

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO FREELANCING

1.1 INTRODUCTION (WHY WE MADE THIS BOOK)

Freelancing is one of the fastest growing career paths for young people today. It is a response to what they see as the overly structured work environment of previous generations. They are bolder than previous freelancing generations, taking the reins of their careers in their hands. They are freelancing full-time, across borders, industries and occupations. With rapid changes in the economy, technology and work cultures, we see that even those who are more accustomed to a fixed office environment turn to freelancing or risk being left behind.

One of their biggest challenges is connecting with companies who need their services. Conversely, companies constantly face the challenge of finding good, proven, project-based talent for their initiatives. In 2012, CreativesAtWork was set up to be that essential link, bringing together the freelancer and the employer for media projects across Asia.

We connect talented freelancers to project owners with our matchmaking and project management services. With a strong network of media freelancers, CreativesAtWork provides a complete solution to every project owner's media needs and requirements. Since our inception, we have built a network of over 1,500

specialists in the media industry and completed more than SGD\$10 million worth of projects.

The COVID-19 era shows us that the future of work is here. More projects and less budget mean that selecting the right person for the right project is imperative to success. Companies — from large Multi-National Corporations to Small Middle Enterprises — have less wiggle room than ever before. We believe creative freelancers will play a pivotal role in helping large corporations, SMEs or start-up companies to manage their internal resources and enable the use of exceptional project-based talent that would otherwise not be economically feasible to bring on board. Most importantly, during times of uncertain market conditions, they enable businesses to maximise performance across peaks and troughs in demand.

We hope through this book, it will bring about more awareness of the lesser known profession called “freelancer” and generates the next wave of “Future Leaders” with entrepreneurial and self-employed mindsets.

If you have not started your freelancing career yet, there are many things you can do to prepare yourself before you jump in. For those who have already started freelancing, we hope you find these tips useful too.

1.2 SO WHAT IS FREELANCING ALL ABOUT?

Freelancing is not always the easy, laid back lifestyle that people believe. It is challenging, many times more so than being an employee. You do not have the support of co-workers, a boss or a training team, so it is up to you to keep yourself and your business on track. Being a freelancer requires a lot of grit. But just like with everything, this mindset is something you can develop!

On the surface, a freelancer is someone who works on a contract basis. But the real differences are seen when you check under the hood — mindset, lifestyle, and skills that would differentiate the freelancer from a regular employee. As a freelancer, you will find yourself having to make many decisions that most employees take for granted such as invoicing, negotiating your pay (constantly), even where and when you work, just to name a few. All these might seem small, but they do add up the mental load that many will crumble under.

So every time we speak to a person who comes to us looking for advice on freelancing this is the first thing we tell them — you have to be mentally and emotionally prepared to take on this load. Not everything will be perfect, but you will learn to cope and improve along the way.

Luckily for you, we have compiled a ton of good tips here to help you navigate your way and skip some potholes many have stumbled over!

1.3 TYPES OF FREELANCERS

Decide what type of freelancer you want to be. Do you want to work from home, completely on your own? Or would you rather still work in an office?

If you would still like to work in an office setting, consider doing contract work. You will go into the office like any other employee, but you are only bound to the company for the length of your contract. This will play a part in how you set up your company later on.

We can divide freelancers into four general types (these may not be the categories you have heard of before!)

- Pure freelancers
- Contract workers
- Interim freelancers
- Artisans

1.3.1 Pure Freelancers

These freelancers often work for multiple clients at the same time. They do not have any obligation to be in an office. They adhere to deadlines, but when and how they work is entirely up to them.

These freelancers have almost total freedom. They can work from a café in Amsterdam, or in their shorts at home. But they do need to have a lot of self-discipline, as they are totally unsupervised.

1.3.2 Contract Workers

These freelancers turn up at the office and keep the same hours as a regular employee but they are working on a contract, just like other freelancers. Some consultants work this way, as do many specialised engineers and programmers. For these freelancers, it may not be possible to work for multiple clients at once.

1.3.3 Interim Freelancers

Some freelancers do not intend to stay that way. An example would be a contract worker who wants to be considered for a permanent position. Interim freelancers need to work on other areas, such as fitting in well with the corporate culture to get a permanent position.

1.3.4 Artisans

Artisans see their work more as a calling or art form (or craft) than a job. Financial gain is not their sole concern. Whether their

medium is photography, writing, painting, etc., it is important that they derive personal satisfaction from the project. These freelancers need to pick their clients carefully; otherwise they could end up working for someone who is too controlling, or who cannot appreciate their work.

1.4 PROS & CONS OF FREELANCING

1.4.1 *Benefits of Being a Freelancer*

There are many benefits of being a freelancer. But the one that we most often hear is freedom. The freedom to be able to choose what project you want to work on, the freedom to choose how you want to work and where you want to work and the freedom to decide what you need to do when you need to do, it sounds very appealing especially to the younger generation. This is what drives most people to be a freelancer.

For some, freelancing provides an opportunity to work outside of an office. You can hang out with friends till midnight, come home, and then start work (if you are a night owl and party animal). You can work from a spa in Bali or be backpacking over the Andes during your work week.

Another advantage of freelancing is that you develop a strong network of contacts. Due to the nature of freelancing, you will inadvertently in your normal course of business get in touch with many other people whether they are your clients, your co-workers in one of the freelance projects or just random people you meet at networking events. Most freelancers will agree that they need a strong network of contacts to continue their trade.

A third advantage to freelancing is subtle, but important: freelancing does not allow you to stagnate. You have to keep finding new

clients. That means developing your skills, maintaining your network, and upgrading or developing new services and products. We have often seen employees in their 40s or 50s who have a hard time when they are made redundant — many have become out of touch with what the job market demands. Freelancers are forced to keep pace and always be at the forefront of change.

A freelancer can be choosy and select desirable jobs, while avoiding the less appealing ones. This may come at a cost of lower earnings. We know several musicians who outright refuse to play certain types of music or at certain venues, even if it means earning less.

Freelancers who are less choosy often (not always) make above-average incomes. From our experience, writers who freelance instead of working for a single publication almost invariably earn more.

The final benefit we like to highlight is the easier transition from self-employed to business owner. One day, being a freelancer may no longer be sufficient. A time will come when you have more clients than you can service, and you have numerous high-level executives and directors clamouring for your time. It is an opportunity to run your own business.

This is never easy, but a freelancer will find the transition from worker to business owner easier. Freelancers already know how to deal with issues like risk and opportunity cost, how to behave like a vendor, and how to deal with fluctuating income. They have a better sense of how legal and financial paperwork is handled. Above all, they have a strong network of contacts to source clients from — in fact, many start their business with a waiting list of clients that is several months long. Hence, freelancing can also be akin to running a business. A business mindset is important in order for freelancing to be a rewarding and fulfilling journey.

1.4.2 Challenges of Being a Freelancer

Then we come to the difficult part of freelancing: money.

This is where it gets touchy. In our experience, freelancers can earn more than regular employees if they are not picky. This means having a craftsman mindset rather than an artist mindset.

Most likely, you'll be getting your 'salary' based on projects too. This means that many-a-time, you'll be facing unstable income. You constantly have to be on your toes, thinking about where your next paycheck is going to come from. Financial issues aside, the stress and anxiety of this turns many people away from freelancing.

Change, as much of an advantage of freelancing it is, is also a bane to some. Some people like to find a comfortable state to be in and stay there. There is no wrong in that. However, if you are a freelancer, the lifestyle of constant change that bring excitement and drive to some might also cause you stress.

With the freedom that is awarded with the lifestyle, ironically, another challenge that arises is the discipline that one must develop as a freelancer. You get to work almost any time you choose, but do you want to be working for 24 hours a day? You are unsupervised, but do you want to constantly procrastinate and deliver rushed jobs to your clients?

Being your own boss, no matter your chosen trait, you'll most likely spend a good amount of time doing business-related tasks like invoicing, pitching, canvassing, marketing, collecting payment and other administrative tasks. If you were working in a large company before, you'll most likely be used to another person or department doing

these for you. However, being a one-man show, these tasks will fall on you now. These are dreaded but necessary tasks for any business.

Freelancing can also be a lonely road a lot of times. There are usually no co-workers, no water cooler chit-chat, no lunch buddies. These might seem irrelevant but many miss the social aspect and the commiserative feeling of working in a company with a team, with everyone around you moving towards a common goal. There are substitutes for this which we will touch on later. However, it is still something that does not come as naturally as when you have a team you're working together with while in the same room or building for 8-10 hours a day.