

An Interview with Zulma

Starting a Business during the Pandemic



How much do you charge for your services?

I usually charge \$35 per hour for service once a month or every other week, and \$30 for every week. Other cleaning companies charge between \$40 and \$50 per hour.

How did you decide how much to charge?

In the beginning, I charged less because I needed the business. I took two jobs for only \$27 per hour. They were my first customers. Sometimes I feel like I don't charge enough. I'm going to start raising my prices. I'm afraid to lose the customers, but I'm going to take the chance.

How did you decide to charge by the hour instead of by the job?

I haven't really figured out which is best – whether I should charge by the job or by the hour. But for now, I think hourly is good. My friends disagree. They say it is better to charge by the job.

Why do you charge by the hour?

People often want you to do extras – like washing windows or cleaning baseboards. You have to take that into account when you give your price. You have to calculate that you will charge “x” more on top of the base price.

But I don't do it that way. I say, “This is how much four hours costs. What do you want me to do?” If the job takes more than four hours, I will charge them accordingly. When I am working, I don't waste time. If you hire me for four hours of work, you get four hours of work!

Do jobs sometimes take longer than you expect?

Yes! You can't always predict how long it will take to clean the apartment. Sometimes, when you start cleaning, you say, “Oh my goodness!” One time, I took a job without looking at it first. I thought I was going to spend three hours there. In the end, it took me and my husband 12 hours! They paid me for the full 12 hours.

Do you usually look at a job before you do it?

Yes! That was an exception. Usually I look at a place before I do the job, especially with moving-in or moving-out jobs. I look at the job and I estimate how many hours it will take me.

What other expenses do you have to think about—for example, travel time to and from the apartments, the cost of the cleaning products?

At the beginning, I didn't think about these things because I just needed a job. I usually look at a place before I clean it. That takes time, but I don't charge for that. I buy my own cleaning products most of the time. Sometimes customers have products for me to use. They know my price is reasonable. Still, I feel bad asking customers to provide supplies.

What's the hardest part of the job?

Figuring out how much to charge! Sometimes I feel like I don't charge enough, and other times I feel like it's too much. Cleaning – I don't mind that. But the part about charging people has been hard for me.

A Fictional Weekly Schedule for Zulma’s Cleaning Business

Zulma charges her monthly clients \$35 per hour, weekly clients \$30 per hour, and new clients \$27 per hour. Use the table below to calculate her earnings for each day. Write an equation for each day showing the income. For example, Monday could be: $(\$27 \times 3) + (\$35 \times 4) = \$221$. Then calculate the hourly rate she made each day. Count all the hours spent working, including preparing supplies, doing paperwork, and traveling. For example, Monday’s hourly earnings would be: $\$221/11 = \20.09 .

Time	Mon.	Tues.	Weds.	Thurs.	Fri.
7-8	Prepare supplies and equipment; travel to job	Buy gas for car; check oil; travel to job	Promote business on social media; travel to job	Travel to job	Do paperwork for the business; travel to job
8-9	Clean for new clients \$27 per hour	Clean for weekly client @ \$30 per hour	Clean for monthly client @ \$35 per hour	Clean for weekly client at \$30 per hour	Clean for weekly client @ \$30 per hour
9-10					
10-11					
11-12	Look at 2 new jobs			Lunch	
12-1	Purchase supplies; eat lunch while doing work errands.	Lunch; look at new job and travel to next job		Clean for monthly client @\$35	
1-2	Clean for monthly customer @ \$35 per hour	Clean for weekly clients @ \$30 per hour	Lunch; personal errands		Lunch; personal errands
2-3			Clean for weekly client @ \$30 per hour		Clean for weekly client @ \$30 per hour
3-4					
4-5					
5-6	Promote business; send invoices				
Equation	$(\$27 \times 3) + (\$35 \times 4) = \$221$				
Gross income	\$221.00				
Hours worked	11				
Hourly Rate	\$20.09				

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What was Zulma’s gross income for the week? (*Gross income* means the total amount she got paid before deducting expenses.)
2. Estimate Zulma’s expenses (for example: supplies and gas). Then calculate her net income for the week. (*Net income* is the total you are left with after you deduct expenses.)

3. Explain why the hourly rates for each day are different.
4. What stands out to you about the information on this chart? If this were your business, what would you do differently?

NOTE: FIND AN ANSWER SHEET on our website on the [Issue #55](#) page under “Extras.”