

**HOW TO CHARGE MORE MONEY FOR YOUR  
PHOTOGRAPHY**

Dear friend,

Okay, so I talk a lot about “barbelling” your photography prices: either free, or very expensive. But how do you actually charge more, and get people to pay?

## **Did you grow up poor like me?**

Let me start.

First of all, I grew up poor. Not poor starving, but poor -- didn't know if my mom could pay rent at the end of the month, because dad gambled away the rent money.

My problem ethically with charging more money for my photography services, products, and workshops:

*Growing up poor, I assumed everyone else was poor. And by charging more money, I was giving a big middle finger to all my fellow poor folks.*

But that was the wrong mentality to have.

To be frank, we all want more money. I do. You probably do.

Money is a tool, to exert more power and freedom in your life.

For me, having money means I can pursue intellectual and literary pursuits, without the stress of having work 8-12 hour minimum hour shifts at Starbucks.

For me, having money means my mom doesn't need to work at sushi restaurant anymore, grinding 6-7 days a week, just to make ends meet. It means, she finally have the freedom to travel, go hiking and backpacking in Nepal for 21 days straight, through the Swiss alps, and finally to live out her dreams of helping her local church community, and hiking group.

For me, having money means I can give away more free information. Because I don't need to monetize as heavily, and struggle for survival.

## **The death of the middle class.**

I recently watched the music video for “Mask off” from the rapper Future.

It was pretty depressing: a future dystopia world of the hyper rich vs the poor.

You got the hyper rich, rolling the streets with a platinum plated Rolls-Royce Phantom, while you got poor folks stealing shit in the streets.

Obviously the future world won't be like that, but this is what I see in real life:

*Hyper rich people buying \$1,000 Giuseppe shoes, while the poor scrambling to make a living, and not having enough money to replace bald tires for \$300, because they are already \$5,000 in debt.*

I remember my family: my mom would put off fixing our run-down 1995 Nissan Maxima, with the peeling clear coat on the black paint and the bubbling purple tint. The tires are bald. The brakes don't work well. Seriously dangerous to drive-- but she didn't have \$500 to fix the brakes, \$300 to replace the tires, because she was already thousand of dollars in debt.

My grim future vision:

*The middle class will no longer exist. They will either turn to the really rich, or the poor.*

But the good news: in America there is still social mobility. Enough luck and hustle, get into a good college, meet the right folks, hustle, keep living expenses low, and starting your own business-- you can become rich. At least, I was lucky enough to -- with hustle, hard work, grinding 14 hour days 7 days a week, for 6 years.

The sad reality: the “American dream” isn't really possible in other countries. For example in Vietnam you can be smart and talented, yet your potential growth is stunted, by lack of opportunity and low wages. I'm not sure what the situation is like in other parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, or South America. I've only lived in America and Vietnam so that's all I can talk about.

## Barbell pricing: FREE or EXPENSIVE

Anyways, I'm writing this assuming you're a photography entrepreneur-- someone who wants to either make side income, or a full income living from photography.

The future:

*Free or very expensive.*

Free: - Free blog posts - Free ebooks - Free videos - Free photos

Expensive:

- Expensive limited-edition art prints or portfolios.
- Expensive workshops, tours, or curated experiences.
- Expensive high-end, bespoke, one of a kind, artisanal products.

## Trust your own intuition, and be stubborn as hell.

Business models are dumb.

Coca-cola started as a drug company.

Tiffany and Co started off as a stationary company.

Problem with business plans: you become blind to other options or opportunity.

For example, let's say you write a fancy business plan, with projected growth and income models, advertising etc. **You become a slave to the business plan; your business plan is no longer your slave.**

Which means, let's say you're starting off as a photography blogger. If you had a business plan of making \$10,000 a month in Google Adsense, you will become option-blind. Meaning, you might not think of other opportunities, like teaching workshops, doing consulting, or selling products.

Apple is a good example. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak started off in a garage, making Mac computers. They were “Apple Computers”. Then, one day Steve Jobs wanted to get into music, because he was passionate about music and Bob Dylan. But in the past, no music company went into music. When he wanted to make the iPod, everyone thought he was crazy. It quickly went on to win the hearts of millions, with the white earbuds, and the concept of “1,000 songs in your pocket.” Apple soon changed their name to just “Apple” (dropping the “computer” part). This is why I’m trying to rebrand “Haptic Industries” to just HAPTIC.

Moving on: when Steve Jobs wanted to make a smartphone, he hated the shitty windows smartphones. Eventually him, the design team and Jony Ive made the iPod into a touch screen phone-- a huge innovation at the time.

Same with iPad: when netbooks were a fad (netbook is a tiny laptop, with very little power, yet portable)-- Steve Jobs said something like:

*Netbooks aren't better at anything! What if we can make something in-between the iPhone and laptop?*

iPad was born. It first was hated on by the press (people weren't sure whether it was a big iPhone, or an I-tampon) but soon, it went to becoming one of the best selling products. On the first day Steve Jobs announced the iPad, he got 700 angry emails from people saying, “Fuck you! How could you not include any USB ports?” It made Jobs a bit depressed.

Anyways, I'm getting a bit off topic: but the lesson is this:

*Don't listen to the opinions, taste, or trends. Rather, **be stubborn as hell about your own artistic vision, and don't compromise.***

For example, Steve Jobs was adamant that the iPhone would only have one button, whereas all the other phones had a billion buttons. Thank god he was so stubborn.

For myself, I was stubborn on keeping the information on this blog open source, free, without bullshit email newsletters keeping you back. I personally hate paywalls. I also hate banner advertising, and pop up shit. So I decided *not* to

restrict freedom of information-- whereas everyone told me I was crazy. I even have declined a potentially lucrative book deal on the "Learn from the masters of photography" in the past-- because I couldn't post the entire text and PDF file online for free. I was told by my loved ones, "I'm disappointed in you." That hurt. But I'm glad I kept true to my inner hue; deep blue.

### **This probably won't work for you.**

Obviously I'm spouting all this economic theory which is just my personal theory. I'm probably wrong.

Anyways, it has worked for me, and probably won't work for you.

But I can say this: by charging a lot of money for my services, I'm no longer struggling financially. I no longer stress about paying the bills. I'm rich enough to help support my family financially. I'm rich enough to not worry about paying the rent at the end of every month. I have very few material wants anymore. Therefore I feel "rich as fuck" (as Dr. Dre says). I'm not rich as fuck because I make billions of dollars, I'm rich as fuck because I'm rich as fuck in terms of being rich spiritually, rich with my relationships, rich creatively, and rich with gratitude.

### **3 steps to charging more for your photographic services.**

So once again, off topic. Sorry.

To charge more money for your photography services or products: several ideas.

### 1. Publish more.

Okay this is gonna contradict much of what I've said in the past. But I think to charge more money for your services, you need to publish more.

For example, consider how many published blog posts that The New York Times does daily. Imagine how many pieces of content are floating on Facebook. You're competing for the eyeballs of your viewer.

If you are a blogger, and go one day without publishing a blog post, you're going to lose followers.

I frequent blogs. If I visit a blog and there is no new content, I'm less likely to visit again.

Imagine if your favorite coffee shop weren't open everyday, every morning, or if they didn't always have your favorite espresso. Would you return daily?

**Quality is overrated in blogging. I say, aim for quantity, not quality.**

Why? We don't know what makes a "quality" blog post. For me, I just try to write things which interact me, things which I think is useful, and **make it 80% good enough then hit publish.**

It has worked for me.

The more I publish, the more likely I am to hit the right string in the heart of my viewer.

The more I publish, the more likely I am to hit a home run.

If you played soccer and were 1:1 against the goalie, would you rather have 1,000 kicks against the goalie, or just 1?

Same in photography: **the more you click the shutter, the more likely you are to make a great photo.** Your first million photos are your worst.

For blogging, your first 1,000 blog posts are your worst. I'm at 2,700+ blog posts, and my aim is this:

*Make every blog post a little less bad.*

Easy.

## 2. Have the confidence to raise prices

For me the confidence to raise prices were thus:

- I had money saved up in the bank, at least 6 months living expenses. Therefore, I knew if I raised my prices, and nobody signed up for my services, I wouldn't go broke.
- I keep living *below* my income. For example, I no longer eat breakfast or lunch. I eat one meal a day-- dinner. I am not picky about what I eat, I can fill myself up on eggs (I usually eat 6 eggs, including yolk, every evening at around 9pm before sleeping).
- I have low expenses: I don't rent an office, I just buy coffee at the coffee shop and steal the free wifi.
- I don't buy expensive camera gear continuously: I stick with my film camera, and digital Ricoh GR.
- I have a backup: move in back with my mom, or Cindy's family. Very low downside.

So before raising your prices for your services, know that there is a risk that nobody will pay you for your new prices. And **once you go up in terms of pricing, you can't go down**. It is the equivalent of burning your boats behind you.

But if you're an entrepreneur, you need to love taking risk. If you're risk-averse too much, you're gonna die. It's probably better you stay at a safe and secure office job.

In modern times, we don't have Spartan soldiers that risk their lives anymore-- unless of course you join the military. But most regular "civilians" no longer have to deal with real risk, life, and death.

I think the modern day Spartan is an entrepreneur -- someone willing to risk their

own reputation, finances, and lifestyle -- to create something greater than them.

I love risk taking, because I want to see what my upper-limit is. Even when I deadlift at the gym, and add 2.5-5 pounds a week, I'm taking a risk. What if I injure myself or hurt myself? Fuck it, I wanna see how close I can fly to the sun on my golden chariot with my Dionysian war horses. Why? Because I want to live a life of grandeur.

### **3. Just do it.**

To raise your prices, just do it.

For example, I was stuck doing \$500 weekend workshops from 2011-2016, almost 5 years! I was scared of raising my prices, from fear that nobody would sign up, and I'd go broke. And to be honest, very few people encouraged me to rise my prices-- except a few friends of mine (thank you Steve, Todd, and Joel).

One day I raised my prices for my week-long workshop to \$2,500. I got 16 people to sign up for the early bird discount of \$1995 USD.

And now, I'm even more ambitious. I'm gonna keep rising prices for workshops, while increasing my knowledge, and also increasing the quality of the experience for my workshop attendees.

But the moral of the story is this, from my friend the rapper Big Sean from Detroit:

*Take a risk that might fuck up your life.*

## **Conclusion**

To own your own business is a risk.

You can choose the gilded cage-- and get an office job. That's what I did when I graduated college and it was good. It was my "incubation phase"-- like I was a newly hatched egg. But soon, I outgrew the nest. I took the risk of no longer staying in the business world of earning \$40,000 a year.

To be honest, I'm lucky my company made me redundant after the tech stock crash of 2011. Thank you God for giving me the opportunity. Because I honestly lacked the guts to quit my job. I became fearful of starting my own business.

But when I was made redundant, I felt free. I remember biking home on my red Nishiki road bike (flange 2 steel), cruising and feeling the Santa Monica breeze on my face, leaning forward on my purple zebra-stripe handlebars, and with the red

wheels spinning against the steel chrome body. I called Cindy and my mom, and told them I was going to pursue photography full time. They both gave me strength and their wishes and encouragement.

I'm lucky, an anomaly. A black swan.

But so are you. You were cut from a different cloth.

So fuck living a "normal" life. Be like Achilles, and take a risk. Be self-centered, a bit crazy, and drunk on your own self-importance.

Study Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, Nassim Taleb, and other risk-takers. They will be your heroes, driving you forward.

BE STRONG, ERIC

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