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Advice From Successful Freelancers: Starting & Maintaining A Freelancer Career

By Yuwanda Black

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by: **Yuwanda Black**

For the e-book, Advice from Successful Freelancers: How They Built Their Careers & How You Can Too!, I asked ten questions of freelancers who were living their dream life. Following are some of their answers. They cover successful marketing techniques, how to get clients and more!

1. Why did you start freelancing? Yuwanda Black, Writer, Editor, Small Business Columnist

My sister and I worked at the same company. We were freelancing on the side. Once we realized that we were making more as freelancers than as full-time employees, she quit and started Inkwell Editorial. Once the business was able to support two salaries, I joined her, which was one year later (1997).

2. How long have you been a full-time freelancer? Eileen Coale: Marketing & Corporate Communications Writer

I don't work full time. On average, I work about 15 hours a week, sometimes a bit more. I work mornings until my youngest gets home from kindergarten, and sometimes I'll put in evenings and Saturdays as well. Sixty to 70% of my work hours are spent networking and marketing to get assignments. The remainder is spent writing. In another year or two, I expect that ratio to flip.

3. How many years of experience do you have? Marcy L. Brown: Cataloging, Indexing & Information Management

I have five part-time years of indexing, but 10 years of library employment including cataloging, some indexing, and information management.

4. Do you specialize in a certain area, e.g., legal, medical, production? If so, what? Cathy Moore: Writer, Instructional & Marketing Copy

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Instructional writing and marketing copy. I write appealing text for any readability level, including kids.

5. What specific marketing tips have you personally tried that worked? Jennifer Lawler: Writer, Editor

I tried a direct mail letter to editors that included the type of editing I could do, a few companies I had worked for, and my business card printed in such a way that it could be popped right onto someone's rolodex. This letter generated so much business for me that I never had to do another direct mail package.

6. How do you get most of your clients? Katharine O'Moore-Klopf: Editor, Copy Editor, Factchecker

When I first started freelancing, I got them mostly by word of mouth, and some were former employers. Now, I get them mostly by word of mouth and via my Web site.

7. Under what circumstances would you turn down work? Jennifer Dirks: Journalist, Editor, Writer, Speaker

I've turned down work if the pay (or potential payoff) won't compensate me for the work I'd put into it. I also once turned down work from a magazine publisher who in the past has asked for several rewrites without explanation and I was unsure if anything new I did for her would ever please her.

8. Approximately how many hours a week would you estimate you work? Nan Yielding: Copywriter

Anywhere from 50–60. I pretty much work a 9-hour day ... weekends included. However, I do allow myself some time off every so often to just 'play,' so it averages out.

9. If offered a well-paying, full-time position, would you accept? Please explain why you would accept/refuse. Richard Adin: Desktop Publishing & Copyediting Services

This cannot be answered yes or no; there are too many factors that I would have to consider. "Well-paying" is important but also important, perhaps more so, are matters of responsibility and challenge.

10. What is the number one piece of advice you would offer to freelance newbies? Rachel Goldstein: Web Developer, Graphic Designer, Muralist

In order to assure your chances for the greatest success, you should do some self-evaluation before you leap into freelancing. Not only does it take a special temperament to run a successful business, but it also takes talent and expertise in your field. This includes some or all of the following personality features: self-confidence, common sense, innovation, and ambition.

Summarizing the experts:

°Have experience in your area: All of the contributors worked full-time in their area at some point to gain experience.

°Marketing: Simply put, you will not succeed unless and until you learn how to market your skills (effectively and consistently).

°Perseverance: Simply hanging in there is the final piece of advice our contributors offered.

Excerpted from Advice for Successful Editorial Freelancers: How They Built Their Careers & How You Can Too! on 11/01. It is a companion to How to Really Make a Living as an Editorial Freelancer.

May be reprinted with inclusion of the following: Yuwanda Black is an entrepreneur, author, speaker and syndicated small business columnist whose focus is controlling your destiny through small business ownership. Her most recent e-books, How to Really Make a Living as an Editorial Freelancer and Advice from Successful Freelancers: How They Built Their Careers & How You Can Too! are available for immediate download at

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So You Want to be a Freelancer? Here's How!

By Vishal P. Rao

Not that long ago, freelancing was something people did mainly in larger metropolitan areas where work for writers, artists, and other creative types was plentiful and easily accessible. Today, however, the freelance landscape has dramatically changed.

For one, you can live practically anywhere in the world and still be able to maintain a successful freelance career. Not to mention that the creative fields aren't the only areas where freelancing is popular any more.

Today, accountants, trainers, computer technicians, etc. are all able to earn a living as freelancers. Regardless of the freelancing field you are interested in, there are some important things you should know that will help you get started and get successful.

Before we discuss those, however, we need to talk briefly about the pros and the cons of being a freelancer. You need to know both sides before you make your decision so you truly understand what you're getting into.

Freelancer Pros

1. You set your own schedule

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As a freelancer, you get to determine what time you get out of bed and what time you turn in at night. You get to decide how much vacation time you can afford to take this year and you can elect to skip work one afternoon to spend time with your children.

2. You don't work for a boss

Even though you are answerable to your clients, they don't wield the same power over your life that a boss does. Yes, they can fire you, but you can also quit working for them if things get too difficult.

3. You determine how much you earn

While a conventional job pays a set amount of money regardless of how hard you work (and in some cases how long you work), freelancing allows you to make practically any amount of money that you wish because you determine how much your services cost and how many jobs you take on at one time.

4. You are able to work from your own office

Whether you prefer working in a home office or renting space somewhere to do your business, you are in charge of designing and maintaining your own comfortable office. You get to pick the people you work with. You get to pick the type of computer, post-it notes, and bottled water that you use on a daily

basis also.

Freelancers Cons

1. You can become overworked quickly

When you start working steadily as a freelancer, it becomes nearly impossible for you to truly take a vacation. You have projects and clients that need your constant attention, so being gone or getting sick even for a day can put you behind schedule.

2. You have to deal with clients who can be more difficult than bosses

Most of the clients freelancers work with are genuinely good people, but there are others out there that are not. Every freelancer has probably been ripped off by a client at one time or another, even if they take steps to protect themselves.

3. You don't have a steady income

Unless you have one or two truly constant streams of work, you can expect your income to fluctuate dramatically. Some months you may feel like you struck the lottery while others may make you think you're heading for the food stamp line, especially when you are starting out.

4. You don't have a way to separate work from home life

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If you have a home office, you may find it difficult to recognize the difference between being at home and being at work which means that while your watching television or eating dinner you may begin to feel like you're actually still on the job.

As you can see, each positive has a negative aspect as well. However, many of these negatives can be easily handled once you have experience as a freelancer, but to get to that point, you need to know how to get started.

Find Something You Enjoy Doing

This is critical to your success. If you don't already have something in mind to do as a freelancer, you need to be sure that you pick an activity that you truly love. Remember, you will be doing this type of work every day. Also, the more you enjoy your work, the more passionate you are about it. Potential clients will spot that passion and will be more inclined to work with you.

Save Some Money

Most freelancers actually start out as conventional 9–5 workers. In fact, many of them maintain their full–time jobs in addition to their freelance work for the sake of a stable income, health insurance, or other benefits. If you choose to go freelance full–time, however, you need to be sure to have a comfortable nest egg in the bank. Most experts agree that you should have enough money in your savings to cover six months worth of your basic necessities. If that sounds impossible, then try juggling some freelance work with your regular job for awhile. Save up all of the money you earn from your freelance work and use that as your nest egg.

Start Finding Clients Today

One mistake that freelancers often make is that think they can only start networking and marketing their services after they've gotten started. The truth is that if you're considering becoming a freelancer, now is the time to start networking and marketing. Let people know that you are thinking about going solo and get their reactions. Start building a database of possible job leads. In fact, you may want to line up some work beforehand so you can be sure of having an income initially.

Be Prepared

Most potential clients will want to see references and/or samples of your work before they give you a project. You need to have these prepared in advance. Don't wait until someone calls to possibly offer you a project to get your portfolio in order or to line up some qualified references. Have those ready to dispatch as soon as you get off the phone or finish the email.

Find an Accountant

The most difficult part of freelancing can be the handling the financial aspects: tracking invoices, staying on top of bills, figuring your yearly taxes, etc. Unless you are already skilled in accounting, you need to find someone to help you out with this from the beginning. It makes it much simpler for you and

for the accountant.

Start a Web Site

Use the Internet to your advantage. Create a professional-looking but simple web site advertising your experience and your services, then place it on the Internet. It's one of the best ways of attracting new clients.

These suggestions will help you start your freelancing career on the right foot, but the most important key to your success will be your perseverance. If you give up easily or don't follow through with things, you may never truly make it as a freelancer. You must be able to take rejection. You must be self-motivated, and you must be persistent. Only then will you be able to experience firsthand all of the benefits of being a modern freelancer.

Useful sites:

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