

## Contractor doctor: how can I deal with staff who keep asking me for expert advice?

Dear Contractor Doctor,

I was hired into a project because of a very specific skill. However, the permanent staff keep asking me lots of questions, which I'm helping out with, but am concerned that this is slowly reducing the value of my expertise.

I was never hired to provide training and am worried that if this continues then they might not need me any more. How should I deal with such situations without spoiling the relationship with the team and client?

Thanks

Tim

Contractor Doctor says:

This is a common problem that many highly skilled contractors encounter, and one that needs to be handled delicately. It's a bit of a juggling act - you want to keep the client happy and provide a little bit of extra value, but also ensure you aren't taken advantage of and end up selling yourself short - training involves knowledge transfer, and normally commands much higher rates.

We discussed the issues relating to [whether you are legally obliged to train staff](#) in a previous article. From what you have told us training staff isn't part of your normal work so the client can't expect you to do this. But simply turning off the "advice tap" citing legal reasons might not be the most diplomatic way to handle the situation.

Paul Johnson, who has been contracting for six years says "Most contractors do offer a bit of advice and guidance to junior staff now and then, and this can be expected, but you need to be careful to make sure you aren't drawn into the 'providing training' zone."

In your case, it certainly sounds like you have been drawn in too much, and need to get out! So how do you deal with it?

Your best approach is to speak to your boss and tell them that whilst you are happy to help out on occasions, you feel you are training their existing staff too much and imparting knowledge, which wasn't what you were brought in to do. You can also explain that training rates normally cost more, and that you are happy to do it, but there would need to be a change in the rate.

The other factor to take into account is the current market conditions. If there are plenty of other contractors who would happily take your place *and* throw in some training for free you might decide that it is in your best commercial interests to do the same. On the other hand if the client could not replace you then you are in a much stronger bargaining position, and one which you could use to your advantage. You could explain that it is evident that their staff need some training, pointing to the amount they are currently requesting, and that the solution to the current and long term needs is for you to provide some formal training.

Also, if you have not trained people before, then you could view this as a great opportunity for you. Why not offer to develop some training material and deliver it to their staff? You could perhaps agree that they pay you the same rate for the time taken to develop the material and present it, but you would retain the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) over it. That way the client gets what it wants at a cheaper rate, and you get your own training course developed which you can put on your CV - with one happy client already.

And finally, the next time you encounter your clients asking for more than you've agreed to, perhaps think of it as a buying signal, with the chance for greater opportunity rather than a threat.

Good luck with your contracting.

Contractor Doctor

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