

Wages Negotiations

Bin Li

While watching *Mission Impossible - Ghost Protocol*, I wondered if these IMF (Impossible Mission Force) agents get paid per mission, or are they on an overall salary package? Do they get overtime? Are they on a 10 hour or 12 hour day? And how does that work when they're planted in a Moscow prison for a year?

Wages negotiation is an unavoidable part of the job for freelance editors and assistants. It's something we face at the start of each job and it's something I've always found difficult, although now I'm more at ease with it by following these simple tips.

1 – A moment to think – It's best to ask for a day or even a few hours to think over your decision. If it's a job for 6 month or a year, it's worth giving it a little time to reflect on the situation.

After a cup of tea, you may wonder what you were thinking, going to Dubai to meet an international professional assassin and then capture her alive! For \$400 a day without overtime, are you kidding?

2 – The power of saying NO – Some of the best deals I've made were after saying no a number of times. It's hard to do for many people but no is an honorable response. You have a universal right to say no to anything you want in this country.

Start your sentence with a “ No,” be assertive, you don't have to give a reason if you don't want to. You'll get respect, but on the other hand, you may lose the deal, so be prepared to backup your word and walk away.

The few times when I have walked away from projects over wages or work conditions, were the best decisions I've ever made. Other jobs appear, you work freelance, it's not the end of the world to say no to one job. If we all said no more often, we would be all working in much better conditions with much better pay.

3 – Call for backup, advice from friends and peers – Talk to your friends in the industry, talk to other editors or assistants, they are the most accurate source of what is going to be a great deal, an reasonable deal or a bad deal. Share details with each other, be informed and offer information to receive new information.

4 – Be clear with what you're getting or not getting –

Don't agree with unclear statements such as 'we'll work it out when we come to it'. Best to work it out before you start work and have it in your contract.

Be very clear with overtime and working conditions, are we doing a 5 day week or 6 day week? Is it a 10 hour day or more? Is it an actual business class flight and not Premium Economy? Are you getting a hotel room by yourself or sharing it with the grip department?

Is the per diem in US dollars or Chinese Yuan?

John Lee writes from LA:

I always take time to think and when I know I'm going to be doing my deal I write down what I want on a file card so I can refer to it during the meeting or phone call so I don't forget anything.

Here 's what I have on the card –

How much I'm asking for. How many hours is that? 50 per week or 55 or 60? The price I won't go below. Box rental (computer). Per Diem. Car for location work. Housing allowance or hotel. Business class flights (international). Flights for my family if I'm going to be gone for longer than 3 months. Dollars or pounds sterling? Cell phone charges. Gas or mileage. Also I like to be paid as a corporation and not an employee.

As you can see, I do a lot of international jobs. It's actually pretty easy to negotiate on the sorts of jobs I do. Our union is strong (local 700) so the rules are fixed and everyone knows them. Also, once you get a certain rate on a job then that's your rate. You can then ask for a little bit more than that next time. Everyone expects that. Negotiations are generally pretty good.

CONTACT _Con-36FD55A750 Supriya Naidu-James writes from London:

It might be a good idea to ask for a confidential rate when you do your deal, as producers can do a rate check on you. I have been stung in the past on a job where the producer wouldn't give me the going rate because they knew I had accepted a lower rate on a previous job.

Every film has a different budget and schedule...especially in the current economic climate, and these are factors you need to consider when you can.

Unfortunately there isn't a rulebook to follow, but you do need to consider the value of the job against the budget and expectations of the film. If only we could always be as good as our last job!

How great it is to have a Union! There are work practice laws protecting us from being exploited here down under, but given the nature of our work, there is plenty of room to

move on the wage scale.

The ASE I believe are in the process of setting up an estimate wage scale for editors and assistants.

At the end of the day, it's best not to start work each morning feeling angry about your pay and the deal you've made. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to do your best as an editor or assistant editor on the chosen film or TV show. Be thankful you're not an IMF agent, having to recover in hospital after each mission with PTSD and accepting the fact that most of your colleagues are in body bags.

Our editing colleagues are not dead or maimed, but are helpful and friendly, they'll make suggestions and ideas that will benefit you.

Because when it comes down to it, they know out there in the field, you'll do the same in return.

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