about what's going to happen after your workshop so that it isn't the final step in your participants' journey with you, but just one of many steps along the way.

Mistake #3: Only Trying it Once

It is also easy to give up after doing one event on a PWYC basis because it doesn't make the money you think you deserved. Instead, it's useful to know that it can take a while to find your stride with this pricing model. Instead of getting bitter, trying getting better at it. Get curious, not curmudgeonly. Ask yourself, "How can I tweak this to make it even better and make it more valuable?"

Risks of PWYC To Your Participants

Risk #1: They Have to Deal With Your Weirdness Around Money

If you are using pay-what-you-can (PWYC) as a way to avoid dealing with your own discomforts around money, your participants will be made to bear the burden of that. If you offload your money issues onto the participants with a big ol' "No *you* decide what it's worth," that can actually feel extremely uncomfortable for people. In fact, enough people have been through this at least once that they might decide not to come because it's just that painful to sit through.



A mistake that many people make when using PWYC for a workshop or a concert is that, when the time comes to ask for money, they say something like, "Everybody, thanks for coming. Thanks so much. There's a basket at the back of the room. Put some money in it if you want to put some money in. You don't have to though. There's no pressure. You know . . . and maybe you're broke? In fact, if there's money in the basket and you need some, just take some out. We're just trying to make this work accessible and you coming is a gift to us. We don't do this for the money."

Of course, that's an exaggeration, but not much. Verbally, few people go that far but energetically, that is fairly accurate. Non-verbally that all comes through loud and clear. What's tragic about it is that there are people who actually *want* to pay you who will simply forget and walk right by the plate with no ill intention, they just kind of miss it. It's painful. And when they remember they feel embarrassed and awkward, and that's not a great relationship status for you to have with potential long-term clients.

Ways to Reduce Risk #1:

- **Create a conscious moment where you talk about the money.** Craft the words you'll say. You can read a transcript of what I say later in this eBook. Give yourself enough time in your schedule to do this. And be firm with yourself about honouring this.
- **Give your participants a clear "full price" or "market value" that they see when they register** (and ideally give them the option to pay this). More on this later.

Risk #2: “What If I Pay Too Little?”

When I first came across the pay-what-you-can (PWYC) concept, I felt like I’d found the Holy Grail. I thought “This is incredible. There’s no risk at all.” I get at least four times the people at my workshops than I might otherwise, by simply using the PWYC pricing structure. And because of that I get more money for less effort. Less money *per person* perhaps (on average), but more money overall, without all the sweat and stress.

The risk that most people as participants carry when going to regularly priced workshops is “Will this be worth it? Am I going to get my money’s worth?” That doesn’t exist in PWYC. They’re going to get their money’s worth, because they decide what they will pay.

The risk they experience walking in is this: “Am I going to pay enough? Will I insult or offend him? Will I take up a spot of somebody else who could have paid more?” People are scared of making a mistake here and being judged. They are afraid they’re going to pay at the end and you’re going to look and say, “Oh, um, huh, that’s interesting. That’s much smaller than I was thinking. Wow.”

Here’s how I learned this: I did an introductory workshop in Calgary. There was an older couple there who I seemed to have a good rapport with. On the little feedback form at the end of the workshop, they checked the box saying, “Please contact me. I’d love to explore coming to the PWYC weekend workshop.”

So I called them. I asked, “Do you two think you’re coming to the workshop?”

“No, we don’t think we’re going to come,” they said.

“Oh, how come?” I replied.

“We just don’t think we can pay you what we think it’s going to be worth,” they told me.

That will happen for people. The discomfort around deciding what to pay, and not being able to pay what they imagine is enough, can be very real for people. That’s something that could stop people from going in the first place. For most people, PWYC will reduce the risk of taking the first step. For others, it dramatically increases the risk. Later in this eBook, you’ll learn some simple, straightforward strategies for dealing with this.

Ways to Reduce Risk #2:

- **Acknowledge the discomfort early on and reassure:** If you're doing an introductory workshop then you might say, near the beginning of the workshop, "I know PWYC can feel uncomfortable and that some of you are sitting here wondering if what you're going to pay at the end of this workshop is enough. But let me reassure you that whatever you pay at the end will be perfect. I've been doing PWYC workshops for over a decade and it works well for me. I just need you to trust me on this. Truly. And do wait until the very end to decide because . . . you never know . . . I could have a weak finish." And, if you're just starting with PWYC and you're not sure that it's going to work for you, you could say that, "I'm not sure this is going to be sustainable for me. It's an experiment. If it doesn't work, then I won't continue it. It's all good either way." The key is to take the pressure off of them.
- **Explain Your Selfish Rationale for Doing PWYC:** Now this could be in your sales letter or in the workshop. Ideally both. It's not always enough to say, "I'm cool with it." It's also important to let people know *why* you're cool with it and why it works for you. You can explicitly share the Eleven Core Benefits of PWYC (that I shared earlier in this eBook). With the older couple from Calgary, I told them, "Look, I've already printed the workbooks. There are zero extra costs for me having you there at the workshop, and whatever you pay is more money for me. So please do come."
- **Explain Your Selfless Rationale for Doing PWYC:** It could be good to share your politics around this all and say, "Here's politically why I'm doing it." You can talk about your class analysis, your understanding of the economic systems, the trouble of debt and the federal reserve, the ways that racism creates and reinforces poverty, etc.
- **Speak About Smaller Payments:** Sometimes I tell people, "When people give a small amount that means this is somebody who would have never been able to afford this in any other way, and they get access to something useful, and that feels really good to me."

Risks of PWYC to You

Risk #1: They Pay Too Little

If you don't think about it strategically, and just say, "Show up, pay-what-you-can," there's a way that people could see that as: "Oh, so it's basically free." If you're too casual with the pricing then they are less likely to value it and mindlessly drop a \$20 bill in the basket at the end of your weekend long workshop. And this can lead to resentment. Let's be real about it. It's likely to happen. You do a workshop for which you've busted your ass in preparation. You've poured your heart and soul into it and then you go through the payments at the end of the day and . . . they paid you almost nothing. That's going to hurt. Now, the next workshop everyone might pay you more. It seems to average out but certainly I've had workshops where, for whatever constellation of reasons, I was paid very little. And it can't help but sting a bit. It's hard not to take it personally and want to never do PWYC again. I understand. But, if you follow the advice in this eBook, you're more likely to have this work out than not.



One way to deal with this is to get a deposit of an amount where, if that's all they paid, you'd feel okay. Another is to get your hard costs covered. If you're doing a residential retreat where you're renting an entire venue, feeding and housing people, you could say, "You pay the hard costs and then PWYC on top of that at the end." That way you are guaranteed not to lose any money.

Risk #2: Pitching Your "Next Level" Products and Services Is More Complicated

I haven't figured out how to do pitching yet, partly because it's just not something I practice myself. There's this sort of model of workshops where people come and do an introductory workshop and then they're sold into this next thing. At that thing, they're sold into the next level. Introductory workshop into weekend workshop into group coaching program, etc. It's a fine model, but it's got an additional wrinkle with a pay-what-you-can (PWYC) pricing model.

Normally, what would happen when pitching next level services is that workshop-goers have already paid for the weekend before they came, or it's a free weekend. The money has been handled, so when they get to the end, or the Saturday night, whenever the hammer drops, it's like, "Hey, there's this thing that's going to cost more money."

Whereas when I'm doing PWYC, participants aren't actually paying until the very end of the workshop, which is modelled after how street performers do their shows. You don't pay until the very end of the show and it's already over.

There are a couple of options and people can figure out what's best for them. One is you do the PWYC payment process, and then you have 15 minutes after that where you say, "Now I'd like to talk about the next level stuff." Another option could be you say, "Look, now it's time to PWYC, and if you would like to sign up for this much more expensive coaching thing, whatever you pay today can go towards that." If you're thinking about doing that, I encourage you to look at the numbers and if it still feels exciting for you, and you think, "Yes, I would still be really excited to do the weekend workshop even if whatever they pay for the weekend went towards the coaching program," do it.

You could do that and that would definitely land as very generous. I would just say with all of this, and with that type of a move, make sure it's not coming from a place of collapsing. There's the real potential for over-giving that I've previously described.

It's something to experiment with. You might do it one week and say, "Look, I may never do this again. I'm seeing what the response is."

Could you do the offer for the coaching program via email or phone after the weekend is over?

You could also do that. The thing I would say is it's probably good to seed that during the weekend. You could even frame it as, "Look, there's an advanced level thing. I will follow-up with you afterwards by email but here's the deal with it." Then you give your best two minute pitch where you say, "Here's why you're going to want it. Check that email. It's a solid thing. Here's who it's for, here's who it's not for. Here's why you should sign up." Then you send the email but I would be framing it and making sure they know it's coming and that any legitimate scarcity involved is properly highlighted (e.g. only so many spots). You could also say: "Hey, if you really want to get in on this, email me."

But here's the crux of it: If I get to the end of my weekend workshop and I just say, "Hey, everybody, there's a Level Two weekend workshop and you can sign up right now," well, let's say somebody was going to pay \$800 for the weekend. Now they see that for another \$400, they could sign up for this other thing, the group coaching program. They might just think, "Well, then I'll just pay \$400 for the weekend and \$400 for this coaching program. I'll split it." So you still make the \$800 but you make \$400 for the weekend itself. I haven't figured out a way around it because this sort of pitching isn't something I ever do. But it's good to be aware of, if it's something you are anticipating doing in your work.

Risk #3: Taxes

If you live in a country with goods and services taxes that you would have to pay for something like a workshop, well . . . You eat the tax on it. You can't ask everyone to pay the amount that feels perfect for them and then say, "Okay. Whatever that number is, add 5 per cent for tax." So remember that you'll need to be aware of what your net take is from a PWYC fee.

Risk #4: No-shows

If you do PWYC (and have no clear cancellation policy and ask no deposit) you will have a higher rate of people no showing your workshops. With the \$25 deposit for my day-long workshops I still get a 10 per cent no-show rate or so. People pay \$25 and just don't show up. As I've shared earlier, when I was leading weekend workshops with no deposit it was much worse. If people pay for the whole thing up front, you'll see almost no no-shows.

Risk #5: What If You Want to Charge Full Price?

This isn't a big issue, but it's worth considering. If you've done PWYC or sliding scale for years and then decide to charge a flat rate that works for you, there's the chance that some people will accuse you of selling out or no longer being accessible. Most people will understand but, should you decide PWYC is not the way to go, there could be some blow back.

Risk #6: Thoughtlessness and Selfishness

I remember reading the note I got from someone on his payment form from the workshop. He wrote, "Hey, I can't afford to pay for the day but going to get some of your eBooks." I shook my head. "Right," I thought. "So, I don't get paid for today." What he was telling me was that he actually could afford to pay for the workshop. He had the money. But he decided that he wanted to get a little bit more for the money. It felt like a punch in the gut while he lifted my wallet from my pocket. All the goodwill I'd worked so hard to generate during the day felt utterly squandered.

I recall after another workshop a participant giving me a lift somewhere. She told me, with immense enthusiasm, why she hadn't paid me anything for the day: "I feel like we're partners in business now and so I'll pay you as this begins to work and invest the money I have into my business!" She was clearly excited and this all made sense to her. She reasoned that she could send me more money in the future if she invested her money into her work and then she'd send me more than she could have given me today and this would be better for me!

I sat there for a moment wondering if I should say anything. I decided I'd better because if I didn't deal with it right away, she'd go on doing the same thing to others down the road. "Okay. I'm going to level with you. This feels awful. What you're telling me is that I don't get paid today. You got a free workshop. And that's okay. That's part of why I do PWYC. You don't owe me anything. We're good on the money front. If you can't afford to pay anything for the workshop that's really okay. What doesn't feel okay is you framing this as a partnership without ever asking me if that's what I want. If you were to ask me, 'Would you rather get \$50 from me now or \$200 in a year?' I would have told you that I'd rather have the \$50 now and that nothing is owed to me beyond that. By making this promise, you're asking me to trust you and we don't know each other at all. You're opening a loop and now, for the next year, I get to wonder if you'll even remember to pay. So I don't get paid today."

She got quiet. It all landed for her. A few months later, she sent me some money for the workshop. On the upside, this led to me telling people at the end of my workshop (when I remember) to not promise to send me more money. "Whatever you pay today," I'll say, "We are complete. It's all good. You don't owe me anything. Please don't promise to send more. If you do, it has me wondering about it. If you want to send me more down the road, please feel free. Just don't create an expectation around it in my mind."

Every once in a while I get a comment on a card, with no payment attached, like "I'll figure something out" or "I'll pay you back down the road when I apply this and it helps." It's a strange thing. You knew this workshop was PWYC. You knew you would be asked to pay at the end. You could have been ready. But instead, even though there's been no evidence that I'm open to it, you decide that you're going to tweak the arrangement to work for you and leave me unsure if I'll be paid for your attendance. It's not kind. You're paying for the workshop. You're not paying for applying it. I'm in control of the workshop I give. I'm not in control of what you do with it. It is worthwhile to speak to this in the moments before the payment is given.

In another workshop, someone wrote this on their follow-up form, "valuable workshop but nothing I didn't already know," and paid nothing. It was heartbreaking to read. I got paid nothing for the effort, nothing for trying, nothing for spending eight hours on my feet at the front of the room busting my ass to help them. It felt hard to imagine that there was literally nothing new for her. That she'd heard it all before. It felt a bit like someone telling a waiter, "I've had this food before so I'm not paying or tipping." What often feels magical suddenly felt so transactional.

She was at my workshop alright. I worked while she shopped for ideas. Now, it could be that she was right and I was wrong. It's a risk I take with PWYC, that people will pay nothing. It rarely happens. Sometimes people can't pay but they write something lovely on the card about the depth of their appreciation for my work, what I do, and how they wish they could pay more. That feels good. But the "choosing" not to pay because of a manufactured perception doesn't.

PWYC

In 2017 I led a weekend workshop and a participant had her four payments scheduled. She never sent the last one. She just ghosted. After trying to reach her several times, I sent her this email:

“It has been four months since I have heard from you.

It feels important to tell you something of the impact of this all on me.

I've done my workshops on a PWYC basis for over a decade and people vanishing like this is incredibly rare. So much so that I wrote this piece: marketingforhippies.com/trust

I think people think I'm joking when I say that, ‘I couldn't keep doing this if people didn't pay,’ that my continuing to offer my work in such a way will happen regardless of how much they pay, if they pay or how they engage with me about it. I don't know if people consider how the way they conduct themselves around this might impact others.

Your not paying and vanishing is full of consequence you may not have intended: it has me rethinking if doing PWYC makes sense, it has me wondering about it from time to time and brings bad feelings into my body. The next time I do a workshop, I will look out onto the group and feel less trusting because of it, ‘Will someone else do to me what she did?,’ and then there's the making notes to follow up and now writing you this final note and the time and emotional labour involved in that, which I have to do because you didn't.

If this kind of dynamic were to become even a little more common, I would stop offering PWYC. This is the truth of it. If I felt like it was no longer, despite my best efforts, being honoured as a practice, I don't know if it would honour the practice or my well-being to continue it.

In truth, it is not about the money per se.

It's that, for a whole weekend, I give everything I have. I do my best not to leave anything on the table. I put myself and my financial well-being in the hands of those who attend. Some weekends I make a lot of money. Some I don't. It all seems to even out. In the end, I don't mind it if people don't pay much. If I feel like I showed up and people paid a sincere amount . . . it might be economically frustrating, but it's good food for my heart. I know something wonderful happened. We did something so unauthorized by the system. We operated based on a sort of radical trust so uncommon in these times. I can see people leaving inspired by the possibility and wondering how they might weave it into their work.

'Does everyone pay?' they ask me.

I nod. ‘Almost everyone pays. I've almost never had anyone ghost on me.’

PWYC

But when this manner of thing happens, someone vanishing, it feels like a violation of the spirit of the whole thing.

If you can't afford to pay more, that's how it is and we can bless and release the commitment.

But to be in the position of waiting and wondering, following up and not hearing back . . . it speaks to a deep lack of respect which goes against everything I'm trying to cultivate in the weekend. I do my best to foster goodwill and, in truth, I am not bullet proof. It hurts when it is not returned.

If you are able to send your final payment, I would happily receive it. If you can't and don't want to send more? Well, I wouldn't ever want someone to pay money they didn't want to pay.

I hope you are well. I won't be emailing you anymore. I ask you to think on these things.”

I never heard back from her. I hope she is alive and well. But it felt better to roll the dice and speak my truth so that things might be clean between us should we ever reconnect.

PWYC can lift up strangeness in people around money. You'll get a chance to see selfishness, entitlement, and also shame from people that you might have wished wasn't there. It doesn't happen a lot, but it's worth naming.

PWYC will lift up some bad and/or thoughtless behaviour.

Doesn't PWYC Devalue a Workshop?

One of the big concerns about PWYC becomes, “Oh, you’re devaluing it. People really value things they pay for.”

I hear the concern and I would render it differently. The truth in it is that people do tend to value more things they have *invested* themselves in. It could be a relationship. It could be a workshop. It could be a product.

The more invested people are in it, the more they value it. That’s 100 per cent true in my experience.

What’s not true is that the investment has to be money.

For example, if you wanted to do some one-on-one PWYC coaching, you might give people three hours of homework to do before the call and that, if they don’t do it, that you’ll reschedule the call. That’s just part of the deal. That would be a way to get people to invest themselves in the work and, therefore, value it more.

With that investment of time, they show up differently than if you say, “Yes sure, just give me a call. We’ll do pay-what-you-can.”



On Framing Price: How Do You Ensure That You Are Paid What You Are Worth?

This is one of the most common questions I get from people around using the PWYC pricing approach.

It's a strange thing. Many people praise my PWYC approach as innovative and generous but then they say "value yourself" and "you're worth more."

My main response is that the question, "How do you ensure that you are paid what you are worth?" is a dead end. What you are paid has literally nothing to do with what you are worth as a human.



"Ok," comes the follow-up question. "But I mean, how do you make sure that you get paid what the workshop is worth?"

To which the response is, "What makes you think your workshop is worth a particular amount? How do you know it's worth that? Might it not be true that it's worth more to one person than another? Maybe one person comes knowing everything you're about to teach whereas it's all new for another. Maybe one person is a better fit for the workshop and another one shouldn't even be there at all. Is it really worth the same amount to them both?"

This is an important thing to linger over: pricing, worth.

The first thing to understand is that pricing is one hundred percent arbitrary. It's all made up. There are no pricing gods who suggest, certify and sanctify your pricing as the "right" price. There is no such thing as the "right" price in any moral sense. There's just the price you decide to charge and whether or not people are willing to pay it. The most honest thing we can say about our prices is, "Well, that's what I decided to charge."

How do we decide? It's a bigger conversation than this eBook is built for but, in brief, there are two steps.

Step One: identify the facts of the situation. What do others charge in a similar field, with similar experience? What are the costs associated with doing or making the thing you sell? What are your financial needs and goals? Where else is money coming in for you? How robust is your sales funnel? What are your basic costs (including food, shelter, etc.)?

Step Two: is to sit with the price starting with a number that is far too low and then go to one that's far too high. And then, like a pendulum, to let yourself swing back and forth in your mind until you find the one where your body relaxes.

That's my clearest understanding of how to find the best price for you.

And so, let's assume you've sorted out the amount that you'd enjoy to be paid, the amount where you could welcome someone to your workshop with zero resentment and only good vibes.

Then the question might become, "Okay. How do I get people to pay me as close to that as possible in my payments?"

And . . . that's still not quite the right question because if we're doing PWYC pricing in a genuine way, it can't be about subtly trying to get people to pay us a certain amount. Whatever they pay *must* be okay.

Perhaps better questions might be, "How do I get the most amount of money that people feel good about paying *on average*?" or "How do I give so much value to people that they want to pay me as much as they are honestly able to pay?" Or, "How can I make sure that I'm receiving an amount of money that feels good to me for the workshop I'm doing?" Or, "How can I set things up so that people end up paying me the amount that feels just right for them and also really good for me?"

Somewhere in all of those questions you should find a faithful guide to sorting out how you propose to get paid in all of this.

The most vital part of PWYC is properly framing the price for the participants.

Framing it before they arrived was a game changer for me.

Here's the conundrum . . . if you *don't* frame the price at all during the workshop, you could do a four day workshop and be paid \$50 by someone who doesn't know any better and who might think that was a fair price. If you *do* frame the price during the workshop, the question becomes *how* and *when* will you do that?

When I first began, there was no deposit and no suggested price. People would just show up for the workshop and I would have to, throughout the course of the workshop, either not speak about it or try to subtly suggest the value of what they were getting by mentioning other workshops to which I'd been and how much I paid for those or by having them do some math on how much the approaches from this workshop could mean to them. Those approaches always felt "off" to me because they were covert. There was an unspoken hidden agenda on my end to communicate something. It was indirect.

But the alternative seemed to be to wait until they got there and, at some point in the workshop say, “So . . . by the way, you’d pay \$2,000 anywhere else.” That would be a real shock for people. It would be unkind. It would be a bait and switch. They were baited with “pay whatever you want” and then, once they were hooked, right before they go to pay, they get the message, “Actually, it’s worth this much and you’ll feel crappy if you don’t pay that.”

In 2012, I found myself in Cairo with friends from around the world and we went to the pyramids. I was told in no uncertain terms to not to trust anyone there, that the place was full of scam artists. This proved to be true. But, coming out of one of the pyramids, a man in a white shirt greeted us, smiling like the sun.

“You want picture on a camel?” he asked.

And I really did.

“How much?” I asked.

“Whatever you want to pay,” he said. “Whatever makes you happy.”

Well, this was too good to pass up. I did my workshops on a PWYC basis and so, even if he screwed me, it might make a good story for an eBook.

“20 Egyptian pounds,” I offered.

“Whatever makes you happy,” he repeated.

Since the price had already been established, I couldn’t imagine how it could go wrong. So he led us to his friends who helped us to mount the camels and we were walked over to a place where we could get not one but two of the pyramids in the photo. But they had no cameras and so I handed him my iPhone. And then my heart lurched. I’d just given my expensive phone to a con artist. But no . . . the photo was taken and the phone returned. Perhaps I had judged them too harshly.

But then the con came. We were separated and each of us asked to pay, individually, for the whole damned thing. They wanted each of us to pay for all the photos. They wanted me to pay for it. They wanted my friend from Selma to pay for it. They wanted my friend from Bolivia to pay for it. It was outrageous.

I handed my fellow 20 Egyptian pounds.

He looked at me with disgust. “What is this?” he said holding the bill.

“This is the payment I agreed to with the fellow in the white shirt.”

“Who? Who in the white shirt? There is no one with a white shirt. This is nothing. This is one American dollar.”

I looked around to locate the original fellow but he was long gone. I shook my head. “You’re not getting any more money,” I told him.

He continued to berate me and I suggested he should have clarified what he wanted up front. I walked over to my friends who were being treated even worse.

“I should call the police on you!” one of them declared to my friend Valentina from Bolivia.

“Ai! We should!” and she called the local tourist police officer over.

All of a sudden the camel photographers’ tone changed. They were all conciliation and brotherhood again.

That is how people fear it will go with your workshops: that you will tell them that whatever they pay is fine and then be mortally offended with what they can manage.

This is what I was wrestling with in relation to my workshops. But when to speak to it?

I had to do something because saying nothing about it was also a problem. Some of the potential participants had no idea what would be a “fair price.” Is it \$2,000, \$5,000, \$200, \$25, who knows? I saw was it was stressful for people to have no idea what to pay.

I was talking with an Australian street performer, Nick Nickolas, and I said to him, “What would you say is the biggest mistake street performers make when they do their pitch at the end of the show?” He said, “They save too much of it for the end. They do this whole show and then there is this whole, long thing. It’s too long. They wait and backload everything in. It’s joke after joke. You’re not sure what to do, how much to give, pull out a five from your wallet – give me your wallet. It’s like a million of these hat-lines or they make a big two-minute speech. I just say, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, you know how it works. This is my hat. This is my heart. This is my art. Thank you.’ If you watch my show, you’ll notice that I’m sort of doing the pitch throughout the show.”

The next time I watched his show, the cups and balls, I noticed how he did a trick, and said, “An old lady saw me do that trick and she came up to me after the show and said, ‘I like that. That show was really good. That show was worth \$5.’” Then he looks at the audience meaningfully, “I just thought I’d point that out.”

Another street performer, Gazzo Macée, would make a reference in his show, “If you’d seen me do this at a pub, you’d buy me a beer and a beer is \$5. I just thought I’d point that out.” He’s naming it. He’s priming the audience for them to expect that he’s going to ask for some money, but that it’s going to be reasonable. Subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, they were both letting their audiences know what a fair price would be.

PWYC

By talking about pricing and value earlier, you can take the pressure off the moment at the end. This is vital. The advantage we have over street performers is that we get to have sales letters and registration forms. We get to email participants before the event, etc. We can, and I believe we *should*, do the framing of the price before they ever show up and we should do it so well that there's much less need to speak about the PWYC offer beyond reviewing some logistics and a few well chosen words at the beginning and the end of your workshop.

Why “Charging What You're Worth” is Bullshit

You have, no doubt, been told to “charge what you’re worth.”

No matter where I go, there is a conversation to be had on this. If you're on many email lists you'll see this idea being exhorted frequently. And I'd like to share my concerns with it.

First of all, let me say this: I am a big fan of right livelihood. I love seeing people be able to be paid for doing what they love and are gifted at. I hate seeing people charge so much less than they really need and struggling. I hate seeing people give away their work for free and then not being able to pay their bills. I think a lot of people need to raise their prices a bit (and some a lot).

And I hate seeing people charge so much more than they need to get the “maximum profit.”

So, you’d think I’d be a natural fan of “charging what we’re worth.”

But I’m really not.

Here’s my take: I think that the notion of charging what you're worth is bullshit.

We see this all over the place with statements of “Don't you deserve to earn six figures?” or “You work so hard! Don't you deserve to take that trip to Hawaii?” A sense of entitlement constantly being fed that we deserve more than we're getting. If we're not earning the kind of money we'd like to earn it's often framed as evidence that we don't believe in our worth enough. But this is where it gets sticky. We are all worthy of having our needs met. We all deserve that (and, sadly, a lot of people don't believe they are entitled to having their needs met). But we don't deserve whatever we want (including other people's money) just because we feel good about ourselves.

But, for the most part, I want to suggest that the whole notion of connecting our worth to the amount of money we charge or earn is a mistake. I think it does far more harm than good. I think it make us neurotic because it reinforces the idea that our deepest worth as a person is, in any way, connected to the amount of money we should charge. It has us look constantly at our own reflection is the mirror vs. out into the real world and our impact on others.

After all, when you hire someone to do something for you, are you paying them for their inherent value as a person or for the self-serving results they bring to you?

Imagine a contractor doing a crap job of the renovations on your house and finishing way over budget and months late (and then leaving a huge mess behind him). You're infuriated. You refuse

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SOCIETY'S
IDEA OF
SUCCESS**

to pay what he's asking, and his response is, "Hey! I'm worth it." He's missing the point. This isn't about his value as a person. It's about the value you did or did not receive. Period. That's the only factor in what you pay him.

The Dalai Lama is a wonderful man. But I don't think I'd hire him as my contractor.

And my contractor might be a miserable bastard . . . who's so good that he's worth every penny he charges.

To go a cut deeper: The Dalai Lama isn't worth any more as a person than that sonnovabitch contractor.

So, any focus on our worth as a person misses, I think, the whole point of what we charge.

Like most things in business, we tend to get caught up in looking at it from our own point of view, rather than the point of view of the client. From their point of view, they could care less about "you're worth." They just really don't think about it that much. If at all.

But it goes deeper.

After all, if someone charges more than you, does that make them worth three times more than you as a person?

I charge \$300/hour for my personal coaching. Does that make my time inherently half as valuable as someone who charges \$600/hour? Or is it just the amount that felt right for me to charge given my lifestyle, gut feeling and business model?

Terms of "financial net worth" are often used in the financial industry. We hear news anchors report that, "Warren Buffett is worth billions!" But is he worth that or are those simply his net financial assets? When we don't have money, we say "I'm broke" as if there were some relationship between our personal level of brokenness and money. When people work minimum wage jobs, they might be told, "you're worth more than that!"

But are we actually worth more than the others working with us?

Is a person worth more because they're wealthier? Is Donald Trump's life worth more than Gandhi's?

I imagine a modern day marketing guru speaking to Martin Luther King Jr.'s mother and saying, "Why just be a stay at home mom? You're thinking too small! Start trading your time for dollars. You need leverage if you want to make a real difference in the world. Stop doing the one-to-one model of raising your son. What you really want to do is the one-to-many model. Don't you value your time? Isn't your time worth more than that? So, hire a nanny and start building your business so you can be an empowered woman. What if you started teaching workshops on how to be a

social justice leader and converted the attendees into a high end coaching package on how to be more effective at social change? You could create informational products and sell those via mail order and make millions! And think of how much bigger an impact you'd have on the world with all that money and with that size of following!"

Of course, sadly for all humanity, because she thought so small and didn't value her time, all she did was raise up Martin Luther King Jr. to be the man he was. So sad for all of us.

Another way to look at this: if you stop doing work that pays money are you worth less?

Even more so: if you have no money (or worse, are deep in debt) are you worth any less as a person?

If you choose to take a path that has you earn less money than you could have — is that always a sign of low self esteem? Maybe you have the skill set to be a badass corporate CEO but you choose to spend your time on your art and running a non-profit doing radical work that challenges the basis of the economy and doesn't pay you well. Is this a sign that you don't value your time? Or is it a sign that, perhaps, you value something even more than your individual life?

What if your service is legitimately worth far more than people can afford to pay you?

Of course, this can get slippery.

Some people tend to genuinely collapse emotionally and walk through life as if everyone else's needs matter more than their own. They become doormats.

Other people posture and walk through life blind to the needs of others.

Neither of those is healthy.

Ideally, we are in a composed place of valuing the needs of others as well as our own equally. Isn't that the heart of democracy and good relationships? That we all matter equally?

So, what is your time worth?

Imagine you had only a week to live. Could you put a price tag on that time. If someone offered you a billion for a day — with the caveat that you had to spend it on yourself alone — would you take it? Isn't our time on this planet invaluable? You don't know how much longer you have on this planet.

And what about the gifts you have to offer. If you offer healing, isn't that invaluable? Isn't helping someone heal heartache, end their fights in their marriage, become a better parent . . . isn't that invaluable? How does one put a price tag on this? And yet, would you pay someone an infinity of

money for “healing?” Just because the essence of something is profoundly worthy doesn’t mean that you can charge whatever you want.

If I offered you a billion dollars to remove all your memories of your time with your one true love – would you take it?

How on Earth do we put a price on these things?

This entire economy seems hell bent on putting a price tag on everything so we can profit from it. One could argue that the core of the economy (credit to Derrick Jensen on this notion) is about converting living things into dead things. We turn mountain tops into pop cans, trees into paper and people into numbers. If we can kill it, we can control it, which means we can sell it, and profit from it. Life can't be controlled so easily. But if we can't control and own something and put a price tag on it, does that mean it has no value?

Do the forests have no value on their own? Does land have no value unless it is developed? Does the work of mothers around the world have no economic value? Are the oceans only useful to us as long as they have fish? Is water only valuable so long as we can bottle it and sell it?

In American writer, teacher, and activist Starhawk’s brilliant book *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, she speaks to the notion of earth, air, fire/energy, water and spirit being the five things that no one can or should own because they are the forces that create and sustain all life. They are beyond any monetary value. After all, without them, what does the economy matter?

So, if your life, your time on this Earth, and your unique gifts are invaluable . . . how does one put a price tag on them? How does one ascribe worth to something that is worthy beyond measure? There’s a difference between the value of the essence of what you’re doing and the particular form you offer it in. Healing might be priceless but I’m not paying you a million dollars for a massage.

Outside of the essential economic and activist work of protecting “the commons” (earth, air, fire/energy, water and spirit) and making sure that nobody ever owns them and nobody ever even tried to privatize or put a price tag on them, it seems to me that we do it by taking inherent worth out of the picture entirely.

We stop trying to put a price tag on our value as a person and we start asking ourselves what price makes sense given the lifestyle we want to have, what our real needs are, the amount that would feel good and genuinely sustain us and be accessible to our ideal clients. It also takes into consideration what others are charging and how much demand there is for what you’re offering.

What you charge has nothing (precisely zero) to do with what you're worth as a person and everything (100 per cent) to do with the value people perceive they're getting in what you're offering. Period. That's it.

PWYC

How to set your price is a topic for another blog, but I can promise that taking your inherent self worth out of the picture will make the process a lot clearer for you.

In my world, pricing is a practical consideration worth your time to deeply consider, but it's got nothing to do with what you're worth.

Ten Key PWYC Suggestions

PWYC Suggestion #1: Pay At The Door When You Come in vs. Pay At The End

One of the key differences in how I do pay-what-you-can (PWYC) to how many others do it is that I invite people to decide what to pay me at the *end* of the workshop rather than at the beginning. I am asking them to let me do my show and decide on their fee once it's over like a street performer. This seems more fair to me, and also more conscious and intentional than the too-casual, "throw some money in the bowl on your way in. It's by donation." If a street performer asked their audience to pay in advance, it would no longer be PWYC. It would be a ticket to an outdoor show. This is because we know that the set up for buskers is that you pay at the end.



Not that there isn't a long-standing tradition for PWYC at the beginning of events. As my friend Susan tells me, "in the independent dance community, it's very common to do a PWYC matinee during a performance run. And the aim with that is to make it more affordable and accessible, allow for another performance opportunity for the dancers in a theatre space that you've already got rented. In these cases, it is a payment at the door, but someone is always holding the 'jar' at the door and it's offered to you to add your payment when you walk in. You know what the show is "valued" at because the ticket prices for the non-PWYC shows are well and clearly publicized and stated.

In these cases, we're also not dealing with huge stakes. It's also true that people usually know that it's PWYC coming in because it's been publicized at that. A \$20-50 ticketed performance might then bring in \$5-15 per person. It also allows families to bring children as it's an easier time of day to attend with a kid, and not as expensive when buying multiple tickets.

I think many people do it almost without thinking as a nod to the needs of the community – because it's a poor one, and everyone is attending one another's shows anyways, meaning the community is very much one another's primary audience for the most part.

PWYC Suggestion #2: Ensure They Know it's PWYC Before They Arrive

If they don't understand the payment structure before they arrive, then you can run into situations where people are surprised and feel incredibly pressured to do something they didn't sign up for (i.e. give you more money than they expected). "I thought it was free!" or "I thought the deposit was the full price for the event. I didn't think that I'd need to pay more at the end," they will say. It's awful to go to an event that you thought was free, and then they say, "Surprise, we're asking for money." That's no good. It can't be a surprise. The PWYC payment structure has to be clear walking in. It's really important that people sort of understand that setup. "It's pay-what-you-can, and here's how it works."

It's also true that you will occasionally get someone who is just not a good reader. And in spite of you clearly stating your PWYC structure, they will still say they're surprised, or thought it was only the deposit amount. In these cases, of course it's awkward, but mostly because I can point out that I did my part. It was clear. They just didn't take in the information.

PWYC Suggestion #3: Ask For a Deposit

I charge a \$100 deposit on my weekend workshops, and \$25 for my day-long workshops.

For years, I resisted having a deposit because I love the idea of participants not paying; just showing up.

But then Seattle happened to me. Early in my career, I hosted a weekend workshop there. Over the course of promoting the workshop, I had 35 people enrol. There was no deposit. They just told me they were coming. I was over the moon with those numbers. At 35 people, it was more than worthwhile to go.

And then, in the weeks before I flew to Seattle, 15 people withdrew, sent their regrets. That was discouraging but there were still 20 people registered, I could work with that. But then the day before, as I was calling people just seeing if they needed help with directions or anything else (this was before I could easily send an email with a map attached), people were telling me, "Oh yeah, I can't make it. I guess I should have called."

I thought, "Yeah. That would have been nice." Then only 12 people showed up in the end. But I'd printed out materials for 20 and booked a space for 20. It went from 35 to 12.

Because there was no deposit, there was no real skin in the game for those registrants.

I had already paid for 20 workshop binders (at about \$40 per binder). I had already paid for a venue that was now much bigger than I needed. At that time I used to have my assistant do a welcome call to everybody coming where they would go over everything the participants needed for the weekend. And then they also got a welcome email. There were a number of things we did to be ready for these folks. And when almost half of them didn't come, there was so much time and energy wasted.

Honestly it was heartbreaking. I was so angry and discouraged about it.

And that can mean that you're not on your game for a workshop — you can almost end up taking out your disappointment on the people who actually did follow through and show up. And that's not fair to anyone.

That's when I decided to start charging a deposit for people to lock in their spots. I asked myself, "Okay, what's an amount that, even if they cancelled, I'd feel ok about, and I wouldn't resent them for not showing up?"

For me, that number was \$100 for a weekend workshop, and \$25 for a day-long workshop.

Once I implemented it, there was a dramatic drop in no-shows. People are more serious about something they've paid for — even a deposit. Once they've already invested something, it's more likely to go in their calendar. They're more likely to get their childcare arranged or schedule cleared to do this thing they've committed to when they pay a deposit.

And of course sometimes things come up for people, they get sick, something pressing in the family happens, their car stops running, etc. but the deposit seems to mitigate the forgetfulness of signing up for something half-heartedly, or not taking their or my commitment seriously.

The other thing I do with my deposits is that they *are* refundable up to a week before the workshop start date. This is clearly stated in the registration process. Sometimes I'll offer a refund for someone who's gotten really sick at the last minute, or hold the deposit for a future workshop, but it's at my discretion after seven days out, and that feels better for me as the presenter with money on the line for hard expenses like rent and materials.

In the beginning, (and this example is for my weekend workshop with the \$100 deposit) before online payments were a thing, people often paid by cheques that they would mail to me and I'd say, "Postdate it for two days after the workshop so I can't cash it. You're not even paying anything really, but it's just in case you bail two weeks before the thing. If it's more than two weeks before, I'll give you all your money back. If it's within the two weeks, I'll give you \$50. If it's the week of, you lose the money entirely."

These days, given that most people are paying with credit card or PayPal, I just have them pay the deposit in full. Simple. No one balks at it.

I think the cleanest version of this would be that as soon as they show up at a workshop with a significant deposit (e.g. \$100), everyone gets a \$100 bill. Their deposit would be refunded to them. But that's a logistical hassle for me and I haven't done it, and people haven't seemed to mind. On the other hand, I've had people drop out halfway through a workshop. So, if it's PWYC and you don't have a deposit from them, then you've lost their payment completely.

And, if people can't afford the \$100 deposit, I just work something out for them. I don't turn people away due to a lack of funds ever. And I state this clearly on my sales page, and certainly people contacted me to take advantage of this. In all these cases we've both felt really good about the individual agreement we came to.

However, if you have per-person hard costs associated with your workshop (e.g. you're hosting a retreat and each person will have onsite accommodations, and you're feeding them) then you might need to charge more than \$100 for the deposit. One of my colleagues Russell Scott leads meditation retreats and his modification of PWYC is that people pay the base costs of the hard expenses upfront and then, at the end, they pay anything more they'd like to pay as the PWYC portion. With this, you'd want to have a very clear refund/cancellation policy (e.g. if they cancel their attendance within two weeks of the event they lose the entire deposit they paid for the accommodations and food).

PWYC Suggestion #4: The Three-Payment Options

Over the years, I finally had to admit that PWYC was unnerving for some people. I had to admit that there were people who simply wouldn't come because of this alternative pricing model. They would look at the sales letter and want to come but then have the following conversation with themselves, "What if it just feels so weird and awkward, I'm going to sit through this whole thing, and the whole time I'll be wondering what to give, so I just won't go and then I don't have to deal with it. Maybe he's got some eBooks . . ."

It's good to know that for some people, given a choice of PWYC or a flat rate, they would actually prefer to pay the flat rate and honestly feel much better about it.

That is what I finally had to admit.

And this was one of the biggest revolutions in my PWYC world.

In short, here's what I did . . .

For day-long workshops, I gave people three payment options when they signed up:

- Payment Option #1: \$25 Deposit + PWYC at the end of the workshop
- Payment Option #2: \$200 flat fee
- Payment Option #3: \$67 three-pay (\$67 now, and then I invoice them for the next two months at \$67 per month)

This accomplishes a vital thing: It frames the “full price” as \$200.

This has multiple benefits:

Benefit #1: Everyone can exhale. No more guessing. It's clear. No one needs to feel guilty for paying \$200 and thinking it's too little or paying \$150 and imagining it to be vastly short of what they “should” be paying.

Benefit #2: I make more money upfront. Maybe we have 5-10 per cent of the people attending each workshop who choose to pay one of these “full price” options (whether in the one-time payment of \$200 or the three-pay option of \$67). But that *does* increase the amount of money I get.

Benefit #3: I make more money in the PWYC portion. I make more money here because, without needing to speak about it at all during the day-long workshop, everyone walks in knowing the “full,” market-value price that I've chosen for it. There's no need for me to drop hints. There's no need for me to awkwardly insinuate a ballpark. It was right there in front of them when they signed up and they chose to do the PWYC portion instead. Once I started doing this, I felt so much more relaxed about the money and people also began paying a bit more.

Since implementing these three options for my day-long workshop, I pretty consistently make \$115 per person on average.

For weekend workshops, there are three options as well:

- Payment Option #1: \$100 deposit + PWYC at end of the weekend
- Payment Option #2: \$1,800 flat fee
- Payment Option #3: \$425 four-pay (where I invite them to choose four dates between the end of the workshop and one year hence, and to make their payments on these dates. There is some admin to stay on top of here for you to remind them, but I've found it to be effective.)

I can't overstate the importance of giving them pricing options like this upfront, before they sign up. They must see these prices as a part of their enrolment process.

PWYC Suggestion #5: Ask for Multiple Payments

Inviting multiple payments from people was the biggest breakthrough I had in running PWYC workshops.

Note: For a day-long workshop, I recommend asking for a deposit before participants come (I ask for \$25) and then a single payment at the end (I get \$115 on average per participant). For a weekend workshop, I ask for a \$100 deposit, plus a PWYC commitment at the end made over multiple payments – usually three or four (I get \$1,000 on average over those three-four payments from participants).

Let me break this down.

I think part of why PWYC works is because most entrepreneurs are often pretty cash-flow poor. They're rich in so many ways, but not necessarily in cash on-hand in the moment.

When I first started, I was making about \$150 to \$200 per workshop. I was fine with that. I was younger at the time. "Whatever, this is great," I thought, "How perfect."

But what I found was people were coming up to me at the end with their payment envelope. They'd pull me aside, and they'd always look so guilt-ridden. Sometimes they were even crying. They'd say, "Tad, I want to give you more than this, but I literally can't pay rent if I give you more, but this was so good." And this was after I did the whole taking-the-pressure-off pitch at the end, saying whatever you pay is okay, etc., and they were still wrecked by the whole thing.

I would say, "It's okay. It's cool. That's why it's PWYC. This is the perfect amount," but there was still that guilt for a lot of people.

I thought to myself, "This is not a healthy relationship. They're going to avoid me next time I'm in town because they think they owe me something. This is no good." But it kept happening for years because I just didn't know what else to do.

I knew something had to change but not what. Then I got this idea. I said, "Why don't I give them the choice to postdate it." At the end, I said, "You can pay with more than one cheque if you want," but nobody did it. I think because the option hadn't been framed before walking into the room, they hadn't had time to consider it, and also some of them hadn't brought chequebooks.

Then I actually made multiple payments a condition of attending the weekend workshop. I was very nervous to make the change. I said, "If you attend, I will ask you to pay with three cheques: one payable now and two postdated up until six months. Those cheques can be for any amounts and on any dates. Spread them out as you want."

Essentially, I was offering them a PWYC payment plan. A payment plan where they decided on how much they would pay and when.

And this circles back to one of the central issues of approaching PWYC with the “put the money on the plate at the back of the room” approach. Most entrepreneurs are broke. They don’t have the money right now. Really and truly.

It took me a few workshops to smoothly work the multi-payment requirement in and figure out all the places I needed to communicate it.

Then I found that my income per person went up from \$150-\$200 to \$300-\$500. Now what I’ve shifted it to, and I think I’ll stay with it, is four cheques (or online payments) payable over a year. The average contribution went up to about \$800 per person in this model. Since then, it’s gone up further to approximately \$1000 per person. I think this is also due to my shrinking the number of people who can come to my workshop to six people. The more personalized attention and help people get, the more money they will want to give (and justify to themselves).

In my more recent few weekend workshops in my living room, where I hosted less than 10 people per workshop, the amount I got was about \$1000 per person on average. I think part of the reason for the increase has to do with a smaller group and each person receiving more individualized attention. Also, using my living room is way less overhead for me – and because I live alone, I’m not upsetting the balance for family or housemates. It works really well.

I remember once being paid \$1,800 by a woman in Toronto for a weekend workshop. It was the first time I’d ever been paid so much for a such a workshop. I thought to myself, “I have to send some of this money back. This is too much.” I had to breathe through that initial reaction and talk myself back from that ledge. “It’s okay,” I had to remind myself. “They wanted to. This is pay-what-you-can. I specifically told them not to pay me more than felt right or more than they could afford.” You may find the same thing.

Also of note, I’m about 15 years into presenting marketing workshops, honing my thoughts and stance on marketing, and developing products. So certainly another factor in my increased income is the increased weight and value of my experience and expertise. But I’m sure it’s not only that. I’m sure that the inviting, low-pressure and clear PWYC multi-payment process is a huge contributor.

In reality, some people just give me one cheque or eTransfer. They say, “Tad, I can give you more money in one cheque, let’s just be done with it,” which of course I’m happy with. But the beauty is that it’s very much their choice, they understand they could spread it out if they wished to.

When I started doing the three cheques, it dramatically cut the amount of guilt I was getting from participants at the end. And with the four cheques, the guilt was completely gone. I almost never get any guilt at the end of a workshop anymore. I almost never hear anyone say, “Tad, I want to give you more money but I can’t.”

To be clear, by doing the multiple payments I make about four times the money I would have with a single payment and none of the guilt I was getting.

More money and less guilt.

PWYC Suggestion #6: Make it a Part Of Your Business, Not The Whole Thing.

PWYC is not an either/or proposition. You don’t have to use PWYC pricing for everything you do. I sell my eBooks, home-study programs, online group programs and coaching at a flat rate. The only thing I use PWYC pricing on is my live workshops. That’s it. I know others who only do PWYC pricing on their online products. I know others who only do PWYC pricing on their coaching and nothing else. You can do it any way you want.

PWYC Suggestion #7: Use PWYC On Items That Are Low Cost to You But High Value to Them

This is a very helpful distinction. Don’t do PWYC pricing on something where your hard costs are fixed and high. If you’re a sculptor and you just spent thousands on your travertine marble and hundreds of hours sculpting, I would urge you not to offer your work up on PWYC pricing. But for an eBook? Why not? For a live workshop where the venue is affordable and you were going to be in town anyway so the travel isn’t really a cost, and you’re staying for free with friends? Why not? Virtual products, live workshops and online group programs lend themselves to PWYC pricing because it costs you nothing to have additional people there. In fact, you make more money for having them there, even if it’s just another 10 dollars. If you’re just starting out and are leading a lot of introductory workshops, why not make them PWYC? You’ll make some money, it’s high value to them and low to no cost (beyond time) to you. This eBook focuses on PWYC workshops because I think live workshops are one of the best arenas for PWYC. Why? They’re there with you live and so there’s both a connection formed and a greater accountability. Your workshops are high value to them but their attendance is low-to-no cost to you. This is the ideal set up. Online programs lack the intimacy and accountability that live workshops provide and selling online products this way lacks it even more.

PWYC Suggestion #8: Add Connection and Remove Pressure

This is a meta-level suggestion. If you want PWYC pricing to work for you in your workshops long term then you must focus on creating more connection and reducing pressure. It's vitally important that they feel good about what they pay after they leave the workshop. Sure, you can manipulate people into giving you more money at the end but, if they leave and, in the hours, days and weeks after they realize that they got worked by you and were unconsciously coerced into paying more than was really appropriate or felt right to them, they won't come back and, at best, they won't recommend your work to their friends and, at worst, they will warn people away from you. At the end, you might feel a panic and the urge to do whatever you can to get them to pay more. But just take a deep breath. You can trust people. You really can. Instead of adding pressure at the end, focus on removing it. Make sure they know that, whatever they pay, it's the perfect amount. This works out much better for both of you in the long run.

PWYC Suggestion #9: Appealing to The Deeper Why

One of the discoveries of those who've worked with PWYC over time and experimented with it is that people will give more money if they know that money is contributing to a bigger cause that matters to them. Of course, this could be used as another covert manipulative tactic but let me share my understanding of how this might be brought in. The first thing you could do, which I don't, is let people know that a certain per cent of the money they pay you will go to some charity that is related to the work that you do. In my workshops, and you'll be able to read this in the transcript at the bottom, I make the point that they aren't paying for their spot in the workshop. It was, in all practical, philosophical and pertinent ways it could be meant, paid for by the people who came to the last workshops. If they hadn't paid, I wouldn't still be doing PWYC workshops. I'm no fool. If PWYC stopped working, I'd stop doing it. It has to sustain me too. I'm not going to lose money leading workshops (if I'm going to lose money it's going to be spending money in bookstores). So, what are they paying for exactly? They are paying for the possibility of this workshop staying in the world so that others might have a chance to attend it. That's the reality of it, as best as I can render it. Certainly their payment is about me being paid and making money. But it's also about the persistence of this workshop, and more broadly, PWYC ventures in the marketplace.

PWYC Suggestion #10: Smaller Numbers + More Personalized Workshops = More Money Per Person

This one might go without saying but it's worth pointing out. If your workshop is mostly lecture style (as my day-long workshop is) then the number of people there won't change how much you make per person. If I have 10 people there, I'll get about \$_____ per person. If I have fifty people, I still make about \$_____ per person. It's not going to vary much. It might go down a bit because people may look around at your sold-out room of a hundred people and do the math and think to themselves, "Wow. They're going to get rich today. They don't need my money that much," and decide to pay less, but it's not a huge issue.

If your workshop has smaller numbers and is highly personalized to the people who are there, you'll make more money per person. For example, my weekend workshop *The Radical Business Intensive* is a PWYC weekend workshop that I've done for up to 30 people. The format is lecture, with Q&A and structured exercises. I make about \$800 per person at that workshop. My weekend workshop, *The Living Room Sessions*, has a limit of six people and it's entirely hot seat based. This means that each person gets two hours of focused coaching from myself and the group. There is no formal content to the event at all. It's all tailored to who's there. I email pages of notes and resources to people after their session (I'm typing while they talk). At *The Living Room Sessions* I make about \$1150 per person. So that's a \$350 difference per person. I think that difference is due to the level of personalization (which you can't do once the numbers go too high).

On Trust

In the fall of 2012 got an email from a participant of my spring workshop in the United Kingdom that had taken place a few months prior.

She wanted to send me money.

I had completely forgotten about this.

At the weekend workshop, which I run on a pay-what-you-can (PWYC) basis she'd told me, "I'll be in the United States in the summer. Can I just mail you a cheque then? It'll be easier for me and then I can send it from my US account. No fees for you, etc."

So, of course I said, "Yes! That sounds wonderful." I've found that when you trust people, they trust you back.

Here's a secret: I keep terrible track of the money people owe me.

Here's the truth: I don't keep track of the money people owe me unless we make a specific agreement on timing.

At all.

And yet, they keep sending it to me.

I don't make them promise. I don't have them sign a contract to pay me. I often invite them to give me a sense of timing. And sometimes they can't. And sometimes I forget to write it down. You'll notice my business is not called "Accounting for Hippies."

And yet, I'm rarely taken advantage of. Months later, long after I've forgotten, people send me emails wanting to send me money. Once a man showed up to a workshop with a cheque for 80 more dollars. He just wanted me to have it. I used to run free introductory workshops. And some people would insist on paying me for them.

"But this is a free workshop."

They'd look at me, "Right . . ." and continue writing out their cheque.

Often, when you genuinely give to people, they want to give back. When people give to you from their heart, it is such an incredible joy to give back. Because it's no longer a transaction, it's the experience of community. It's the beauty of being a generosity-based business.



Years ago, I went to see Mumford and Sons live in concert in Toronto. I'd bought two tickets thinking I'd find someone to go with me. Amazingly, I couldn't find a damn person. What?! It's Mumford and Sons! So I went with the extra ticket and found a young couple holding up a sign for a ticket. They already had one but they needed one more. I offered them my extra one.

"What do we owe you?"

I shook my head, "No no. Just pay it forward. Enjoy the show."

"WHAT?!! Really? Oh my god! Thank you so much!" she started to tear up and the fellow looked gobsmacked.

We chatted a bit and I went in to what ended up being one of the best live music shows I've ever been to.

Months later, I get a letter from the couple with a picture of themselves at the concert. They'd made a donation for the ticket amount to Amnesty International in my name. And they wanted to let me know what that gift had meant to them.

People are good.

It's no secret that when I was young I wanted to be a street performer, because it was so honest. Street Performers go out onto the street and not only do they get money at the end . . . they have people *wanting* to give them money . . . feeling *happy* to give them money. They want to thank the busker for the gift of the show. They want to acknowledge the work that must go into the craft of it. I once saw a busker tell his audience halfway through the show that they should come up to his hat and put in half of the money they were intending to pay at the end so he didn't get screwed if people walked away at the end (which will always happen some of the time, no matter how good you are).

But what's more powerful than imposing morality?

Helping people find their own goodness.

And then your only role is to keep experiencing happy delight when they do.

Another message I received well after a workshop: "You may have noticed that the \$200 cheque I gave to you last August has bounced! I am very sorry — I was anticipating that it had been withdrawn on the first of August, and spent money without checking. I have since gone to the bank and have a money order ready for you. (I am told you cannot re-issue a rejected cheque.) Please let me know your mailing address, and I will send it to you as soon as possible. I still think of the things I learned in your seminar — it was very useful, and certainly enjoyable!"

In March of 2015 I received an email money transfer for \$700 from a couple who had attended my weekend workshop the previous year. I remembered them as being my favourite people in that particular workshop, and they sent along this note with the payment:

“My wife and myself took your *Marketing for Hippies* course last year in Vancouver (I think it was December) and at the time, we promised to make regular monthly payments which we didn't do and didn't communicate we wouldn't do. Our financial situation has dramatically improved and I sent you earlier today an eTransfer with our payment for the course.

Even more than the content of your course, which is proving very useful, it's the spirit in which you run your business that inspired me the most. Last month, my associate and I took on to start offering our services on a pay-what-you-want basis and are experimenting with it. It is both deeply satisfying and the source of a lot of questioning about what we offer and the perceived value of our own courses. I am not sure where it will go yet, but we are definitely going for it. Thank you for not only doing it yourself, but sharing that you do, it made a big difference for me.”

At the end of yet another one of my weekend workshops I was paid incredibly well by one of the participants and he told me there were three reasons he'd paid so well, "Firstly, some people in the room could not pay or paid very little and we have to keep you operating. Secondly, I learned a lot it was worth it for me, most people have never been in sales so they don't know how good it was. And thirdly, as Clive Owens said in the trailer for the *The Inside Man*, “because I can.”

So much of the world of sales, and so much of the world of politics, is full people saying to us, “trust me.”

But you know what's more powerful?

Saying, “I trust you.”

Your PWYC Sales Letter

How your pay-what-you-can (PWYC) system is worded and spoken is vital.

But you don't need to go over the top.

I used to have three pages written about PWYC and my political reasons why I did it, etc. It was too much. You don't need it. You could write a blog or a page about it on your website and have a hyperlink to it and simply state "if you'd like to read more about the political and social reasons why I chose PWYC, just click here (and link to the page)."

I have experimented with many approaches to this but here's what I finally landed on that feels the best on both ends.

What's vital to your sales letters is that the PWYC pricing is *not* mentioned in a footnote in small print. PWYC a core part of your offer. It must be impossible to miss that your workshop or offering is PWYC.

Here's an example of how I do it for my weekend workshop.

You can see most of this on my sales letter here: marketingforhippies.com/lrs-edmonton

The Headline:

First off, the sub-headline of the sales letter makes the pricing very clear:

The Living Room Sessions

Edmonton. January 10-13, 2019

— 7 Spaces Left —

I'd like to host you and nine others in my living room for an application-only, pay-what-you-can marketing training where you get over \$780 of marketing materials the moment you're accepted.

Some Important Words on The Price:

There are three ways you can pay:

1. Pay-what-you-can: This is how I invite you to pay. This means that, if accepted, you will send in a \$100 deposit to confirm your spot. This is refundable up until two weeks before the week. After that, it is not. Then, at the end of the weekend, in the last 15 minutes as we finish and settle up, you can pay whatever you want to pay on top of that, whatever you are able. Whatever you pay is perfect. There's no minimum. There's no maximum. Truly. If the \$100 deposit is too much, email me at admin@marketingforhippies.com and we can work something out.

Catch #2: You will pay me in four instalments spread out over a year. These PWYC payments can be for any amounts on any dates within one year. I've opted for this approach for my weekend workshops because, in my experience, entrepreneurs are cash-flow poor and it's easier to spread payments out rather than people feeling terrible that they can't pay much all in one moment.

- **PWYC Option A: Four Cheques.** One cheque payable immediately and the remaining three payable over one year on dates that work for you.
- **PWYC Option B: via PayPal.** You can send these manually or I can set up four PayPal auto-payments. One immediately and the rest over the coming year on dates that work for you.
- **PWYC Option C: via eTransfer.** You can pay me via eTransfer direct from your bank. I can set up email reminders to help you remember, for the dates that work for you.

2. Pay in Full at Market Value: I offer this only because pay-what-you-can makes some people deeply uneasy and who would rather just have it all settled before it gets started. If that's the case, you can pay the market value of \$1800 upfront.

3. Payment Plan for Market Value: Again, I'd rather you do pay-what-you-can but, if that feels uncomfortable to you, another option is to make four payments of \$450 over a schedule of your choice within one year.

To be very clear: you are not expected to pay anywhere close to \$1800. It's a legitimate PWYC deal. I want this to be accessible and sustainable for you.

The Video:

Next there's a video embedded in the page, in which I explain the PWYC premise and what the workshop is about. You can watch it here: youtube.com/watch?v=LNxNf_z5Efg



How I Speak About The PWYC Pricing in My Sales Letter:

Below is the actual wording I use. Feel free to copy what is useful for you and tailor it as you need.

Some Important Words on The Price:

There are three ways you can pay:

Option #1: Pay in Full at Market Value: I offer this only because pay-what-you-can makes some people deeply uneasy and they would rather just have it all settled before the workshop gets started. If that's the case, you can pay the market value of \$1,800 upfront.

Option #2: Payment Plan for Market Value: Again, I'd rather you do PWYC but, if that feels uncomfortable to you, another option is to make four payments of \$450 over a schedule of your choice within one year, with the first payment made by the end of the workshop.

PWYC

Option #3: PWYC: This is how I invite you to pay. This means that, if accepted, you will send in a \$100 deposit to confirm your spot. This deposit is refundable up until two weeks before the workshop. After that, it is not. Then, at the end of the weekend, in the last 15 minutes as we finish and settle up, you can pay whatever you want to pay on top of that, whatever you are able. Whatever you pay is perfect. There's no minimum. There's no maximum. Truly. If the \$100 deposit is too much, email me at admin@marketingforhippies.com and we can work something out.

You will pay me in four instalments spread out over a year. These PWYC payments can be for any amounts on any dates within one year. I've opted for this approach for my weekend workshops because, in my experience, entrepreneurs are cash-flow poor and it's easier to spread payments out, rather than having people feeling terrible that they can't pay much all in one moment.

*****To be very clear: you are not expected to pay anywhere close to \$1,800. It's a legitimate PWYC deal. I want this to be accessible and sustainable for you.*****

- **PWYC Option A: four cheques.** One cheque payable immediately and the remaining three payable over one year on dates that work for you.
- **PWYC Option B: via PayPal.** You can send these manually or I can set up four PayPal auto-payments. One immediately and the rest over the coming year on dates that work for you.
- **PWYC Option C: via eTransfer.** You can pay me via eTransfer direct from your bank. I can set up email reminders to help you remember, for the dates that work for you.

The Registration Form:

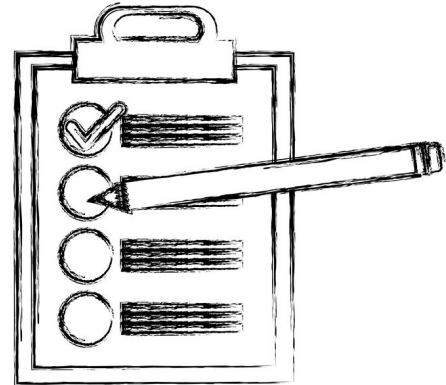
On the registration form, I give them three options for paying (which I also outline in the video). You can pay full price, a four-payment plan of the full price, or PWYC (\$100 deposit + PWYC at the end).

You can see what I've come up with here: marketingforhippies.com/lrs-registration

About Application Forms

When people want to attend my weekend workshop I have them apply. It's not automatic that they get in. Due to the more intimate nature of the events, I am screening people to make sure I really want to spend the full weekend with them. And also to make sure that the applicant is in a place in their own work where my workshop will be beneficial to them. If they are accepted, then I send them the link to the registration form.

Here's my application form: marketingforhippies.com/lrs-application



I've shifted it from being a registration form to an application form, and that's because I work with hippies. I've had a few experiences with people who were in super-mainstream businesses who could not have even identified the smell of patchouli to save their life. It just weirded me out because they made some comments such as, "Yeah, I've been thinking about setting up a sweatshop in China," or something. I was like, "Wow! That's not going to fly for me." I just don't want to work with someone whose values are so at odds with mine. And I will not be the best marketing coach for them either because of this values-disconnect.

Part of the benefit of doing PWYC pricing is that it is a reminder to yourself that, if you're going to be so generous with the pricing and take on such risk then you certainly get to be as choosy as you want to be about who you work with.

One more thing about an application versus a registration, is that I find potential participants take it more seriously. They fill in their application very thoughtfully. They consider themselves and their work a little more objectively. And then there's the thrill of being accepted into something — which, while not the primary objective of my choosing an application process, is a satisfying side benefit for applicants.

And on the rare occasions (and they are rare) that I don't accept someone to one of my application programs — be it because I don't feel they are ready for the level of the workshop I'm hosting, or I don't think I'm the right fit for them, or because I see that our values are at odds — I take the opportunity to write to them honestly and sincerely, and to share some links to other parts of my work, be it eBooks or other programs, and to colleagues of mine who I think would be a good fit. I think this is really important when you are disappointing someone, perhaps, with a "no" to their application. And certainly, in many cases, they could be potential future clients.

PWYC

You could add stipulations to your sales letter, “If this works, in exchange for the generous pricing, I’ll ask you to write me a testimonial,” or “There’s all this homework that you have to do,” or “You have to do this whole application process.”

You could do all of these things without PWYC but you might feel more at ease asking these extras of your potential participants if it is PWYC, and your participants might feel more amenable to them given the flexibility in your pricing.

Payment Forms

It’s important that a participant’s payment at the end of the workshop is clear, easy and simple.

You don’t want them to suddenly get confused.

Here’s what I do to keep it simple and to make it easy for me to count and keep track of payments afterwards.

I’ve got a little form each person gets near the end of my workshop — day-long or weekend. I go over it just after lunch time in my day-long workshops and on the Saturday of a weekend workshop that ends on Sunday. More about this below.

The forms are slightly different for the day-long and weekend workshops. I’m sharing them at the end of this section, and you’re welcome to use them, modifying them to your own needs.

I used to be paid almost entirely in cheques and so I had a little envelope of cheques in my office, and I would look through it from time to time and see that there were some cheques to be cashed. You could also list these in a calendar if you’re feeling organized. Almost everyone pays online now. And so, for weekend workshops, I simply send my assistant a photo of each of the forms and she enters those into a spreadsheet and follows up with people if they miss payments. I forward notices of payment (be it via eTransfer, PayPal, or credit card) to her via email as they come in so that she can know and mark who has paid and who hasn’t on our tracking document.

I tend to print my PWYC forms off as postcard-sized. Literally just on regular, old paper, nothing fancy required.

Regarding the timing of handing out the PWYC forms, and this is really key. I don’t give the actual forms out until the end of my day-long workshop. But I go over them in detail right after lunch. I literally hold one up and read out and describe the different questions and pieces of info on it. It takes 10 minutes at the most. I do it right after lunch rather than when they arrive in the morning to allow for late comers (which there will always be), to make sure *every participant* in the room gets this information.

First off (before the PWYC form comes out) I have people get into groups of four or five to share what they've gotten from the day so far and how they imagine applying it to their individual business situations. I find that it gives them the digestion time they need after lunch both physically and mentally.

Then I usually go into an open Q&A for a bit. And then, I say, "Okay. Before we dive back into the workshop, I want to take a few minutes to go over the PWYC form that I'll be handing out at the end of the workshop, because if I wait until the end I won't give enough time for this." And then I just walk them through it, step by step. There's no rush. I'm not selling anything. There's no ask. I'm just trying to make sure that everything on the form is clear. There's no enthusiasm in my voice. My affect is pretty flat during this time. Why? Because they're ready for a pitch. As soon as I start speaking about my future offerings, a part of them goes into fight, flight or freeze mode. They can feel the pitch coming. And so it's vital that I do nothing to trigger that reaction. It's a very low-key soft sell. Not even a sell, just me sharing what the process is.

Then I'll say, "Any questions?" Sometimes there are. Sometimes there aren't.

Once we're done that, we continue.

The mercy of this is that, by the time we get to the end of the workshop, all I need to do is hand the forms out. I don't need to walk people through them because the ending is absolutely where they're expecting the big huge pitch to occur. When it doesn't, it's immensely refreshing to them. And, given that I'm about to ask them for money (on a PWYC basis) it's vital that I don't trigger any pressure at this moment.

Along with these forms, I also have a stack of envelopes I carry with me, and everyone gets an envelope with their form. Then they can feel private and secure that no one else will take a look at theirs when passing them back to me. It's truly an agreement between me and each individual participant. It's only our business. Also, if someone is using a cheque or cash, this envelope keeps their payment secure for me. It can be really easy when handling cash after a PWYC workshop to lose track of who paid you what in spite of best administrative intentions, and these envelopes and the forms in them help keep that clear. I generally don't get people to seal the envelopes so I can use them over and over again, all their info goes on the paper form *inside* the envelope.

If someone wants to use a credit card, I do carry the Square payment service with me. It's literally a little square swipe-thing that I can plug into my phone to accept credit card payments. And if the swipe doesn't work for some reason, I can also key the card number in directly into the Square app. This costs me a little bit more in fees, but it sure beats carrying around people's credit card numbers when I'm on the road, or worrying about not writing down a number correctly.

You'll see on the forms that I include a final bit where people can choose to be on a number of my email and/or program notification lists. These are all programs that I've described to them in the course of the workshop, because each of my workshops and offerings applies to a different aspect of marketing. This is a great way to gain "express permission" from people to add them to your email lists, increasing your chance of continuing to work with them. For anyone who's dealing with General Data Protection Regulation in the European Union (known commonly by it's acronym GDPR) in Europe, getting express permission is now absolutely required. And it's low pressure, they don't have to raise their hand, they just circle the ones (or don't) that they want to hear about, and then my assistant adds them to the appropriate lists. It's a powerful and honest way to build your contact lists.

Day-Long Workshop Payment Form

Name:
Email:
Phone:
Amount Paid:
Circle One:
<div> <div>Cheque</div> <div>Paypal</div> <div>Credit Card</div> <div>eTransfer</div> <div>Cash</div> </div>
Follow-Up Options (circle whatever appeals, if any): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email list (newsletter, colleagues, touring, FB) Puttering Sessions advance notice list Mentorship Program advance notice list Weekend Workshop advance notice list I'd like to host your day-long workshop and could guarantee 20 people in the room

Weekend Workshop Payment Form

Name:

City Workshop Was Held In:

Date:

Email:

Phone:

Payment Method:

Circle One:

Cheque Paypal Credit Card eTransfer Cash

1st Payment Amount and Date:

2nd Payment Amount and Date:

3rd Payment Amount and Date:

4th Payment Amount and Date:

Follow-Up Options (circle whatever appeals, if any):

- Email list (newsletter, colleagues, touring, Facebook)
- Puttering Sessions advance notice list
- Mentorship Program advance notice list
- Weekend Workshop advance notice list
- I'd like to host your day-long workshop and could guarantee 20 people in the room

The PWYC Pitch

If you've done everything right at your workshop, you've set yourself and the participants up for a good end to your day or weekend together.

At this point, they know what the “full price” of the workshop is because that was a clearly stated part of their registration. They know, if it's a weekend workshop, that they're being invited to give multiple payments. You've already walked through the payment/follow-up form earlier. They know why you're doing pay-what-you-can (PWYC) pricing.

The pieces are all in place.

You just have to not screw it up.

And there's one key way you can screw it up: by putting too much pressure on them.

It might seem, at the end, that's when you want to really put on the pressure and employ subtle, sneaky, stealth tactics to get them to feel the pressure to pay more.

My take on this is that, actually, by the end of a workshop, there's so much pressure built up already. It's immense. They've been sitting there the whole time wondering what they're going to pay. It's a pressure cooker.

If, at this point, you decide to break out the sales scripts and guilt trips to see if you can get more money out of your participants you will absolutely get less or, if you do get more, you will utterly lose all the goodwill and trust you built by offering your workshop on a PWYC basis.

I encourage you to have a very light a touch at the end.

Let me tell you a story: years ago, I was in Winnipeg leading a series of workshops. They went incredibly well. And I happened to have colleagues from Calgary who helped holistic practitioners build Wordpress websites, I'd seen their workshop a number of times and loved it for its content and tone. They were in Saskatchewan visiting family and so I told them, “Come to Winnipeg and lead a workshop! I'll introduce you to my people.” During the week I'd been in Winnipeg I'd connected with about 100 local folks and the vibes were incredibly good.



And so, my colleagues agreed to come and I introduced them to my new, but highly responsive and trusting, Winnipeg list. I endorsed their Wordpress for holistic practitioners workshop, which was an hour-long, lunchtime session. About 20 people attended.

Keep in mind, I'd had these colleagues lead their Wordpress for holistic practitioners workshop three or four times at my day-long workshops when I was in Calgary. It was always a delight. They delivered real value. It was helpful. Good vibes galore.

Cut to a month later and my friend Jeff Golfman, who'd hosted me in Winnipeg, drove me from Toronto to Guelph. He brought up the workshop my colleagues had led.

"Right! How did that workshop go?" I asked. "I've been so swamped on the road and haven't even checked in."

"Well . . . the workshop was good but the ending was not." And then he proceeded to tell me what he'd heard from a number of participants who'd attended.

The workshop had been the same one I'd seen. It's an educational hour that builds immense trust.

And then right at the end, those trusted colleagues of mine did a big, heavy pitch. Everything had been great right up until that moment. The room loved them and trusted them. The participants were so glad that I'd endorsed this work and told them about it. And then the gears changed and one of the presenters began to make an offer. Fine enough. But the hour was up and someone got up to go back to work (since this was their lunch break) and my colleague told her, "Please sit down. The workshop isn't over yet." Hackles began to rise. My colleague pitched the package he wanted to sell and wrote the price, a big one, up on the flip chart. He told them all about why it was worth much more than this stated price. And then he crossed it out and wrote a smaller amount, telling them that this was the price he'd be offering them today. Everything about it reeked of formula and greasy salesy-ness. And then his partner (who also happened to be his wife), in a tone that sounded utterly insincere and infomercial-esque, said, "Honey, I really like these people. Can't we offer them a better deal?" And he took out a different coloured marker, crossed out the second price and wrote a third one, much lower and said, "Ok. But this price is only good for the first seven people and only until 5pm today."

False scarcity. Time pressure.

People left disgusted and angry.

Had they, at the end, said something like, “Thank you for your time. If you’re interested in being on our email list, check this box. If you’re interested in Option A check this one, and Option B check this one. We’re happy to stick around for a while to answer questions, but also feel free to email or call us,” I suspect they would have absolutely cleaned up over the coming two years from the people in the room and the word-of-mouth that they’d spread. Not only that, they would have been able to come back to Winnipeg a few months later to do the same workshop.

As it was, their name was mud in the Winnipeg community. And after I spoke to them about how things had played out in Winnipeg, and they told me they wouldn’t apologize to my folks for doing that kind of a pitch to them, I told them I could no longer endorse them.

They had it all and they lost it in those five final minutes by putting too much pressure on the group. And honestly, because I’d recommended them, they had tarnished my name with the community I’d built up in Winnipeg by extension.

Once you’ve given your workshop, given your best for the day or the weekend, you have to trust the value of your offering. And, when people get a lot of value, they just naturally want to give a lot back. That’s the human principle of reciprocity.

What will kill this feeling of reciprocity is if your participants feel pressured. Imagine if, at the end of a weekend I said, “So people, I hope you liked the weekend. If you look at the doors, you’ll notice I taped them shut. So alright you, punk asses. It’s time to PWYC. And I know most of you can pay me more than you were thinking of. Do you know how many years it took me to develop this workshop? Do you know how much money I spent learning all of this?!”

That kind of pressure kills the natural generosity that people have in a moment like this.

If you say this is pay-what-you-can, but then you’re unloading some kind of, “Really it’s worth this much,” people are going to resist that. When you push, people resist.

And honestly, if people feel pressure right at the end to pay a certain amount when they were told that they could pay whatever they wanted, they will actually pay you less because now they are resisting you, pushing back against you to preserve their autonomy.

To state it another way, if you’ve done your job well, your participants already want to give to you in this moment. You don’t need to do anything. The less you do the better.

It’s a sacred moment and it’s important that we treat it as such.

With street performing, the best pitches I’ve ever seen at the end are always the most gracious.

The worst ones? Full of pressure and guilt trips. I saw one street performer halfway through his show say, “I’m not working out here for free.” It was halfway through his show. He said, “I’m going to put this blindfold on for this trick and you can pay half now and half at the end.” It was terrible. Half the audience left.

You’ve just got to be cool about it. You’ve got to trust people. They need to receive this message from you: “I trust you to pay the amount that’s perfect for you and I trust that’s going to work out.”

On one level, what we do at the end of the day is bring the day to a close. But on another level, it’s an opening. We are trying to open up a conversation around something that’s uncomfortable for people: money.

For a day-long workshop, I tend to take about 10 minutes. For a weekend workshop, I’ve taken up to half an hour. This time is just me talking. It’s not a group discussion.

It’s about creating a sacred moment where the money is exchanged to honour what has transpired.

By the time we reach this point in the day, the value has already been established. They either liked the workshop or they didn’t. So, all that’s left to do is to help them figure out the right amount for them to pay and, this is the key part and your central objective at the end, to diffuse any pressure they might be feeling about how much to pay.

Let me say this again: **your central objective at the end is to diffuse any pressure they might be feeling about how much to pay.**

Though I don’t anymore, I used to spend a few minutes talking about the pressure as a means of relieving it, “Look, you’ve just received a whole weekend. There’s an incredible amount of reciprocity,” and I’d explain the whole psychological principle of reciprocation. “So that’s here in the room. There’s also the principle of authority. I’ve been at the front teaching you the whole weekend, and so there’s a power dynamic in the room because of that. That could lead you to pay more than it was worth. You may just like me, and want to. There are a lot of things that could be psychologically pressuring you to give me a lot of money.”

I would try to unpack a lot of those dynamics of social pressure so they could be giving from a clean place that they could feel good about. Because I know if they do, they’re going to tell everybody they know about what I do. The next time I come back, the word-of-mouth is going to be flowing so easily from them.

At the end, I do everything I can to take the lid off and let the pressure go a bit. I think there’s an argument that can be made for the fact that they may actually pay you *more* if you do that (if they’re in a position to) because then it’s not coming from fear or guilt. It’s more coming from reciprocity and a sense of generosity that’s genuine.

And, even if it's not more, the long-term benefits to you from a participant's repeat business and the word-of-mouth referrals they give you are certainly going to be worth it.

If you're not pressuring them to pay a certain amount then they're not pushing back against anything. They actually get to make a free choice.

It's been a while since I've said the following in my pitch at the end of the workshop but I think it has merit. You could say something like, "You saw the amounts that you could have paid. Here we are at the end and there's a number of things to consider. Number one, just to consider what this could do for your business (or relationships or health) if you really applied it. What's the impact this might have realistically if you were to really take it and work with it?" And then give people a few minutes to sit with that honestly, encouraging them not to be too over the top with it. Invite them to be conservative.

It's important to me that people genuinely feel okay about whatever amount they pay for my PWYC work and that no one feels any shame for paying too little.

To me, it's immensely important that people are genuinely paying whatever they *want* to pay, not that they get to the end and then all of a sudden, they get the distinct impression that if they don't pay *this* amount, it means they're not really seeing the value, or that I think they don't value me as a person now. At some of the workshops, I've said, "Look, what you pay has nothing to do with my value as a human being. This is not personal to me. It's just what you can afford, what you felt it was worth. I get it, you might have already known a lot of this stuff and it was just a refresher. That's different than if it's blowing your mind and you've got a lot of money."

Sometimes I would tell people that, "At one workshop I did in Toronto, one person paid \$25 for the whole weekend and one person paid \$1,800. Maybe you can't pay the amount that feels right for you right now, but next time I'm in town, you can spread the word for me, and that will make me money. You can tell your friends about this and talk it up, and that helps me, even if you don't do a social media blast. The fact that you just told 10 people makes me money next time I come back."

I sometimes also say, "Look, if you can afford to pay more, here's your moment. If you can't, it's not your fault necessarily. It's just that these things happen. We go broke sometimes. There are other priorities. I'm happy you're here. I make more money, even a little bit, by you being here with no extra time spent for me. Whatever you pay is perfect. It's going to be the right amount. Thanks for coming."

I'm really clear about not paying more because, when people overpay, it can get weird. I remember one woman came to a weekend workshop I did in Toronto years ago. She paid \$500 for the weekend. She chose that amount after I took thirty minutes to make sure people were paying the proper amount. Afterwards she told me she got nothing out of the weekend and demanded a full refund. It was the strangest thing. From time to time, I've shared that during the workshop or at the end and told people, "I don't need to deal with that. Just save me by paying what you want to and can."

In the past, a few times I broke down the hard costs to people of the workshop, "My flight cost X, this venue cost Y and my accommodations cost Z," so they would understand that I'd already spent a good chunk of money to be there. But, I stopped because I didn't think that people needed the detail. I could just say, "Look, I pay all the expenses before I show up – the venue, travel and accommodations. If no one came or paid, I'd lose money on this."

I recall reading about a study on PWYC where people were going to a museum or art gallery and it was offered on a PWYC basis. They did several experiments. The first was simply inviting people to put money in a box anonymously. Then they tried it with giving the money to a person, and this increased the amount given. Then they added that the money was for a fund that contributed to a cause bigger than the profit margin of the institution. They appealed to the larger "why" behind it. This got the most money of all.

We are helping people see how they're participating in a bigger movement. "If you got value from this workshop and you believe, as I do, that us getting better at our marketing is vital for the success of not only our businesses but of the world, and if you want to see this workshop continue in the world, this is where it happens. Your payment here is not just about you, this is about supporting this work that helps make people more effective in spreading the word about what they do, and these incredibly important alternative solutions that we need in the world that are often hidden because of incompetent marketing."

You could translate this to your own work with benefit.

This ending is also a fine time to speak about your personal philosophy on money. In the weekend workshops, I used to spend a lot of time sharing what I'd learned from Lynne Twist, the author of *The Soul of Money*, and her philosophies around money. I would share stories I'd heard from her. I think much of my reason for this was to begin to shift gears and let people know we were moving into some more sacred context around money. But you, no doubt, have your own inspirations and stories about money and your political and spiritual views around it. It's a good moment to share those.

Transcript of my PWYC Pitch

This is from a day-long workshop I did in Demmitt, Alberta in October 2018:



“Thank you for coming. It is not lost on me that it is some matter of risk to enter a room like this where you are not sure you want to stay the whole time. That is understandable. I would feel utterly the same way, if not more so. A day of your life – I don’t take that for granted.

Let’s talk about the money piece.

I mentioned earlier in the day that I wanted to be a street performer when I was a kid – true thing. I hung out with all the street performers. I used to help them count their money. This is part of what compelled me to maybe be a street performer because the good ones make good money.

What an amazing idea that you could just show up in a town, throw down a hat, do a show, pay for your day. Do that every day. The freedom of it seemed amazing.

And there was one street performer in particular who I was most taken by, Gazzo Macée, a close-up magician. I do close-up magic. I am actually good. The pen trick I did earlier did not confirm that, but I am pretty good. He would go on to mentor me.

I would see him in different cities and I would show him what I was working on. He would give me tips. But he had these cups and balls. If you have ever seen anyone do cups and balls on the street, it is *his* routine. Big brass cups with little yarn balls, and the balls jump from cup to cup while he is surrounded. It is amazing. People are right behind him and they can't make out what his trick is either.

It is almost like we, the audience, are comparing notes with each other.

"Did you see it?"

"No!"

At one point, he says, "Ladies and gentlemen, how many balls under the cup?"

"Two!"

"No. Orange!" He lifts the cup and there is a huge orange that he has to knock out of the cup, surrounded, while we are all looking at him. He just snuck it under. "How many balls under this cup?" Orange, orange – now there are three oranges on the table. They are real oranges that barely fit in the cup.

He goes back to the first cup. Orange! Orange! Orange! Six oranges on the table and no one has seen anything. Then he has his hat. He says, "Alright, I'm going under the hat. How many balls under the hat?"

Audience: "One."

Gazzo: "No, three. How many balls under the hat now?"

Audience: "None."

Gazzo: "No, watermelon."

Blam! And there is a watermelon. He says, "Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming to the show. I think street theatre is one of the most honest forms of theatre in the world. Anywhere else you go, you pay before you see the show. It is very awkward to leave in the middle and there is no chance of refunds at the end. But here you got to see the whole show. You got to enjoy it and get to decide what you think it is worth.

If you saw me do this in a bar, you'd buy me a beer. A beer is \$5. I think that is fair. If you don't have \$5, a dollar or two is fine. If you don't even have a dollar, just keep your money. This show is my gift to you."

At 12 years old I was so moved by this because I am looking around and I am seeing such diversity in the crowd. There are people who probably have lots of money and there are homeless people. In street performing, something that is normally the province of the elite, normally reserved for corporate functions or expensive events . . . everyone gets to see it.

When I first started my marketing business, I went to some very expensive marketing trainings. One cost \$5,000 USD just to attend the thing. And three things struck me.

One: my friends never hear about this stuff. They never even hear the names of the people teaching it.

Secondly: they would be offended by the rhetoric used because it is pretty aggressive capitalist rhetoric. And for some reason, for me, I have been able to filter that. It hasn't been a big issue for me. For some people it is very hard.

And thirdly: the biggest thing is they have to go into credit card debt just to go to the thing, and it seems so insane to me that people doing some of the most important work in the world, that is so needed, never hear about it. They couldn't afford to go, so that is part of why I do these PWYC workshops – to make it accessible.

I have a few things to say about the money. One is, in a lot of ways, you are not really paying for your spot here today because it has already happened. It is over. Your spot was paid for by the people who went to the workshops before you. And that is not a particularly abstract idea in my mind.

I just mean if they didn't pay, I couldn't afford to keep doing these workshops. I couldn't travel. Their willingness to pay makes these workshops possible. So, if you are not paying for your spot, what are you paying for? Of course, it is for the people to come. If you enjoyed this workshop, if you got something out of it, if you want to see this thing persist in the world, this is when it happens.

In terms of the amount, there are two things I want to ask.

Number one, please, you are on the receiving end of a whole day, and there is going to be a certain amount of pressure or expectation that I know you have been sitting with all day. I get it.

But please don't pay more than you think this day is worth or than you can afford right now. I just need you to hear that. Don't pay more than this day is worth or more than you can afford. I get that the number now is different than a month ago, a month from now, a year ago, a year from now. There is a certain reality that you have now.

You might be flush with money. Great. You might have very little. I have been both places and there is no shame in not having a lot. If you pay more than you think this workshop is worth or more than you can afford, you will resent it, and me. I want you to understand that, selfishly, I will make more money in the long run if you pay me what you *can*. I mean, sure, I'll make more money right now, today, but less money down the road – in the longterm.

If you pay more and leave thinking, “I was going to pay less and then he told this really affecting story of a British busker and I dropped another 50,” and you leave resenting it . . . what if I come back? You won't talk it up because you feel like you got worked. It is important for me that you pay an amount that isn't more than feels right. That is the first thing.

The second thing is please don't pay *less* than you think this day is worth or you can afford, because . . . guilt is a terrible feeling to live with (*laughter or relief from the room at this line*). I don't want you to carry that with you out the door. Of course, what I am suggesting is there is a sweet spot that is perfect for you right now and it is different than it would be another time.

Whatever you pay is the perfect amount, truly. I started doing pay-what-you-can in 2002. I have been doing it ever since. I would not keep doing it if it was not working for me. People who have more tend to pay more – it just seems to even out somehow.

Also, whatever you pay today? We are good. Sometimes I have had people come up to me at the end and say, “I got so much out of this. I can't pay as much as I think it is worth,” as if they are obligated, or, “I will send you more down the road.”

You don't owe me. Whatever you pay is sufficient to the day. It is good. We're clean. Nothing owed here. This is genuine. The only thing I ask is that you make whatever payment you're going to make now. Today. Every once in a while someone will write on their follow-up form, “I'll figure something out and send you money later,” or “I'll pay you once I apply this and make some money with it,” but, of course, this doesn't feel good. I'm asking you to pay for the workshop I gave. That's the only thing I can control. I can't control whether you apply this or not. So I ask you to pay for the day, and whatever you pay is perfect.

This is not about charity for me. This is just a way of community. This is a way of trying to make this accessible for people who I wish had access to it. That's all.

In the same way, I know you do this. I know you do this in your own work. You try to make things accessible to people in a way that preserves the dignity of those people. And so, today it is me; tomorrow it is you.

PWYC

The other thing is if you are going to do an eTransfer or PayPal or something in this manner, if you do it within 24 hours it is helpful.

If you are going to send an email money transfer or PayPal, the email is tadlington@gmail.com. And if you are going to use a password, let's just agree the password is hippies. Keep it simple. And I think that is it. Thank you so much for coming everyone."

Final Thoughts

A strange (perhaps) thought: you can known for *how* you charge for what you do.

Of course you can be known for *what* you do, *when* you do it, *where* you do it, *how* you do it, *why* you do it, *for whom* you do it. Those have likely occurred to you already.

But you could also be known for *how you charge for what you do*.

What a thought.

Pay-what-you-can (PWYC) pricing for my workshops has become a core part of what I'm known for.

And this reputation has become a good friend to me.

PWYC is an outgoing, likeable and warm friend who does so much of the heavy lifting of networking and word-spreading for you. It's not a bad way to think about it.



When you start doing PWYC pricing for your workshops, it's like you bring another person on to your team. They're invisible. You'll never hear from them. They cost you nothing, but they bring in people who would have normally never come before.

PWYC will show up in conversations between people where one says, "Have you thought about going to that workshop?" and the other replies, "I'd love to but I can't afford it." And PWYC interrupts and says, "Forgive me for intruding, but actually . . ."

There have been ups and downs with PWYC. There have been good days and bad. But, overall, the good days outweigh the bad. Using PWYC has meant that I have made more money on the whole with less effort.

PWYC has meant seeing people in my workshops who I know for a fact would never have been able to attend my workshop has I sold it at "market value." I know this because they've told me.

PWYC

PWYC has meant that more people of colour, Indigenous folks, people who are broke, single moms and dads, artists, people struggling with mental illness, and a litany of other folks in marginalized communities (who have enormously hard lives) got to come. Many people struggle for reasons well beyond their control. Sometimes it's bad choices that land them there, but often it's just bad breaks.

It means something to us both that they are in attendance. Today I help them in this way, by offering my workshop as PWYC. Maybe tomorrow they help me. Or maybe they help someone else, passing on the assistance, the choice.

PWYC isn't charity. It never has been.

It's something much better.

This is community.

And your new friend will be happy to introduce you around.

warmest,

Tad

Appendix: Avoiding the Horror of the Sliding Scale by Mark Silver

Note from Tad: The following is a fantastic, timeless essay written by my friend and colleague Mark Silver of Heart of Business. I can't imagine having written about sliding scale better myself and often refer clients to the piece. It's an interesting perspective to consider in relation to alternative pricing structures. Enjoy.

I know a healer who charges “between \$25 and \$1000 – whatever you think it’s worth to you.” Seems like an enlightened, trust-the-universe approach, eh? Kinda sweet, kinda generous.

Kinda mean.

Mean? How can a sliding scale payment offer like that be mean?

Money is a funny subject. Funny strange, not funny ha-ha. Rich or poor, struggling or in flow, money can catch all of us in strange ways.

Let me ask you a question: does your business have to do directly with helping people with their money issues?

If Not, Forget the Sliding Scale

Let's step, for a moment, into the world of your client. What's happening for them when they come to you for help? Well, they're stuck in some problem.

Being stuck in a problem means they feel needy. Vulnerable. Maybe a little overwhelmed and exhausted. Needing support.

So they get help from you, and then it's time to pay (assuming you don't get payment before the session). And you hit them with the statement: “You decide what you want to pay me.”

Well, that's a nice end to a beautiful session. You've just jabbed the button activating any shame, guilt, or shakiness that they have about money. They may not show it, but there's a good chance that they've been thrown into some real uncertainty.

That decision of what to pay – it's a burden on them.

We Ended Up Getting Burritos Instead of Crepes

My wife Holly and I were out at a cafe, and then it was time for lunch. We went just a few steps down the street to a crepiere we hadn't yet tried. We walked in and . . .

There were people sitting around eating and drinking. But, there was no wait staff, no menus, and a mysterious sign that said something about “going around the back.”

I don’t know if we were particularly thick or had low blood sugar at the moment, but we couldn’t figure out how the restaurant worked. After two minutes, we stopped trying. And left to go get burritos instead.

And haven’t been back to try again since.

Is Your “Freedom” Sliding Scale Chasing Clients Away?

Your client has that wonderful experience with you, and they think they want more. And then, they are faced with the challenging decision of what to pay.

All the while they’re asking themselves: “Do I make another appointment, and have to face that horrible sliding scale again, or not?”

If they loved you, it might tip the scales to scheduling another. If, however, their money issues are particularly up for them, maybe . . . they just . . . might . . . not.

Do you really want to shift the burden of your money issues onto your client? And have to pay the consequences?

Don’t Underestimate This Factor

Think about it in your own life. When you come to a situation that is confusing, challenging, uncertain – how often do you choose to repeat the experience? Not so often, I’m guessing.

I hate to break the news, but in almost every case where I’ve seen someone offering a sliding scale, it’s actually been because the practitioner was avoiding their own issues around money.

If you’re doing this, it’s okay – no shame is necessary. But, it might be costing you clients. I’d suggest you take a look at it. And, is it EVER okay to work with a sliding scale?

Keys to a Healthy Sliding Scale

- **Is your sliding scale generosity or avoidance?**

If you offer a sliding scale, or, if you let your price slide a lot when people push, just ask your heart – does this feel like a real sense of generosity? Or, can you taste the vague mist of avoidance?

If you feel the mist of avoidance, on to the next key.

- **What would happen if you just named a price?**

What fears, or thoughts, or worries are you facing in naming your price? Make space for those in your heart. Sit with them. Put aside shame or guilt if there is any – you just have what we've all had – uncertainty about money.

Take some time in your heart to ask – what is the larger truth about your price? What would really happen if you just picked a price? Ask to be shown how your clients' hearts would react to you just picking a price.

Most often, what I've seen is that there is an ease that comes in, and a sense of trust and solidity that the client feels when you are able to stand in your price. They can lean into you.

- **Once you're clear, you can negotiate.**

If you find that clarity and strength in your heart about your pricing, then, when someone asks, you can negotiate. Someone wants to pay a lower price, check with your heart. If it feels right (not a collapse) see what feels like a good price to counter with.

Personally, whenever someone asks me for a lower price, my heart almost always asks me to stretch them a bit. Usually the price they are offering to pay is attached at least a little bit to fear, and my heart enjoys the sense of aliveness that both I and the client feel when I ask them to stretch into a slightly higher price.

- **The two situations where a sliding scale may be worth offering.**

If your business is meant to help people process their money issues, then go for it. Your sliding scale can actually be a part of the healing or coaching work you do. If you're intentional about it, and are clear in your own heart about it, your sliding scale can actually help to create breakthroughs.

Or, if you don't mind spending additional unpaid time processing with someone over the price, and supporting them if triggering emotions come up from the sliding scale, then you, too, can use a sliding scale effectively. As with the example above, it can be a part of the work you do with them. But get clear: is this really the work you want to do with your clients?

In either case, make sure you don't set the low end of the sliding scale lower than your heart can bear.

As you can see, the sliding scale can be hiding a whole host of issues, and can be scaring off your clients. Get clear on your price, and you can remove a burden from your clients, which will make it easier for them to return again and again.

About Mark Silver

Mark is a fourth-generation entrepreneur who has run a distribution business, turned around a struggling non-profit magazine, and worked as a paramedic in the San Francisco Bay Area.

He is the author of seven different in-depth programs and a number of other smaller teachings and classes for entrepreneurs. Together they form a comprehensive entrepreneurial wisdom academy curriculum.

A designated Master Teacher ("muqaddam murrabi") within the Shaddhilliyya Sufi lineage, he has received his Masters of Divinity with a speciality in Ministry and Sufi Studies.

As a coach, consultant, mentor and spiritual healer, he has facilitated thousands of individual sessions with entrepreneurs and has led hundreds of classes, seminars, groups and retreats. His weekly writings and teachings are followed by thousands of people around the globe.

He lives in White Hawk Ecovillage just outside Ithaca, New York with his wife Holly, twin sons Sam and David, their aging and loving cat Rafi, an arctic dog Rocky who refuses to sleep inside especially in the snow and all four seasons, which had been missing during his 20 years on the left coast.

You can find Mark's work here: heartofbusiness.com

Acknowledgements

Life can teach you a lot about generosity.

My lessons about this, as it relates to this book, come from three primary sources.

The bulwark of the acknowledgments for this book must properly be laid at the feet of Gazzo Macée the magician from Oxford, England who inspired, for me, the possibility that pay-what-you-can (PWYC) could work in the world. I remember sitting and counting out his hat at the end of shows. I remember him paying for so many meals as myself and others sat down with him in afternoons and late evenings during the Edmonton Fringe Festival. He taught me the meaning of generosity in those early days. I think I have spoken his name in almost every PWYC workshop I've ever done.

And then this eBook, as well as most of my others, would have been inconceivable without the plucky, dauntless powerhouse that is Susan Kendal — the backbone of Marketing for Hippies, whose company I have been blessed with in the capacity of assistant for over five years now and who has been in my life since our mutual childhoods in the Edmonton Waldorf School.

And then, of course, thanks must also go to everyone who ever attended one of my PWYC workshops and who paid what they could and gave so generously so often. If they hadn't paid, this eBook would never exist, and so deep bows to each of them too.

The introduction to this book was written by Mark Silver, a colleague who I admire so deeply in his capacity to be generous to others but also kind to himself. Rarely have I met a colleague with whom I resonate so deeply and completely. It's a rare mercy and a deep blessing.

And then there's Robert Middleton, a sort of God-Father to this modern movement of business coaches. Robert was the first one to ever interview me on this topic and his interest in me a benediction I didn't even know I needed. It meant the world to me. What's presented in this book is different from what we spoke of back in the day, a whole decade of learning with its necessary additions and subtractions woven in.

The Man in the Cover Photo Revealed

I struggled to find the right image for the cover of this eBook.

Here I show you the full photo and tell you the story of the man in it.

I knew it had to be a busker hat full of money but after myself and my assistant Susan delved into the archives of the internet we couldn't find an image that felt right. It was discouraging.

And then it hit me.

I knew exactly the photo we could use, if granted permission.

Which I was.

The photo on the cover of this eBook was taken by the good Megan Kemshed in my spare bedroom in Edmonton. The man holding that hat full on money is none other than Corin Raymond.



I first heard of Corin when Scott Cook was singing a song in my living room during a house concert I hosted for him. The song was called *Blue Mermaid Dress*. It destroyed me. It was one of those songs that just knows. It left me weeping. Scott told me that the song was written by Corin Raymond and that Corin would soon be in town playing a show at the Artery. And so, of course, I found myself there at his show where I realized he wasn't a one hit wonder. Every song he sang, and all of his banter in between songs, was a deep affirmation of life in all of its madness, mystery, mirth and mayhem. I've rarely heard someone sing so beautifully about the joys and injustices of life.

I've hosted him in my home many times and introduced him once as “a master practitioner of heartbreak.” I stand by that. If you aren't heartbroken right now, I recommend it to you and I recommend his entire back catalogue as a faithful road to get there.

The money you see in Corin's hat and lying before him is Canadian Tire Money. For the Americans in the house, well . . . that's a long story and belongs in the list of things all Canadians know that Americans don't (along with Degrassi Jr. High, Mr. Dress Up and Fred Penner). But

basically, there's a store called Canadian Tire and they gave you their own currency as a reward for shopping with them. If you spend \$5, you get a five-cent “bill,” spend \$10 gets you a 10-cent bill, and so on, in Canadian Tire Money. You could spend that money next time you came back at Canadian Tire. Most Canadians I know have a stash of these “paper nickels” in a kitchen drawer.

Well, it's a long story (Corin wrote a whole one-man show about it), but Corin funded his album *Paper Nickels* entirely with Canadian Tire Money. He raised just over \$10,000 in this strange currency, which represents over one-million dollars having been spent real, hard cash at Canadian Tire to generate that \$10,000 of Canadian Tire Money. Extraordinary.

He's a remarkable man. I recommend checking out his music and seeing him live if you ever have the chance.

You can hear some of his magic here: corinraymond.com

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And you can check out Megan Kemshead's beautiful photography work at megankemshead.com



Tad Hargrave is a hippy who developed a knack for marketing (and then learned how to be a hippy again.) For almost a decade, he has been touring his marketing workshops around Canada, bringing refreshing and unorthodox ideas to conscious entrepreneurs and green businesses that help them grow their organizations and businesses (without selling their souls).

He does improv comedy semi-professionally, co-runs Edmonton's progressive community building network TheLocalGood.ca, founded streetcarshows.com, indigodrinks.ca, socialyogiyeg.com, and the Jams program of yesworld.org. He speaks Scottish Gaelic and helps to run novascotiagaelsjam.com and is also a huge Doctor Who nerd.

Tad currently lives in Edmonton, Alberta – traditionally known, in the local Indigenous Cree language, as Amiskwaciy (Beaver Hill) and later Amiskwaciwaskihegan (Beaver Hill House) – and his ancestors come primarily from Scotland with some from the Ukraine as well. He is drawn to conversations around politics, history, ancestry, healing and how those all intersect.

You can learn more about Tad and his work at marketingforhippies.com and nichingspiral.com

[Photo credit: Lucas Boutillier]