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### **Resourceful Designer Episode 320 Pro Bono: Working With Non Profits and Charities.**

Pro bono, working with nonprofits and charities. Now it's inevitable anybody who has been doing this, whether it's web design, graphic design, any sort of design, if you've been doing this long enough, chances are that people have started to ask you for some free work here or there, mostly for types of charities or events, not that they they're trying to pick your brain or use your skills. It's bound to happen. I know I get it all the time. And if it hasn't happened to you, it's only a matter of time before it does. Now before I go any further, I do wanna just quickly go over the differences between a non-profit and a charity. Now I am talking from a North American perspective. I know the rules are very similar in both Canada and the US.

If you are elsewhere in the world, I don't know how these are for you or what the designations are, you'll have to look them up. But nonprofits and charities in the US and Canada are the same, and that's the way I'm gonna be talking about them today. Now all charities are considered nonprofits, but not all nonprofits are considered charities. They're a different status. Now a nonprofit is any organization that qualifies for a tax exempt status by the IRS in the US or the CRA here in Canada. So a nonprofit's purpose is to further a social cause and to provide a public benefit. In other words, to qualify as a nonprofit, the organization must serve the public good in some way. Now this is not to be confused with a not for profit, which is similar but not the same.

A not for profit actually serves its members instead of the general community. Sports clubs are a great example of a not for profit organization, because all the money raised goes towards the club itself, not the general populace. Sororities and fraternities, are another great example of a not for profit organization. Now a charity, on the other hand, is a form of non-profit with a philanthropic goal that aims to improve the quality of life for the community and beyond. Now there are many little nuances between charities and nonprofits. But the main difference that I wanna cover here today, when it comes to working as a graphic or web designer with a nonprofit or a charity, it is that only charities can issue a tax receipt. And I'm gonna cover more on the importance of that a little bit later. Now one thing I want to put out there, it's to squelch the myth that being a nonprofit or a charity means that they have no budget.

In fact, most nonprofits and charities do put a reasonable amount of money aside for marketing purposes, especially if it's a national or international organization. Many of them have lots and lots of money. So just because somebody contacts you saying they're working for a nonprofit or a charity, it doesn't mean they don't have money. I, myself, have done lots and lots of work for Habitat for Humanity, which is an international charity, and they have big budgets when it comes to marketing. For nonprofits, I've worked with several festivals. There was a Highland Games that I've worked with for over a dozen years, we had a local balloon festival that I worked with for many years. These were both nonprofit organizations, but they had a very good budget for marketing. So if you're ever approached by a nonprofit or charity to do work, don't immediately assume that they're asking for free work because many times they're not.

In fact, over the years, some of my most lucrative clients have been nonprofits and charities. Now even though, as I said, most nonprofit and charities do have a budget to work with, there are some that don't, especially when you get to the smaller local charities. And it's these organizations who try to appeal to our passionate side and ask for free or discounted design work. Now since today's episode is titled pro bono, I'm gonna concentrate on those organizations that are asking for free work. Now whether it is a nonprofit or a charity, there are advantages and disadvantages of working for free as a designer. Again, whether you're a graphic designer or a web designer. Now start with the drawbacks. So some of the draw-

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backs of working for free.

One of the big ones is since there's no money actually exchanging hands, if you're doing the work for free, there's no way for them to appreciate the value of what you're doing, of your services. Now I know some designers get around this by issuing a receipt that shows the full amount and then they discount it 100% so that the bottom of the invoice or I should say invoice, not receipt. The bottom of the invoice says 0, but they actually can see what the full amount was. Well, that's a good way to do it. However, the only people that see that are the people who actually handle the invoice. So whoever you're giving it to, and maybe if they have to give it to an accounts person or whatever. And in most cases, if it has a balance of 0, they're not even gonna put it through the books. So whoever you're dealing with will see it, and then nobody else does.

And when that person later on talks it's to somebody else that's in the organization or somebody else outside the organization. And if the topic of the work you did comes up, that person's not gonna say that, oh, well, the work cost this much, but they gave us a 100% discount, so we paid 0. No. They're just gonna say, oh, it didn't cost us anything. So others around that don't know the full amount, that didn't actually see the invoice, there's no way for them to appreciate the value of what you brought for them. And that, in my opinion, is a huge drawback of doing free work, pro bono work for any organization. Now another drawback is you're often treated like a volunteer and not the professional that you are. Now some nonprofits do have employees that are paid, but most of the people that are working there are volunteers.

And even though volunteers come from all works of life. As a volunteer, you're not taken as seriously as if you were a professional. And I've seen that happen before where it doesn't matter how qualified, how good the designer is. It comes back to just not being appreciated. And sometimes because you're viewed simply as a volunteer, some people may try to micromanage your designs. Something they wouldn't be doing if they were paying you to do the work. And this brings me to my last drawback that I have here. I wrote some point form notes down.

Is due to all this, you may feel unappreciated, and it may even cause you to end up resenting the cause. You know, you may not wanna work with them again, or the next time somebody talks about that, you may have a bad taste in your mouth because of the way you were treated. And that's too bad because the the whole purpose of these nonprofits and charities are to bring awareness to certain causes that are dear to some people's hearts, and you don't wanna feel any sort of resentment towards that because of the way you were treated, because you were offering your work for free. Now I just want to stipulate that this doesn't happen all the time. In fact, it doesn't even happen most of the time, but it is a possibility anytime you're offering free work. And I just wanna make sure you're aware of that. Now let's talk about the benefits of working for free. Anytime you do pro bono work is a great way to build up a portfolio, especially if you're fairly new to the industry, you're starting out, and you don't have a big portfolio.

Doing pro bono work is a great way to build it up. You get to build these great assets that are actually being used in the world and add them to your portfolio saying, I did these. So that is one big advantage. The other advantage of doing pro bono work is it's a great way to build exposure. Yes. I know exposure is a dreaded word when it comes to the design industry, but you can't deny that getting exposure is valuable. An exposure comes in many different forms. I know whenever I design something for a charity or a nonprofit, I insist that I have my name designed by Marksman Design on the piece.

In some cases, like, I mentioned that I did work with the Balloon Festival. I gained exposure by offering them a discount,

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and in exchange for that discount, I was given an advertising package with them, which meant that my logo and my website appeared on their flyer. It appeared, around the venue on boards. It even appeared on one of the baskets to one of the hot air balloons. So that got me exposure by offering them a small discount to the work I was doing. Now another benefit of doing pro bono work is you can use it as an opportunity to explore an experiment with different design techniques. The clients are not paying you in this case. You're offering the work for free, which gives you a lot more freedom to do things that you wanna do it.

Do it in a way you see fit. Now this may be a conflict with, one of the drawbacks that I mentioned earlier, how some people like to micromanage you. So maybe they may not like the direction you're taking or the design style you're taking, but you can remind them that they're not paying you for this. And this is what you wanna do. This is you're offering it for free and, I mean, it's one of those things that you have to weigh the pros and cons to it. But I know I've often it learnt new things, because I was experimenting or exploring different design styles while working on pro bono work. And the other benefit of pro bono is it's a great way to network, especially if you get to present. Because most of the time, they'll be a board of directors, which may be anywhere from, you know, 8 to a dozen or more people, that you can go present your work to.

And most of these boards for these nonprofits and charities are business people. So it's a great way for you to get your name out there and show what you're capable of. And be sure if you're doing work for a charity that's local, go out and support them. Go walk around during an event, attend whatever it is that they're doing. Even if you're not participating, like, if it's a marathon and you don't run, you don't have to participate in it, but you can go show up, be there. And if anybody asks, you can mention that, yeah, you do the design work for them. It's a great way to network. So those are some of the drawbacks and benefits to offering work for free.

Now let's say you do decide that, yeah, I'm gonna do this, and I'm gonna offer it for free. I wanna share my policy that I use, that I've used for many, many years, that kind of gets me through all of this with all the multiple people that call. Because every year, I get dozens of people calling me and asking if there's anything I can do or any way I can help them out. And the way I curb having to either be overwhelmed with all this free work to do and not insulting people is I set a policy many years ago that I'll only offer pro bono work to 3 nonprofits or charities per year. And, of course, if it's a charity or nonprofit that's willing to pay me, then they don't count. But I've done free work for local sports organizations I've done free work for causes, like raising money for there there was a bunch of families that got dislocated in, in a fire, they lost their home and all that, I did some work for that, and I didn't charge them. You you know, I've done work years ago for a dog rescue, and there's so many. But my policy is to never do more than 3 in a year.

So that way, when people are calling me up, you know, in September, October asked me to do work, I tell them that I've already reached my quota for the year. And that if they want me to do anything with them next year, they need to contact me in January before my spaces fill up. And this is a great way because it stops the conversation right there. The people go, oh, okay. I understand. We'll put you on the calendar and contact you in January. And some of them do, and some of them don't. It makes it very easy for me to turn down this sort of work, if I don't wanna do it.

Now that doesn't mean that if I have 3 and then something's really intriguing, I won't take it on. It just gives me that out. Should I decide that this is something I don't wanna work on instead of just saying no. Now I do have my own personal criteria on how I choose the nonprofits and charities that I will work with. Now I'll tell you what mine is, but you have to

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come up with your own criteria on how you're gonna decide which organizations are worth your time and which are not. So I have 5 things that I wrote down here. And the first one is I have to have some sort of connection to the cause. You know, I'm a dog person.

So if somebody contacts me and says they wanna, they're asking if I can do some work for a dog rescue or something like that, yes, I'm gonna be much more inclined to wanna offer the work to them as opposed who some somebody who contacts me to ask if I can do work for, I don't know, sea turtles. Not that I'm against sea turtles. I think they're great, but I don't have a direct connection to sea turtles. I don't live near the sea. I don't even know if I've ever seen 1 in my life, but I deal with dogs all the time. So I'm much more likely to work with somebody who's working in that space with dogs, because of the connection. So my one criteria is I have to have a connection. I've done work for the diabetes association, because my mom died from complications with diabetes.

I have a connection to that. And if somebody else contacted me and asked me for work for some disease that I've never heard of before, I may be reluctant to work with them because I don't know what it is. So that is my number 1 criteria is that I have to have some sort of connection with the cause before I agree to work with them. And number 2 is I have to have time available on my schedule. I will not bump paying clients in order to do free work. If I have time, sure, I would gladly take it on and fill those spots. But if my schedule is full and somebody contacts me to ask if I can do something for free for them, the answer is gonna be no. I will not compromise my business to help somebody else do something for free.

Now my 3rd criteria is the project has to be fun. I mean, if I'm gonna offer my time for free, I have to get some enjoyment out of doing it. I mean, if I'm designing something, posters and brochures and websites, yeah, I enjoy doing that. But if somebody's contacting me because they have this ID tag and they just need a 100 or so photos inserted and their names, the name of the person typed in, that's not a fun job to do, and I'll be less inclined to take it on. Now number 4 of my criteria is the the what's in it for me thing. And that comes again to what can I get out of this? Is there any way for me to get exposure? Is there a way for me to network? Is there a way for me to get my name out there and possibly benefit my company. Yes. You wanna help these nonprofits and these charities.

You know, it's something good to do, it's also nice to get something in return that'll benefit you. So if they're willing to add, give you a free ad in their brochure sure or give a link back to your website or mention you during some sort of speech that you did all the design work, that's something that's in it for me. And if they are willing to do something like that, I'm much more inclined to work with them. And number 5, and this is a big one for me, is can I get a tax receipt for the work I do? Now as I mentioned earlier, the differences between a nonprofit and a charity is that only charities can issue a tax receipt. And that makes a big difference. If I can get a tax receipt for my work, then I'm much more inclined to lean that way as opposed to somebody who I can't. Now let me just touch on taxes. Actually, before I get to that, though, I just wanna mention, those are my 5 criteria for choosing a, are choosing to offer pro bono work to a charity or a non-profit.

I have to have a connection to the cause. I have to have time on my schedule, it has to be a project that'll be fun or entertaining. There has to be something in it for me. And if I can get a tax receipt, it's a big bonus. Now speaking of tax receipts, tax receipts are issued by charities for monetary and physical donations, not for time. I've seen this discussion many times, no charity or they shouldn't. I'm not saying no charity will, but a charity should not if it's not permitted in the US and in Canada for a charity to give a tax receipt for the time somebody spends, the time volunteer time that they

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give. So somebody can't say, well, I'll donate 10 hours of my time and my time's worth \$100 an hour.

In exchange for my work, I want a tax receipt for \$1,000. It won't work that way. However, there is a workaround that I've been using for years, and it works great. And most charities it will gladly agree to this method. Here's how I do it. Whenever I work with a charity, and even when I I work with a nonprofit, I always treat every nonprofit and every charity like any other client, and I invoice them. Now in the case of a nonprofit, I'll invoice them the full amount. Sometimes I'll offer them a discount.

But with a charity, this is what I offer them. I will invoice them the full amount as if they're any client. I give them the full invoice, and I expect them to pay that invoice. And once they pay the invoice, I then turn around and I donate the full amount of that invoice back to them. And that donation now is a monetary donation that I'm giving to them in exchange for a tax receipt. It does that make sense? So I do the work. I charge them the full amount for the work. They pay me the full amount for the work.

And then I take that payment, and I then donate it back to them in exchange for a tax receipt. Now this method has multiple benefits. First of all, as I mentioned earlier that, you know, sometimes people don't know the value. Well, in this case, I'm invoicing them the full amount, it's so they get to see the full value of the work I did for them. And unlike giving a discount of a 100%, if anybody's talking later on to somebody else and they say, well, how much should that cost? They know how much it cost because they actually had to pay that invoice. So if I did a \$5,000 website for them, they'll say, well, this website costs us \$5,000. So it's a great way for them to be able to talk about your work and show the value. And the people at the organization, the the charity, they can appreciate the value of the work you're doing for them because they know what the price is.

And because of that, they'll appreciate the work more. You won't be treated as much like a a volunteer as I said earlier. They're gonna be less likely to micromanage you because you're charging them the full amount as if they were a regular client. Now they because they're paying this amount and this is considered a marketing expense, they get to deduct this amount as a as an expense for their business or their organization. So they get that benefit. They're paying me, but it becomes an expense for them. And then I, in turn, will donate the money back in exchange for a tax receipt, which helps me on my taxes. So it ends up being a win win for both sides.

And I've been doing this for years, and I've shared this method with many people over the years who have adopted it as well, and they say it's working very well for them. Now as I said, unfortunately, this only works with charities. You can't do this with nonprofits. I've never actually dealt with a foundation. A foundation is actually a, a 4th one. We've got nonprofits, not for profits, charities, and then there's foundations. Foundations, I believe, can also issue a tax receipt, but don't quote me on that. I've never actually dealt with 1, and I didn't think to look it up until just now.

But anytime I'm dealing with a charity, first of all, I'd like to be paid. Because after all, who doesn't? So if they have the budget, like, when I did work for Habitat for Humanity, they paid me in full for that work. In some cases with a charity, I have offered just a discount and then donated the discount back, that sort of thing. In other words, I would charge them the full amount, and then I would donate 20% of that back to them in exchange for a tax receipt. So it's kind of like they get a 20% or whatever, 20% of the invoice as a discount. But most of the time with charities, it's the full amount, and then I just donate it all back them. So, anyways, dealing with nonprofits or charities is a big part of our business. As I men-

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tioned, if they haven't contacted you yet, it's only a matter of time.

At some point in your career, you will be approached by somebody asking if you can do work for them, for their cause. And, the things I want you to keep in mind is they may have a budget, so don't automatically assume that they want the work for free. But in some cases, they do, or they would appreciate it because they don't have a very big budget. They may only come in with, you know, a certain amount of money available, and it's nowhere near what you would normally charge, then it's up to you. You have to have your own criteria on whether or not it's worth working with them. If they come and they say, we need all this work done, we only have \$1,000. Are you willing to say, okay. Pay me \$1,000, and I'll do all that work for you even though it's worth 2 or 3 or 4 times that amount or not.

You have to make that decision, what works for you. But I can tell you one thing. Anytime you do work for any sort of nonprofit or charity, it's something that means something to you, you have some connection to. It does make you feel really good doing the work for them, especially when you go to whatever event it is and you see your work there out being displayed and people admiring it. It's a great feeling. So, anyways, I wanted to touch on that today. It's been on my mind lately because, well, actually, somebody contacted me. And, in this case, I did not end up working with them, but it got me thinking about it.

And, after some conversations in the resourceful designer community and, that I saw in some design groups on Facebook, I thought that doing pro bono work would be a great topic to cover on the podcast, and I hope you agree.