

# Book Yourself Solid

*for* **CREATIVES**

The Fastest, Easiest, Most Reliable System *for*  
Getting More Clients Than You Can Handle,  
Even if You Hate Marketing *and* Selling

**Michael Port**

*New York Times* Bestselling Author

*with* **Joana Galvão**



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**WILEY**

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*This book is a love story disguised as a business book. It's a love story  
between you and all the inspiring clients you will serve.*



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## Joana's Note

*You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking back.*

—Steve Jobs

Early into my first job as a graphic designer for an award-winning London-based design agency, I found myself increasingly dissatisfied with my job and career prospects. The notion of a 9-to-5 job for the rest of my life felt like a prison – long hours, limited holidays, and a lack of creative freedom that stifled my passion and ambition. Sound familiar? I decided to embark on a new path and take the leap into freelancing, where I could fully express my creativity and build my career on my own terms. I secretly spent my hour-long commute and lunch times reading, researching, studying, and honing my skills. That's where I came across the original *Book Yourself Solid* by Michael Port, first released in 2006 (Wiley).

In the original author's note, Michael shared the challenges he faced when starting his own business and how these difficulties propelled him to develop the *Book Yourself Solid* system, a comprehensive marketing and business system designed specifically for service professionals. Michael detailed how he meticulously researched, tested, and refined the system, transforming his own business in the process. He then went on to share this system with his clients, helping countless other service professionals attract more clients, increase their income, and build fulfilling careers. Inspired by his success and

the proven effectiveness of the system, I thought, “If it worked for all those people, it could certainly work for me as long as I put in the effort.”

There was too much at stake for me, and failing wasn't an option. I was going against everyone's advice. My mum said, “You have no clue how to serve a client; quitting so early in your career is just silly.” My senior designer warned, “You have no clients. Going out on your own is career suicide.” Some of my peers added, “You need at least another decade if you're going to make it work.” But after reading all the reviews and researching the success of the book up to that day, I knew I was in good company. Armed with book in hand, I handed in my resignation letter and got to work.

The promise of the book was delivered. I not only fell in love with marketing and selling by turning it into a meaningful pursuit, but I quickly was booked solid with more clients than I could handle. Ten months into implementing the system, and at age 22, I had a six-figure creative business that quickly turned into a 10-person design agency.

When the book was released in April 2006, *Book Yourself Solid* was the number-two best-selling book on Amazon – not just in the business category but number two in *all* books. It has since become an evergreen resource for professional service providers all over the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. It's been translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, Bulgarian, Polish, Bahasa Indonesian, Orthodox Chinese, Korean, and others. It's included in the curriculums at graduate-level business schools and is touted as recommended reading by professional associations like the National Association of Realtors, which called *Book Yourself Solid* a “must read.”

Combining all the revised and complementary editions, *Book Yourself Solid* has sold more than a million copies. While Michael shared in the original note that he was surprised by the book's success, those who read it and implement the system aren't.

Later in my career, in 2021, I was considering launching a coaching business alongside my agency to help other creative service professionals grow their businesses. I discovered that I could get certified in teaching the *Book Yourself Solid* system. Having experienced firsthand the effectiveness of the system and being able to stand wholeheartedly behind it, it was a no-brainer for me. I jumped at the chance.

Since getting certified, I have coached more than 200 students in more than 40 countries and led them through the *Book Yourself Solid* system. Similar to Michael's experience, I watched their success unfold before my eyes.

I could hear confidence, pride, and accomplishment in their voices. Their businesses took off. My students, who were creative service providers of all kinds – graphic designers, illustrators, copywriters, photographers, video editors, web designers – started to get booked solid (well, most of them – the ones who did the work).

Every now and then, I'd email Michael about some of their success stories, sharing gratitude for making this available for certification so more of us could share the system and with it, help more service providers. But I wasn't expecting what came next.

In the spring of 2023, I received an email that had me dancing across my whole house with joy. Michael was inviting me to cowrite with him this very book you're holding in your hands: an updated version of the original *Book Yourself Solid* book but specific to creative service professionals like yourself.

Together, we want you to know it is realistic for you to become a successful creative service provider. But you need to learn the skills necessary to promote your work and become the go-to creative in your area before it's too late. There is no question that the *Book Yourself Solid* system can change your business and your life.

You love what you do. You're great at what you do. You stand in the service of others, you change lives, and you are a remarkable human being for doing so – now it's time to get booked solid.

This book offers a way toward a profitable, meaningful, and absolutely booked-solid creative business, overflowing with as many clients as your heart desires – clients who energize and inspire you, clients with whom you do your best work, clients who will pay you handsomely.

We hope you feel the same exhilaration in building your creative business as I did along with the thousands of other service professionals that have been supported and propelled by the *Book Yourself Solid* system every day. We expect that this system will not only inspire you but will keep you keenly focused on learning and relearning, experimenting, and honing all that is within you. We are certain the secret to your success isn't just in the work that we do together. It lies within you. *Book Yourself Solid for Creatives* will simply help facilitate your greatness.

We are all on this path together, learning from one another. We are all seeking joy, love, success, and happiness. Continue to trust that you are making a huge difference in the lives of your clients, yourself, and society as a whole.

Here's to you – to focusing on getting as many clients as your heart desires. Please come to the *Book Yourself Solid* system with an open heart and mind. Completely remove, or at least set aside, any preconceived ideas fluttering in your head. Let the process be revealed to you step-by-step.

The *Book Yourself Solid* way is one of abundance, joy, and meaning. It's our deep honor to serve you. As any silly, serious, significant, strategic, personal, or professional questions come up, please give me a shout. I'm always delighted to hear from you. Fire off any and all questions to me at [joana@gifdesignstudios.com](mailto:joana@gifdesignstudios.com). If there is anything we can do to serve you, please just ask.

Warmly,  
Joana Galvão

# Preface

The Book Yourself Solid system is supported by both practical and philosophical principles.

From a practical perspective, there may be two simple reasons why you don't serve as many clients as you'd like to today. Either you don't know what to do to attract and secure more clients or you know what to do but you're not actually doing it. The Book Yourself Solid system is designed to help you solve both of these problems, including the information you need to book more clients. If you already know what to do but aren't doing it, we hope to inspire you into action and help you stay accountable so you build the business of your dreams. Moreover, you may be surprised to learn that marketing isn't really what gets you clients. It's what you do once someone becomes aware of you that books you the business. The Book Yourself Solid system is designed to show you how to create the awareness you need for the services you offer and then exactly what to do to book the business once someone becomes aware of you.

From a philosophical perspective, we believe that if you have something to say, if you have a message to deliver, and if there are people you want to serve, then there are people in this world whom you are *meant* to serve. Not kinda, sorta, because they're in your target market . . . but *meant* to. If this doesn't resonate for you now, we believe it will when you have read this book and begun to follow the Book Yourself Solid way.

The system is organized into four modules:

Your Foundation

Building Trust and Credibility

Simple Selling and Perfect Pricing

The Book Yourself Solid Six Core Self-Promotion Strategies

We will begin by building a foundation for your creative business that is unshakable. If you are truly serious about becoming a successful creative service provider, you must have a steadfast foundation on which to stand. You will then be ready to create and implement a strategy for building trust and credibility. You'll be considered a credible expert in your field, and you'll start to earn the trust of the people you'd like to serve. You'll price your offerings in the sweet spot of the client's desires, and you'll know how to have sales conversations of the highest integrity that work. Then, and only then, will you execute the six core self-promotion strategies, thereby creating awareness for the valuable services you offer by using promotional strategies that are based on your talents – strategies that feel authentic and honest.

To help you design a service business overflowing with clients who inspire and energize you, this book includes written exercises and Booked Solid Action Steps that will support you in thinking bigger about your business. We walk you through the steps on the path to serving as many clients as your heart desires.

You will want to retain your responses to the written exercises for regular review. We have prepared a complimentary downloadable workbook that includes all of the written exercises and Booked Solid Action Steps contained in this book. Simply visit the Book Yourself Solid website and download the workbook so that you may begin today to take the necessary steps to get more clients than you can handle.

Go to <https://www.bookyourselfsolid.com/creativesworkbook> and download your free copy of the workbook so you have it in your hands before you turn another page. So, your first Action Step is to get your workbook. While you'll no doubt get great value just from reading this book, the true value – and your success – lies in your decision to take an active role and to participate fully by doing the exercises and taking the Booked Solid Action Steps we've outlined.

Please work through Book Yourself Solid in sequential order. No skipping, jumping, or moving ahead – the Book Yourself Solid Six Core Self-Promotion Strategies are effectively implemented only after your foundation, credibility-building, pricing, and sales strategies are in place. One of the main reasons that creative service providers say they hate marketing and selling is that they’re trying to market without these essential elements, which is like eating an egg before it’s cooked – of course, you’ll hate it. So, no matter how compelled you are to skip ahead, we urge you to *please* follow the system and watch the process unfold. Remember, self-promotion just creates awareness for the products and services you sell. It’s what you do once someone becomes aware of you that earns you the business. All the marketing in the world won’t do you much good if you have a weak foundation (or none at all), can’t demonstrate credibility, and don’t know how to earn trust, price your offers, or have an effective sales conversation.

So many talented and inspired creative service providers like you run from marketing and sales because they have come to believe that the marketing and selling process is pushy and self-centered and borders on sleazy. This old-school paradigm is not the Book Yourself Solid way. It is the typical client-snagging mentality. And you must *never* fall into this way of thinking and being. If you do, you’ll operate in a mentality of scarcity and shame as opposed to one of abundance and integrity.

Ask yourself these questions:

- How can I be fully self-expressed in my work to create meaning for me and those whom I serve?
- How can I work only in the areas of my greatest strengths and talents so that I can shine?
- How many relationships with people of purpose did I make and deepen?
- How can I better listen to and serve my ideal clients?
- How can I wow people with substance?
- How can I over-deliver on my promises to my clients?
- How can I cooperate with other professionals to create more abundance?

If you keep asking yourself these questions, set a solid foundation for your business, build trust and credibility within your marketplace, learn how to price and sell your offerings, and use the Six Core Self-Promotion Strategies, you’ll be booked solid in no time.



# Acknowledgments

The first line of the acknowledgments section in virtually every book goes something like this: to list everyone we want to thank for their contributions to this book would be a book in itself. You really don't know how true that is until you write your own book. It seems like books are written by one person in solitary confinement in a cabin in the Berkshires or the French Alps. But rarely is that the case. This book is better because of the people around us. Family, friends, colleagues, and clients offer their ideas, relentlessly, at times. So, if you determine that what we've put on paper has merit, you can thank the people around us. They're the ones who deserve the credit. We just form the sentences.



**Module**  
**ONE**

# Your Foundation

Being booked solid as a creative service provider requires that you have a solid foundation. That foundation begins like this:

- Choose your ideal clients so you work only with people who inspire and energize you.
- Understand why people buy what you are selling.
- Develop a personal brand to make you memorable and unique.
- Talk about what you do without sounding confusing or bland.

Over the course of Module One, we'll step you through the process of building your foundation so that you have a platform on which to stand, a perfectly engineered structure that will support all of your business development and marketing, and – dare we add – personal growth. That's because

being in business for yourself, especially as someone who stands in the service of others, requires constant personal reflection and growth.

Over the years, we've found that many people want to hurry through the foundation and just get to the marketing. Please resist this temptation. Remember, marketing rarely gets you clients. What you do once someone becomes aware of you is what actually books you the business. We're aware that we've said this three times now. We'll say it again later. It bears repeating. You need a solid foundation on which to stand first.

Building your foundation may seem like a lot of work. Maybe it is. That all depends on your definition of work, we suppose. But having a solid foundation that feels secure to your potential clients is the first key to business success.

Building your foundation is a bit like putting a puzzle together. We're going to take it one piece at a time, and when we're done, you'll have laid the foundation for booking yourself solid.

# The Red Velvet Rope Policy

*He who trims himself to suit everyone will soon whittle himself away.*

—Raymond Hull

Imagine that a friend has invited you to accompany her to an invitation-only special event. You arrive and approach the door, surprised to find a red velvet rope stretched between two shiny brass poles. A nicely dressed man asks your name, checking his invitation list. Finding your name there, he flashes a wide grin and drops one end of the rope, allowing you to pass through and enter the party. You feel like a star.

Do you have your own Red Velvet Rope Policy that allows in only the most ideal clients, the ones who energize and inspire you? If you don't, you will shortly. Why?

First, because when you work with clients you love, you'll truly enjoy the work you're doing; you'll love every minute of it. (Well, almost every minute of it. It is work, after all.) And when you love the work you do, you'll do your *best* work, which is essential to booking yourself solid.

Second, because you *are* your clients. They are an expression and an extension of you. Do you remember when you were a teenager and your mother or father would give you a hard time about someone you were hanging out with? Your parents may have said that a particular kid was a bad influence. As a teen, you may have thought about how unfair that felt, but the truth is that you are the company you keep. The people you spend

time with make a significant impact on your state of mind and how you feel about yourself. Let this be the imperative of your business: choose your clients as carefully as you choose your friends.

The first step in building your foundation is to choose your ideal clients – the individuals or businesses with whom you do your best work or the people or environments that energize and inspire you. We're going to help you identify specific characteristics of individuals or organizations that would make them ideal to work with. You will then develop a rigorous screening process to find more of them. We're also going to help you prune your current client list of less-than-ideal clients.

When Joana began her career as a freelance graphic designer, she found herself lucky. Most of the clients that came her way seemed to all fit the description of "ideal client." That was until a particular sales call where the potential client raised a handful of red flags. In an attempt to scare the client away, Joana asked for double what she normally would for the project, and to her surprise, the client said yes.

As she dove into the project, she started to dread working on it, not because of the creative challenge itself but because of the client's behavior. This particular client didn't seem to value her creative input, would delay payments, and was overly critical of her work. They asked for more rounds of revisions than were included in the scope of the project, and they pushed back when asked to pay extra for it. The experience was nothing short of draining, with many days ending in Joana questioning her decision to freelance at all.

She no longer looked forward to jumping into her work alongside her morning coffee. The snooze button got hit more often, and she'd find herself procrastinating, dreading her inbox. Each "just one more tiny revision" felt like it could be the final push that sent her over the edge.

It didn't take long for Joana to quickly realize that even for double her rate, it wasn't worth it to work with nonideal clients, and she started to implement her own Red Velvet Rope Policy. It was a game changer, creating a positive ripple effect. She soon started to leap out of bed again, excited to dive into new projects. This excitement was palpable, and it helped deepen the relationship between her and her clients. In fact, she even started flying out to meet some of them face-to-face. This not only made her relationships with her clients stronger but created opportunities for her to be introduced to new ones, just as ideal.

Joana also discovered that when she worked only with ideal clients, her designs got even better. Feeling pumped and into her work meant she could give it her all, leading to doing her best work.

Live by the Red Velvet Rope Policy of ideal clients. Doing so will increase your productivity and happiness. Plus, it allows you to do your best work, which means your clients get the best results possible, which in turn leads to more clients and referrals than you can handle by yourself.

For maximum joy, prosperity, and abundance, think about the person you are when you are performing optimally, when you are with all the people who inspire and energize you. Now think about all of the frustration, tension, and anxiety you feel when you work with clients who are less than ideal – not so good, right?

Wouldn't it be great to spend every day working with clients who are ideal for you, clients whom you can hardly believe you get paid to work with? This ideal is completely possible once you identify who you want to work with and determine with certainty that you will settle for nothing less. Once you do that, it's just a matter of knowing which of your existing clients qualify and how to acquire more just like them.

**1.1.1 Written Exercise:** To begin to identify the types of clients you don't want, consider which characteristics or behaviors you refuse to tolerate. What turns you off or shuts you down? What kinds of people should *not* be getting past the red velvet rope that protects you and your business?

## Dump the Duds

Let's take this a step further. It's time to dump your dud clients. We can just hear your shocked protestations and exclamations. "I thought this was a book about getting clients, not dumping them!" We're referring to the *dud* clients – not all of your clients. It sounds harsh, but think about it. Your dud clients are those you dread collaborating with. They sap your creativity, bore you to tears, or leave you endlessly frustrated with the project, even after giving it your all.

Most creatives choose their career out of passion for their craft. They choose this path to express their creativity and connect with others through their work. However, along the way, many of these talented individuals find themselves burned out and experiencing creative blocks regularly because of working with too many dud clients.

When Joana faced this problem with a retainer client who represented 30% of her agency's revenue, she was terrified at the thought of letting them go. She thought that if she got rid of them, her reputation would crumble and so in turn would her business. But guess what? Dumping this client brought about only positive outcomes, and the team thanked her for it.

There are likely many reasons you *think* you can't dump your dud clients, and we know this can seem really scary early on, but hang in there with. Embrace the concept and trust that this is sound advice from loving teachers and a necessary step on the path to booking yourself solid.

Why have clients, or anyone for that matter, in your life who zap your energy and leave you feeling empty? You might decide to dump five dud clients in one week, or you may decide to dump one per month over the next year. The Red Velvet Rope Policy may be provocative. It might not feel like an easy thing to do. It requires a leap of faith (faith in yourself), but the emotional and financial rewards will be transformational. Within a few weeks of dumping your duds, you may add a dozen or more delightful clients. Sure, you'll increase your revenue if you add more ideal clients to your roster, but you'll also feel at peace and at ease as a business owner and creative. You'll enjoy your work more. Maybe not straightaway, but that Red Velvet Rope Policy? It's your ticket to a more positive workday. It'll keep the duds away and ensure you choose your ideal clients – people who inspire and energize you and, more important, allow you to do your best work.

Ask yourself: "Would I rather spend my days working with incredibly amazing, exciting, supercool, awesome people who are both clients and friends, or spend one more agonizing, excruciating minute working with barely tolerable clients who suck the life out of me?" Any initial discomfort or loss you may feel when dumping your duds will pay off in the long run.

Using the phrase "dump your dud clients," suggests that there is something wrong with them. But that's not necessarily the case. Well, in some cases you may have a real nut job on your hands, but most of the time, they're just not right for *you*. A client who doesn't resonate with your style,

for example, could be a dream for another creative who creates work in the style that client is after. Keep in mind that you don't need to create conflict and fire clients. You just need to stop signing on to their projects. You can be tactful, diplomatic, and loving. You can even attempt, when appropriate, to refer them to a colleague who might be a better fit. Whenever possible, keep it simple. Try, "I'm not the best person to serve you." Or "I don't think we'd be a good fit."

Are you always going to get a positive response when dumping your dud clients? Maybe not. If the first thing that comes to mind is "I don't want anyone out there thinking badly of me," we're with you. We love helping people, and we want people to think well of us. But living life fully can require difficult conversations, and you can't please everyone. To even try is an exercise in futility, as the following Aesop fable demonstrates.

### **The Old Man, the Little Boy, and the Donkey**

An old man, a little boy, and a donkey were going to town. The little boy rode on the donkey, and the old man walked beside him. As they went along, they passed some people who remarked it was a shame the old man was walking and the little boy was riding. The man and boy thought maybe the critics were right, so they changed positions.

Later, they passed some people who remarked, "What a shame! He makes that little boy walk." They then decided they both would walk.

Soon they passed some more people who thought they were stupid to walk when they had a decent donkey to ride. So they both rode the donkey. Later, they passed some people who shamed them by saying how awful to put such a load on a poor donkey. The boy and man said they were probably right, so they decided to carry the donkey. As they crossed the bridge, they lost their grip on the animal. He fell into the river and drowned.

The moral of the story? *If you try to please everyone, you might as well kiss your ass goodbye.*

When considering who you want to work with, look for qualities in a person who you resonate with, so you don't limit yourself to just thinking about the clients you don't yet have. Your Red Velvet Rope Policy is a filtration system that lets in ideal clients. However, you can choose to loosen or tighten the rope at will. We're not (necessarily) asking you to turn away

your very first clients. We understand what you're up against. When you start your business, if you feel that you'd like to keep your red velvet rope a little looser so you can work with more clients, go right ahead.

For example, a recent graduate who is just venturing into freelancing for the first time should have some non-negotiable traits built into their Red Velvet Rope Policy, but it could make sense for them to keep their red velvet rope closer to the ground so they can build a client roster and, critically, generate the revenue necessary to ensure the revenue they need.

Just make sure you know what is ideal and what isn't ideal about the people you're letting into the VIP room. As you become booked solid, you'll tighten your red velvet rope and become even more exclusive so as to work only with those who energize and inspire you and – most important – allow you to do your best work.

**1.1.2 Written Exercise:** Now take a good, hard look at your current clients. Be absolutely honest with yourself. Who among your current clients fits the profile you've just created of people who should *not* have gotten past the red velvet rope that protects you and your business?

**1.1.3 Booked Solid Action Step:** Dump the dud clients you've just listed in the preceding exercise. It may be just one client, or you may need another two pages to write them all down. Is your heart pounding? Is your stomach churning at just the thought? Have you broken out in a cold sweat? Or are you jumping up and down with excitement now that you've been given permission to dump your duds? Maybe you're experiencing both sensations at the same time; that's totally normal. Do it and you'll feel better.

Taking a Booked Solid Action Step is a bold action and requires courage. And courage is not about being fearless – it's about owning your fear and using it to move you forward, to give you strength. There is no more rewarding feeling than the pride you'll feel once you've moved past the fear to do what you set out to do. Maybe you'll find it easier to take it one step at a time. Start by dismissing just one of those dud clients.

The feeling of empowerment you'll have once you've done it will motivate you to continue pruning your list of clients until the duds have all been removed.

## **What to Do When You Don't (Yet) Have Clients**

*But Michael and Joana, what if I just started my business and don't yet have clients, let alone dud clients? Ah, yes, excellent point. Consider yourself lucky. You'll never have to worry about dud clients because you'll put your Red Velvet Rope Policy in place on day one.*

In just a moment, you'll begin to create your Red Velvet Rope Policy. If you're starting a new business and don't yet have many, or any, clients to speak of at this point, as you're working through the exercises, think about current or former co-workers, friends, or even service providers that you've hired in the past. To create your future Red Velvet Rope Policy, you'll be able to draw on your past experiences – who inspired you and who made you want to do them bodily harm. Refrain. Rewind. Remember: love and kindness. Love and kindness.

## **Pruning Your Client List**

If you're struggling with the idea of pruning your client list, keep in mind that it's for your client's benefit as much as it is for yours. If you're feeling empty and drained, or frustrated and dreading the interaction with the client, then you're giving that client far less than your best, and it's both of you who are suffering for it. You owe it to these clients to refer them to someone who can, and will, do their best work with them. If you are working with people with whom you do not do your best work, you are out of integrity. And as we discussed earlier, you *are* your clients. When your clients go out into the world and speak of you to others, they are representing you.

With whom do you want to be associated – the duds or the ideal clients? It's also the ideal clients, those who are wildly happy with you and your services, who are most likely to go out and talk about you to others, to refer other clients like themselves, more ideal clients. The fewer duds you

allow to hang around, the more ideal clients you have room for, the more referrals you'll get, and so on.

Clients are like family, so we know this can be hard and can cause a period of intense and painful negative energy worrying about those challenging client relationships. It's exhausting and takes away from providing the best creative services for your clients. It is impossible to be your most effective, most attentive, and most precise self when working with less than ideal clients.

Joana's agency had been working with a client for more than three years – let's call her Sophie. Wanting to serve Sophie as best as she could, over time, Joana started to expand her offerings beyond her agency's usual capabilities, handling everything from brand identity design to web design and development to editorial design and social media graphics. However, the quick turnaround needed for the latter began to stress the team. This, coupled with the reduced creativity social media design required for this brand, started making the work feel monotonous. The team started to dread working on Sophie's account, and Joana started to find it harder to keep them motivated.

It wasn't that Sophie was demanding or difficult; it was just that this particular task didn't align with the team's passion or expertise. Moreover, the process for quick turnaround social media graphics was so distinct from their other projects that it disrupted their day-to-day operations, making everything feel more challenging than it should.

Recognizing this mismatch, Joana decided to do something about it. She approached Sophie, explaining that while they cherished handling her branding and web needs, both areas for which Joana's agency was known, they believed she would benefit from someone with a keen passion for social media design to take over that role.

To ensure Sophie was well taken care of, Joana introduced her to a freelancer starting out, who she knew and trusted, proficient in social media design and already an admirer of Sophie's brand. This move was a win-win. Sophie gained an expert who was enthusiastic about her social media needs and at a more budget-friendly rate. Meanwhile, Joana's team was free to channel their energy back into their true strengths: branding and web design.

The decision not only re-energized Joana's team but also ensured that Sophie received phenomenal service in every domain. It was a clear demonstration of the benefits of aligning client relationships with one's strengths and passions.

Imagine if Joana hadn't taken this action. From experience, this is how we know the story would have played out instead: Joana and her team would have grown increasingly resentful of the work they were doing and therefore of the client. They would have started to diminish the quality of their service or, even worse, find themselves snapping back at yet another urgent social media request. This would have in turn led to a poor experience for the client and eventually a termination of the contract. Not to mention, it would have ended all the referrals this client had been sending Joana their way.

This is what can happen when you work with clients who are not ideal for you. At some point, you're going to create a conflict, whether intentionally or not, because you're going to be frustrated with those clients. Those clients will think you're not providing them with good service – and they'll be right. It doesn't serve you or the client when you stay in a less than ideal situation. If you do, you'll have former clients going out into the world telling anyone who will listen that you're the worst person to work with. And while navigating nonideal client relationships can be challenging, remember that parting ways, or redefining the project parameters, doesn't have to be painful. Done with care and integrity it can result in a win-win experience for all parties involved, setting the stage for more ideal clients to come your way.

## **Creating Your Red Velvet Rope Policy**

The benefits of working with ideal clients are many and meaningful:

- You'll get to do your best work.
- You'll feel invigorated and inspired.
- You'll connect with clients on a deeper level.
- You'll feel successful and confident.
- You'll know your work matters and is changing lives.
- You'll feel fully self-expressed.

Joana knows her ideal client's traits so well she even created a framework for them:

Here's her DREAM client framework:

- **Decisive** (can make decisions in a timely manner)
- **Respectful** (of Joana's time, her team's time, and their process)
- **Engaged** (communicative and responsive throughout the project, giving honest feedback in a timely and constructive manner to help move the project forward)
- **Adaptable** (open to new ideas out of their comfort zone and new tools to facilitate the process)
- **Motivated** (committed to the vision of their company and the end goal of the project)

Your list might look completely different.

Take heed: how much money a client has or doesn't have is not what this is about. Your Red Velvet Rope Policy considers *what kind of person* you're dealing with, not how much this person has or doesn't have. People with fat wallets are often the primary consideration for many creatives who wind up working with clients who are less than ideal. Notice that my list considers the *qualities* of my ideal clients first – who they *are* rather than what they *have* or the circumstances they're in.

**1.1.4 Written Exercise:** Define your ideal client. What type of people do you love being around? What do they like to do? What do they talk about? With whom do they associate? What ethical standards do they follow? How do they learn? How do they contribute to society? Are they smiling, outgoing, or creative? What kind of environment do you want to create in your life? And who will get past the Red Velvet Rope Policy that protects you? List the *qualities, values, or personal characteristics* you'd like your ideal clients to possess.

**1.1.5 Written Exercise:** Now let's look at your current client base. Who do you love interacting with the most? Who do you look forward to seeing? Who are the clients who don't feel like work to you? *Who is it you sometimes just can't believe you get paid to work with?* Write down the names of clients, or people you've worked with, who you love to be around.