

1

What It Means to Freelance (or Jumping in with Your Eyes Wide Open)

This chapter explores the definitions of freelance and entrepreneurship, the reasons people freelance or choose to participate in a gig occupation, the benefits and drawbacks to launching a freelance or entrepreneurial career, as well as where to look for work.

Often, upon meeting someone new, we ask, “What do you do?” We may ask this as a way to start a conversation, to help us subconsciously or consciously categorize people, or because we are genuinely interested. But more and more, we are moving into a collective work history and culture where that question becomes harder and harder to answer.

Many people in traditional, professional occupations (doctors, lawyers, dentists, etc.) have paying side occupations. Take Chris Reed, a Los Angeles-based lawyer, for example. Reed is also a photographer and an author (“Chris Reed,” 2018). Or Dr. Ting-Wey Yen, a dentist, oil painter, sculptor, and photographer (“Yen Dream Art,” 2018). Or even someone like Oprah, who started her career as a radio newswoman, moved on to television and has added actor, producer, director, philanthropist, entrepreneur, and many other titles after her name (“Oprah Winfrey,” 2018).

Whether it’s because we don’t want one occupation to define us, or because we have many interests we want to pursue, or because we feel we need to cobble together many jobs to help us make ends meet, Americans are increasingly turning hobbies into paid opportunities and taking advantage of the many side hustles available today. Television commercials extol the virtue of making extra money for travel and for dating by having a side gig, business publications, such as *Business Insider* encourage readers

to turn their hobbies into high-paying supplemental income (Gillett, 2017) and financial websites, like *The Balance*, encourage people to “earn a little extra money on the side, without compromising your current schedule” by recommending apps you can use to start a side hustle (Lockert, 2018).

In fact, in 2016, 53 million Americans categorized themselves as freelancers (defined as “individuals who had engaged in supplemental, temporary, or project- or contract-based work in the past 12 months”) (McCready, 2016). And 30 percent of those people were freelancing in addition to their “regular” jobs, according to the report “Freelancing in America: A National Survey of the New Workforce” (2017). We are living in a time of a robust gig economy, where people are supplementing their income, trying to control every aspect of their careers by working for themselves and/or trying to nurture their creative sides by following their passions.

Those 53 million Americans include: independent contractors (40 percent of independent workforce) 21.1 million; moonlighters (27 percent) 14.3 million; diversified workers (18 percent) 9.3 million; temporary workers (10 percent) 5.5 million; freelance business owners (5 percent) 2.8 million, according to “Freelancing in America” (p. 3). And the thing is, whether these freelancers went to college or not, the majority of them were not trained in how to freelance or run their own freelance businesses. Most have had to learn by trial and error, and have succeeded—if they have—by hard work, networking and maybe some luck.

Take Anderson Cooper, for example, who worked briefly as a fact checker upon university graduation, before taking off on his own as a freelance news correspondent for three years and making a name for himself before signing a contract to work for ABC (Cooper, 2006). Or Cameron Crowe, who started publishing music reviews in San Diego at the age of 13, before going on to freelance at *Rolling Stone*, at the age of 15, before writing novels and making movies (Bozza, 2000). Or Donald Glover, creator, writer, occasional director and star of “Atlanta” who started his career as a sketch comic, standup comedian, DJ, and then was a writer on “30 Rock” (Friend, 2018). Or even NBA basketball star Kobe Bryant who wrote the script for a short animated film called “Dear Basketball” and won an Oscar in early 2018 (ESPN, 2018).

In the age of student/artist/on-campus employee, parent/project manager/Lyft driver, comic/DJ/writer, what does freelancer or self-employed or entrepreneur really mean?

What Does It Mean To Freelance?

According to the *Merriam-Webster*, the first known use of the word “freelance” was in 1819, and it referred to mercenary soldiers especially in the Middle Ages (“Freelance,” 2018). But the way the word currently is used isn’t that different (except for the solidier part). Freelance is defined as “(1) a person who acts independently without being affiliated with or authorized by an organization or (2) a person who pursues a profession without a long-term commitment to any one employer” (“Freelance,” 2018).

When working as a freelancer, one can work for different companies at different times or different companies at the same time. One can do the same or similar work for all of the places or different types of work depending on what is needed. For example, if you’re a skilled graphic designer and artist, you could be a freelancer working on a branding project for Company A, designing their logo, their website and all of their marketing materials, while in the space of the same day or workweek, working on your own graphic novel that is under contract to a big world-wide publisher, and doing layout on a small catalog of merchandise for a jewelry designer client, too.

Essential to being a freelancer is that your work is done under contract, where you are either paid per hour, per piece (page, word, or widget, for example), or per project, and the contract has a start and an end time (or a deadline). And though you are contracted to the company for the work, you are self-employed (meaning you have different tax status recognition and different paperwork, such as you fill out a W-9 instead of a W-4 and receive a 1099 for the year’s work instead of a W-2, but more on that in Chapter 4).

But that isn’t to say you cannot be a freelancer and an employee, too.

What Is a Diversified Worker?

If you are a part-time or full-time employee somewhere and you receive a regular paycheck and you have a side gig doing anything that makes you money, you are called a “diversified worker.” Business media *Bloomberg* reports that

the biggest category of freelancer is now . . . diversified workers, defined as: “People with multiple sources of income from a mix of traditional employers and freelance work. For example, someone who works part-time at a start-up, manages an Airbnb, and does freelance coding.”

(Fox, 2017)

Diversified workers come from every industry and their side gigs or multiple sources of income may come from a range of industries, too. Diversified workers can come from every economic strata of life. Think athletes who own restaurants or have their names on shoes or clothing lines or appear in advertising. Or consider the woman I met in 2007, when I was on a book tour for *Sometimes Art Can't Save You*. The part-time salesperson at the Borders bookstore where I was speaking and signing books was also a filmmaker, who was on her way to the Cannes Film Festival to show one of her films.

Which begs the question, what's the difference between a freelancer, a diversified worker, and an entrepreneur? And in today's economy, a person may be one, two, or all three.

What Is an Entrepreneur?

The *Merriam-Webster* defines an entrepreneur as “one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise.” (“Entrepreneur,” 2018). Based on that definition, anyone who claims self-employment could be considered an entrepreneur. But let's delve a little deeper. *Entrepreneur*, the magazine, says that to be an entrepreneur, you can't just build a brand or a platform or a following (things that have little to no risk). Being an entrepreneur has to be part of the equation: Entrepreneur + Capital = Products + Customers = Business (Tobak, 2015). So entrepreneurship takes an investment of money and time, involves the creation of a product and finding customers and that's how one creates a business. Tobak uses the examples of the founders of SnapChat and Whole Foods, and writes, “If you want to be a successful entrepreneur, don't start out wanting to be one. Start out with a customer problem and a product that solves it. Get capital. Make the product, market the product, win customers.”

Take the example of SmartNews (www.smartnews.com) whose mission is “delivering the world’s quality information to the people who need it” (“About,” 2018), but that came about by trying to answer an engineering problem: “How do you deliver the world’s most important information to the people who need it automatically, in real-time? How do you determine what makes a quality story or what people want to read?” (“Careers,” 2018).

When you want to go beyond having a side hustle and turn that or something else into more of a career, you have to ask yourself what do people need and what can I provide? (Even answering that question in a side hustle can help set you apart from others in the same industry who are doing similar things. For example, Uber drivers who offer bottled water, mints or candy, iPad usage, or other things to enjoy on the ride.) Approaching your freelance gig with an entrepreneurial mindset (what product am I offering and who are my customers and what do they need or want?) will make your freelance gig more successful.

Reasons People Freelance or Participate in the Gig Economy

People freelance, work as contractors, participate in a gig economy, or start their own businesses for a number of reasons. *Quartz* reports the “splintering of traditional jobs into freelance work and temporary work” as one of the reasons” (Wang, 2018). *Bloomberg* reports that stagnant wages in traditional jobs may push people into freelance work because they can’t get by on a single paycheck, or because upstarts like “Airbnb or Upwork make it easier for people to earn on the side” (Fox, 2017).

One of the things that has shifted over recent years, according to the survey and “Freelancing in America” report is that “63 percent of freelancers (up from 53 percent in 2014) said they are freelancing by choice, not out of necessity” (Fox, 2017).

People may start a freelance gig on the side because they want to pursue or transition into another type of work, because they want to launch a business but want the security that comes with a regular paycheck while they start out, or simply because they like the work or the people. (One of my graduate school professors said how much he loved a cab-driving gig he had because he got to meet fascinating people.)

Photographer Lorna Stell, in Case Study 1.1, is an example of someone who works for a start-up but has her own company as she transitions into being financially independent from her day job:

Case Study 1.1 Lorna Stell

When I finally graduated from school in Boston, Massachusetts, I knew I was in a tricky situation: I was young and relatively inexperienced in my field as an artist and photographer, and had decided to make an urban area with a high cost of living my new home after moving from Virginia. Having been an art major and trying out different types of creative work in my college years, I knew without a doubt that being a photographer was the only career path I wanted, and it was the only type of work that really excited me to my core for the long term. This intuitive knowing was something I knew I would be crazy to ignore, but I also knew that if I was going to make my new life in Boston work, I had to do whatever it took to support myself financially.

As a college student, I found that the easiest type of work for me to get was in retail and customer service. As an introvert and someone still learning to juggle chronic health issues at the time, the thought of dealing with the stress and scheduling of other jobs like bartending or working in food service made me cringe. Picking up customer service and retail work quickly became the way that I could start to earn a living while meeting interesting people, but it also left me just enough white space in my schedule that I could do my own creative work or look for photography opportunities. There were also times when I would pick up one-time gigs or juggle multiple part-time jobs.

In my journey towards reaching my financial goals, I found that there is almost always somewhere new to look for your next opportunity, whether that's a day job or creative job. For me, many of those came from Craigslist, social media, and direct connections with friends and teachers. My first job working for another photographer

(the type of work I searched for while not on a retail shift) came from a conversation I had with an acquaintance I had reconnected with. My friend had a friend who was a wedding photographer. Although when I reached out to that photographer, she told me that she had all the help she needed already, but she had another wedding photographer friend who could use an administrative assistant. Once this photographer and I got to meet in her home office, I was hired on the spot.

In working for that photographer, I saw what the day-to-day behind the scenes work looked like, what tools she used to run her business, what challenges she faced, what special things she would do for her clients, and even what business expenses needed to be managed. These were all the things that were never taught to me in school, and things I knew I needed to learn if I was to become a photographer myself. By this point, I had learned that staff photographers were dying out, and to be honest, I really wanted that freedom of being able to do only the work I wanted to do, for people I really loved working with, on my own schedule. This was exactly what this wedding photographer was able to do, so I learned a lot from being able to work right next to her and see her business in action. That being said, I continued to work retail shifts while working for her, as she wasn't in a position to provide me with more than 15 hours per week.

Up to this point in my creative development, I was actually not interested in wedding photography at all, and portrait or fashion photography was where I thought I might make my career. However, after working alongside the wedding photographer, I was very inspired by her work and also began to see new kinds of visual inspiration everywhere. I realized that the traditional style of wedding and portrait photography that I had always seen and thought was so boring, with heavy posing, lighting, and camera-aware faces, was not a style I liked at all. But the most important lesson I learned as a photographer was there is a market for whatever your personal and aesthetic style is. Once I discovered that, it felt like the whole world opened up.

After working for that wedding photographer, I landed my next long-term job working nearly full-time as the studio manager for a portrait photographer. He was phasing his business out of wedding photography, but still had a few left on the calendar that I had the opportunity to second shoot for. At those weddings, I was able to get more experience seeing the flow of a wedding day, what moments are most important to capture, and preparing for technically difficult situations. On weekdays, I garnered experience with print products, sales, and client relationships as I took each client from start to finish in our portrait session workflow. Through all of this work, I learned just how many hats a “solopreneur” has to wear within their business, and I learned where some of my business weaknesses were.

About a year and a half later, the portrait photographer decided to close his studio. I didn’t have much transition time and knew I needed other work fast. By this point in my journey I had been freelancing on and off, but hadn’t committed to starting my own business. I had been afraid of failing publicly and not getting booked for work, and I was also afraid of what I didn’t know about how to run a sustainable business. However, I figured out that “the right time to start my business” would never come—I needed to just jump in and do it! So, I created my website, updated my portfolio, and told people I was open for business. The floodgates didn’t open overnight though, so I still looked for a day job.

I became a part-time administrative assistant in the headquarters of a sports retail chain, which was an amazing opportunity because I worked right next to their full-time graphic designers, who were constantly creating marketing pieces and working with commercial photography. After a short time, the company paid me a higher rate to do in-house product photography alongside my other work. While I had very little experience with this, the company was mostly concerned with being able to generate content quickly and inexpensively, so in this way I was essentially being paid to learn on the job. While this position lasted, it was instrumental in building my own business, as I am now able to offer product photography to local small businesses.

When that company was liquidated, I was again in the position of needing a new job fast while I grew my business on the side. This time though, I had more constraints. I had moved further away from the city due to the cost of living, and my husband and I were sharing a car. Public transportation was available but very limited. I also needed flexibility with scheduling so I could shoot weddings on weekends, and portrait sessions and product photography during the week. This means I needed an opportunity that would ideally allow me to work from home and set my own hours. Amazingly, I found a Boston startup was hiring for a customer service associate and they allowed me to do exactly that. It turned out that they were a small team scattered through all different states, and all members of the team worked whenever they were able. Because they are in the baby product industry, they were very understanding of needing flexibility with scheduling and meeting in person.

I still work for this company today and it's been a fantastic experience. The startup culture is an amazing fit for me, and they actually love to see team members active in pursuing their own opportunities on the side, whether that is a formal business or not. When I interviewed with the founders, I was unsure how they would feel about me having my own business, but they were clear that as long as I stayed on top of my work for them and was responsive to the team, they were happy to have me pursue other work on the side. Not all the skills I've developed at this position are transferable to my business as it is a different industry and different business model (they sell products online while I offer a personalized service in person), but I've learned about the importance of balancing upholding policy with making sure customers are happy. Since I focus on customer service, those skills are always important in my business as well since I work one-on-one with all my clients.

Currently the way my business functions is I shoot my own client's weddings, shoot as an associate for another company, or shoot as a contractor directly for another photographer on weekends, and during the week I will shoot family sessions, engagement sessions, or product and portrait photography for small business owners.

Because I work from home, it's easy for me to quickly shift gears between my day job and my business, with zero commute time. I have a home office, so all of my business work (desktop computer, paperwork, equipment, print products, etc.) stay in that room (for the tax deduction and for mental separation), and I work in my common area for my day job. I try to time block whenever I can, and do four solid hours at a time for my day job so I'm not mentally switching back and forth all day long. Since the company doesn't have a preference for what specific hours I work, I can always change my schedule day-to-day if one of my clients needs to schedule a call at an unusual time, or even if I need to run business-related or personal errands.

As I began building my business, I found that while there are dozens of factors that contribute to having a sustainable business, and while there are literally hundreds of other photographers in my area that I could see as my competitors, the one thing we cannot compete with each other on is who we are. So for that reason, I make my business as personal as possible. I do not refer to my business as "we" or write about myself in the third person because I am the owner and only employee. I write all of my own web and social media copy, and my goal is always to write in such a way that I bring in my own personality. I try to get my clients off of e-mail upfront and have as much face time with them as I can. If potential clients can grow to know, like, and trust you, then that is a huge barrier that's broken down before booking. This is especially true in the wedding world, where the wedding photographer is often the one vendor that spends the most one-on-one time with the couple before and during the wedding day.

That being said, it has also been important for me to hone my aesthetic style and figure out who my "dream clients" are as I work to create a niche for myself in an industry that is saturated with other photographers. Along the way I have learned that if you appeal to everyone, you appeal to no one, which means that finding my target market is a constant process, and the target market can also change over time. I'm always trying to further discover what clients are

the best fit for me and vice versa when it comes to demographics, personality, style, and values.

As for my future, my “big dream goal” is to get to the point where my business is my full-time job. This still feels like a big goal since marketing has always been my weak point, so keeping the flow of inquiries and client bookings coming in can be a challenge, especially while I handle all tasks that need to be done in my business. While having a day job has helped a lot in terms of taking financial stress off my family in the short term, it also means that I have less time to do the work I’m really passionate about, and I have less control over where my money comes from. The wisdom of previous generations always seemed to say that having a steady full-time job was the best way to support yourself, and I’ve found that this is no longer true: Not only can it be challenging to find employment in the first place, companies can go under or be sold, sometimes with very little notice (or none at all) to employees. This is why my ultimate goal is to depend on day jobs less and less, so that I can work for myself and continue to do the work I love for the clients I love.

Lorna Stell

Photographer

Facebook: www.facebook.com/lornastellphoto

Instagram: @lornastell

Benefits and Drawbacks to Working for Yourself

Working for yourself as a contractor for others, either part- or full-time, can be a mixed experience, just like when you work for an employer. Some days you may not feel like working or doing a particular project. Other days the sunshine may call to you. And yet other days, you may feel so inspired that you don’t want to stop working after a full eight or more hours.

Some of the benefits of being self-employed are:

You are your own boss. Yes, you have a contract with others to do work for them by a certain deadline and that contract probably dictates many of the terms of your work (deadline, length, who owns the work once it is done, etc.—more on this in Chapter 3). But for the most part, you get to be your boss and tell yourself what to do and when. And you are in charge of determining how much money you will make and when you want to give yourself a raise, take a sick or vacation day, and what kinds of benefits you will provide yourself.

You get to set your own hours. That means if you are a night owl, you can work from 9 p.m. until 5 a.m. instead of its opposite. Or if you want to take a surf, samba, and/or Szechuan cooking class in the middle of the day, you can schedule your Skype meetings, writing, recording, painting, driving, whatever around it. You can also not work the same hours every day nor the same days every week. And since you aren't clocking in anywhere, you can choose to work weekends or holidays or early mornings or any other time when the mood strikes and you are feeling productive or you have an imminent deadline.

You determine what kind of work you do. We've all had to do things we haven't wanted to, such as take a specific class to fulfill a graduation requirement, eat a certain food to appease a parent or grandparent, or done a task at work that we've hated, such as cleaning out the ice cream cooler, a bathroom, or a fitting room. When you work for yourself, you can determine which tasks you tackle and which you can outsource. For example, if playing music and recording is your passion, focus on that, and find an assistant to help carry the equipment or help with your social media or whatever task you find onerous. Or if you're a wordsmith and you want to land a client who needs design, too, partner with a graphic designer and work together on the project.

You can choose with whom you want to work or collaborate. Ever had a job where you didn't like a boss or a co-worker? When we work for others, sometimes we are stuck with those people. But if you're self-employed, you don't have to deal with workplace drama. You can choose with whom you collaborate and for whom you do work.

And if, at any point, you decide something isn't working for you for any reason, you can choose not to work with that person or organization again after the terms of your contract have been fulfilled.

You have the freedom to work from many different places. Computers, smart phones, tablets, and Internet connectivity have given us the ability to work at any time, from any place, doing many different kinds of things, with people all over the globe. From the West Coast of the United States, I have worked for a digital marketer in London, been editor-in-chief of a magazine and book publisher based in Copenhagen, and worked with writers and editors on six continents. I have written books and edited articles at 36,000 feet while flying through the night. We have the ability to work from hotels, beaches, jungles, and on public transportation anywhere in the world. And some of our smart freelance colleagues have been deciding where they want to go and then finding the work to take them there.

Your pay scale can be higher. When a company hires you as an employee, they determine how much you cost them (often referred to as your package, which consists of salary, benefits—health insurance, paid time off, disability insurance, dental and vision insurance, life insurance, retirement plan, and possibly a flexible spending account—plus the taxes the company pays on your behalf). When you work for yourself you are in charge of all of these things, and because of that, you can charge a higher hourly rate than you would get as an employee to cover those things. And this still costs the company hiring you less than it would if you worked for them as an employee, which is why you'll read in case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 about people getting laid off and then hired as contractors for a higher rate at the same companies that laid them off.

You get more tax deductions. When you are a contractor, a freelancer or a business owner, you can deduct things from your taxes as business expenses that you couldn't when you receive a steady paycheck for a company. For example, if you drive to a meeting, you can deduct mileage, parking, and associated costs as a business expense when you are self-employed. You can also deduct computer and phone expenses and office supplies if you use them in your business. And

meals with clients, business-related travel expenses, and possibly even a percentage of your utilities and living expenses if you have a designated space for a home office or studio may be deductible, too. (Consult a tax professional for a complete list of deductions.)

You may save money on expenses (such as clothing, gas, parking, etc.). If you work from a home office, you may not need to get dressed up every day or to wear a uniform like you would as someone's employee. You may save on gas and parking expenses and car maintenance if your commute consists of walking from your bedroom to your office space or studio.

In Case Study 1.2, artist Emily Brantley talks about some of the benefits and drawbacks she's discovered in working for herself.

Case Study 1.2 Emily Brantley

Becoming a freelance artist came with a learning curve. I knew how to get good grades and I knew how to please an employer, but neither experience prepared me for the mountain of responsibility involved in running my own business.

In the educational world, there is a system in place: Play by the rules, work hard, fulfill requirements—and you're golden. The workplace is similar: Get your prescribed work done, be a tolerable human being, and please the boss. In the freelance world, however, you quickly realize that school left you sorely unprepared. The only structure, the only goals are those you create for yourself. If you don't know how to create these, failure is guaranteed.

When I graduated from college, I was unsure of what I wanted to do, career-wise. I accepted a temporary job at my church where I performed administrative tasks, ran the website, wrote and edited copy, planned weddings and funerals . . . all of which somehow turned into five years of my life. At the end of these five years, I surveyed my life and knew I wanted more. Sitting behind a desk doing menial tasks day after day was for me a spirit-killer.

I wanted to do something I loved. I wanted flexibility. I wanted to get out from behind the desk and find a lifestyle that wasn't so sedentary. I had studied art in school and enjoyed painting. So, with all of the courage and naiveté of youth, I left the security of my job to become an artist, certain the world would embrace me. I humbly admit that it was MUCH harder than I had anticipated. My young and optimistic self was startled to find that the world did not immediately embrace me. I painted and I sold some pieces, but quickly realized being a professional artist wasn't just about being a good painter. I needed to be a good businesswoman. I needed to learn marketing, finance, customer service, and web design. I struggled to promote myself and grow my business because of a lack of knowledge and skills.

During the lean months, I periodically picked up jobs copywriting and event planning. I even worked full-time for a year as an art buyer and TV show host. Yet, I always returned to painting and working for myself where I was empowered to make my own choices. I set the hours. I chose the work and the people with whom I work. That was the lifestyle I wanted. I had the passion and the work ethic; I just needed to figure out how to make my work lucrative.

Freedom is a seductive concept. But achieving freedom, while also making an income adequate to support myself in pricey Los Angeles, proved difficult. For the first time, I had no authority telling me what to do. No syllabus for the "pathway to success." No rulebook. No guarantee that if I worked hard and did my homework, I'd earn a paycheck.

It became apparent that I had to self-educate. I devoured books like *The E-Myth Revisited: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It* by Michael E. Gerber and *The Four-Hour Work Week* by Timothy Ferriss. I reached out to successful artists and asked them questions about how they started their careers and how they stayed above the dreaded "starving artist" poverty line. I approached gallery owners and asked questions about how their businesses were run and why their artists were successful. I joined

local art groups, attended networking events, and made friends with other artists on similar career trajectories.

Through my research, reading, interviews, and plenty of trial and error, I began to develop a proper business plan. I set goals and markers for achievement. Taking a hard look at myself, I determined the business skills that needed development—sometimes a LOT of development. I used to ignore the tasks I did not enjoy or at which I felt unskilled, causing myself more grief and frustration down the line. I learned to practice discipline. I realized that working nonstop was not healthy for me, and that I needed occasional getaways to reset my drive to work hard. Slowly but surely, my stubbornly creative mind allowed systems and habits to develop. With these good practices, my business began to bloom and grow.

Running your own business and being your own boss is not for everyone. You have to want it more than security, more than comfort, more than paid vacation. Self-motivation, discipline, and good time-management are essential, as is an openness to constant change and growth. Failures can be turned into learning opportunities, and you have to see these as positive experiences, not allowing discouragement to halt your progress. You have to distinguish between risks that are worth taking and risks that are not. One of the most important things I learned was to surround myself with my cheerleaders—the people who encourage me, help me, and give me honest critique and feedback. I am so grateful for the friends and family who have walked alongside me in this journey. I couldn't have made it this far without their strength behind me.

It is encouraging to step back and look at my journey of self-education and see how far I've come. After working as a professional artist for a few years now, I'm proud of my achievements. Still the new kid on the block in the art world, I have plenty more to learn. I'm constantly adapting my business practices as well as learning new artistic techniques. It's exciting and terrifying to work independently, with the full responsibility of my financial well-being

resting solidly on my own shoulders. But I know that I can grow and change, and I know that the adventure is worth it.

Emily Brantley

Artist

www.emilybrantleyart.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SummersPearl

Instagram: @summers_pearl

While working for yourself or being a freelancer offers some degree of freedom and flexibility, it also can present some challenges that may make some people wonder if it is truly for them. Some of the drawbacks to being self-employed are:

You have to have a number of business skills (or money to outsource them). In order to successfully run your own business, you have to have some idea of basic bookkeeping and accounting to be able to invoice clients. You also need some idea of how to negotiate contracts and payments and rights. And you need basic marketing, public relations, and sales skills. You may also need to know a bit about web design, social media management and messaging and branding, plus a number of other things that go into the day-to-day operations of a business.

No one else sets your schedule or tells you where to be when. As you read in Emily Brantley's case study, suddenly not having a set schedule can be jarring after sixteen or more years being told where to be and when. Wanting to succeed at self-employment makes one become a self-starter, a person who sets goals and figures out a schedule and works hard to maintain it. If you don't, it becomes too easy to get distracted by other things and not do the work.

Your business succeeds or fails almost solely based on you. When you work for yourself you are in charge of creating all of your income and managing all of your own expenses. You have no one to blame but yourself really if things don't go well. This can be overwhelming or paralyzing to realize that it is up to you and only you. For some people, this becomes their driving force, their "I'll show you . . ." (like you'll read in Danielle Brooks' case study in Chapter 7). For others, self-employment may feel like a crushing weight, until their business is firmly in the black.

You have less security. When we work for ourselves it is up to us to make sure we save for a rainy day and for retirement and sick days and vacation. Our employment is only as strong as the length of each contract, so we must keep in mind our present while planning our next gig to make our business more secure and our income streams steadier.

You have fewer free benefits. When you are self-employed, no one pays you for vacation time; offsets your health, dental, and/or vision insurance; or funds your retirement plan. It is up to you to seek ways to accomplish these things and then to fund them.

You're in charge of filing all of your own tax paperwork and paying your taxes. With self-employment comes self-employment tax, which includes Social Security and Medicare taxes. "Self-employment taxes are assessed on a percentage of your net earnings," according to Intuit's "A Tax Guide for Solopreneurs" (2017).

You can feel socially isolated. If you work from home and/or work for yourself in an occupation that can be done solo (writing, editing, fine or applied arts, composing, design, coding, online sales and marketing, etc.) you probably spend the majority of your time by yourself, maybe interrupted by walking the dog, a phone call, or an electronic meeting. Not having face-to-face contact with others while you work can feel very isolating. This is why work-share spaces and work-in-a-coffee-shop culture is thriving. *Forbes* estimates that by 2020, 26,000 shared office spaces may host 3.8 million people so that people don't have to work in isolation and can use the spaces to network (Alton, 2017).

You can get distracted easily if you work from home. When you don't have a boss breathing over you or anyone to manage (or micromanage) your time, stopping to pet the dog, do the laundry, cook, play an online game or visit Facebook, or stare at the squirrel out the window becomes easier. Not stopping work to play Words with Friends every time "your turn" chimes takes discipline. Some freelancers or solopreneurs set aside specific time each day to check e-mail, return phone calls, or give themselves a break. Others negotiate with themselves. (One colleague made herself write five more pages and then allowed herself 30 minutes of Bubble Witch.) If you know what distracts you, find a system that works so you can get your work done and still have time to play or be distracted.

If, in your mind, the benefits of working for yourself, clearly outweigh the drawbacks, then move on to the next section.

Where to Look for Work

Work can be found anywhere and everywhere and can be found when we least expect it. Shortly after college, I was freelancing (called “being a stringer” in newspaper lingo) for my city’s newspaper, I was working as a part-time nanny, and I owned a small business (I bought into a franchise that made personalized children’s books and products). One day the woman who was teaching me watercolor painting called. A client of hers, a district court judge, wanted a St. Patrick’s Day card made to send to her constituents. The judge had seen something I had written, said she thought I had a way with words, and asked my teacher if she could get me to collaborate with her. Would I write greeting card copy for a singing leprechaun that my teacher would draw and paint? Of course I said yes and quoted a price, and that became the first card I ever helped create.

The Internet makes getting in touch with potential clients and companies much easier than the phone and snail work of decades past. Contacts can be found on LinkedIn Pulse, on regular job sites like Indeed.com and Monster.com, on multi-purpose classified places such as Craigslist.com, on gig-economy sites such as UpWork.com or Guru.com, or on industry-specific spaces such as Behance.com. Or you can study your favorite companies—the ones you’d love to do work for and for which you think you’re a great fit—and contact them (more about how to do this in Chapter 2).

That’s how illustrator Armando Veve got his start at *The New York Times*, as he explains in Case Study 1.3.

Case Study 1.3 Armando Veve

I studied illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and moved to Philadelphia shortly after graduating in 2011. I worked several odd jobs in order to sustain my art practice, which consisted of making drawings for myself, and occasionally showing in artist-run spaces in Philadelphia and New York. My “day job” left me emotionally drained, which made it difficult to feel motivated to make art. And even in the creative positions I held, I was merely

the hands behind someone else's vision. I had a lot to say, but I was not given the space to express myself. I decided to begin seeking freelance work, which would give me more creative control over my projects.

At RISD, I took an editorial illustration course that gave me the fundamental skills to approach art directors for work in newspapers and magazines. I started by cold e-mailing art directors at *The New York Times* Op-Ed. I also went to Barnes & Nobles and flipped through every magazine that caught my eye. If they seemed like a good fit, I would go to the masthead and copy their art director's name. If contact information was not available, I would then go online and try to find their information. I reached out to several art directors at *The New York Times* and was fortunate enough to receive a commission several months later. That first published work led to a second, and it snowballed from there. Now, I've accumulated hundreds of art directors' e-mails and I contact them with published work updates up to three times a year. I use Google spreadsheets to organize all of this information.

I fell in love with the editorial process. The topics/themes presented to me gave me something to bounce off, fueling endless possibilities for imagery. I loved the problem-solving aspects of making editorial illustrations. I have been working as a freelance illustrator for six years now, and my favorite part has been the unpredictability of the journey. Every week I have no idea what is going to be thrown my way. The work has now evolved into other markets including advertising and book publishing. I'm also developing work for galleries again. It is still a dream of mine to write and illustrate my own picture book.

I have been fortunate to receive recognition for my work by organizations including American Illustration, Communication Arts and the Society of Illustrators in New York. Most recently I was named in the Forbes 30 under 30 list and named an ADC Young Gun by the One Club for Creativity. The awards have helped legitimize my work in the eyes of clients, but accolades are not enough to sustain a career. They are not what will get me to the studio every day.

I still face the same challenges I did when I started. Overcoming these obstacles inspires me to push myself out of my comfort zone and be ambitious with my work.

It's important to feel a bit uncertain with the process. The day I figure everything out is probably the day I move on to something else. Success is not a place destination.

Along the way, I have learned some very important lessons, including:

- Be kind. Remember that all client interaction is human-human interaction. Your behavior and language has consequences.
- Try not to sweat the small stuff; it's important to keep the bigger picture in mind.
- Be open-minded. You will be thrown curveballs and it's important to catch them with a smile and willingness to make the necessary changes.
- Be yourself. You are being hired for the work you do. It is important to keep your clients needs in mind, but finding a way to meet these needs in your own way is the key to developing a unique product that stands out in a saturated market.
- Clear communication is key to a successful collaboration. Take your time to articulate your points clearly. If you disagree with a specific idea, voice your opinion.
- And of course, do not miss a deadline.

I have also learned that if you can think of anything else that you would rather be doing, do that. Freelancing is not for the faint of heart. There is the notion that freelancing comes with the flexibility to choose your own hours and projects. Yes this is true, but it also comes with longer hours and much more responsibility since you are taking on multiple roles (unless you hire assistants, but this is unlikely when you are starting). In the beginning, there will be times you will have to take on work that is not desirable. Try to learn with every new project, and even if it did not turn out exactly as intended, you can at least take that knowledge to the

next project. I find freelancing to be an incredibly exciting and stimulating path.

Keep in mind that this is a long journey. It's important to think about the big picture. I am happy that I had two years between graduation and my first assignment because I was able to experiment and develop my work independent of the expectations of a client. I am considering taking another break soon to reflect on several years of work and to make room for more experimentation. It's important to find ways to reinvent yourself to keep the work alive.

I have also learned the importance of trying to maintain a regular schedule. Knowing that there is a beginning and end to each day pushes me to use my time more wisely. This has allowed me to enjoy other activities outside of my studio, which give me energy and fuel for the studio the following day. I have been more productive by working less.

Good luck on your journey!

Armando Veve

Illustrator

www.armandoveve.com

Instagram: @armandoveve

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 explored what being a freelancer or a contractor means and how it can differ or be similar to being an entrepreneur. Some people freelance as a way to make money in addition to their full-time employment; others freelance as way to launch a new business or as their main source of income because they love to be their own bosses, set their own hours, and work on a variety of projects at the same time. Successful freelancing takes determination and grit, discipline, a drive to do the work, and a bit of business know-how. And lastly, freelance work can be found online, through your networks or can be made for yourself with a bit of ingenuity.

Exercises

1. Find examples of three people who started as freelancers and share part of their stories with a class discussion.
2. Research possible freelance opportunities in your industry. List five types of freelance gigs you could do.
3. Research companies that hire freelancers and pick three. What do they use freelancers for? What kind of information can you find out online about freelancing for those particular companies?
4. Interview someone you know who has a side hustle. Talk to them about what they love and hate about their freelance gig and what they've learned, then write it up as a case study.
5. Create a personal list of pros and cons regarding starting your own freelance or entrepreneurial career.

References

- "About." Smart News. Last modified 2018. <http://about.smartnews.com/en/careers>.
- Alton, Larry. "Why More Millennials Are Flocking to Shared Office Spaces." *Forbes*. Last modified May 9, 2017. www.forbes.com/sites/larryalton/2017/05/09/why-more-millennials-are-flocking-to-shared-office-spaces/#4722902b69e8.
- Bozza, Anthony. "A Boy's Life (in Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll)." *RollingStone*. Last modified October 12, 2000. www.rollingstone.com/movies/features/a-boys-life-in-sex-drugs-and-rock-roll-20001012.
- "Careers." Smart News. Last modified 2018. <http://about.smartnews.com/en/careers>.
- "Chris Reed." *Artrepreneur*. Last modified March 3, 2018. <https://atp.orangenius.com/author/chrisreed/>.
- Cooper, Anderson. *Dispatches from the Edge: A Memoir of War, Disasters, and Survival*. New York: Harper, 2006.
- "Entrepreneur." *Merriam-Webster*. Last modified February 25, 2018. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entrepreneur.
- ESPN News Services. "Kobe Bryant's 'Dear Basketball' Wins Oscar for Animated Short." *ESPN*. Last modified March 3, 2018. www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/22648342/kobe-bryant-dear-basketball-wins-oscar-best-animated-short.
- Fox, Justin. "The Rise of the Not-Just-Freelancing Freelancer." *Bloomberg*. Last modified October 17, 2017. www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-10-17/the-rise-of-the-not-just-freelancing-freelancer.

- "Freelance." *Merriam-Webster*. Last modified March 1, 2018. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freelance.
- "Freelancing in America: A National Survey for the New Workforce." Freelancers Union and Elance-oDesk. 2017. https://fu-web-storage-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/content/filer_public/c2/06/c2065a8a-7f00-46db-915a-2122965df7d9/fu_freelancinginamericareport_v3-rgb.pdf.
- Friend, Tad. "Donald Glover Can't Save You." *The New Yorker*. March 5, 2018.
- Gillett, Rachel. "18 Hobbies You Can Turn into a High-Paying Side Gig." *Business Insider*. Last modified July 26, 2017. www.businessinsider.com/hobbies-high-paying-side-job-2017-7.
- Intuit. "A Tax Guide for Solopreneurs: Self-Employed Tax Tips." Last modified 2017. <https://turbotax.intuit.com/tax-tips/self-employment-taxes/a-tax-guide-for-solopreneurs-self-employed-tax-tips-/L6N77a4mr>.
- Lockert, Melanie. "7 Apps You Can Use to Start a Side Hustle." *The Balance*. Last modified February 23, 2018. www.thebalance.com/apps-to-start-side-hustle-4134658.
- McCready, Ryan. "How Much Do Freelance Writers Actually Make?" Venngage. Last modified June 10, 2016. <https://venngage.com/blog/how-much-do-writers-make>.
- "Oprah Winfrey." IMDB.com. Last modified March 2, 2018. www.imdb.com/name/nm0001856/bio.
- Tobak, Steve. "The True Meaning of Entrepreneur." *Entrepreneur*. Last modified April 3, 2015.
- Wang, Amy X. "The Number of Americans Working for Themselves Could Triple by 2020." *Quartz*. Last modified February 21, 2018. <https://work.qz.com/1211533/the-number-of-americans-working-for-themselves-could-triple-by-2020>.
- "Yen Dream Art." Beach Heights Dentistry. Last modified March 2, 2018. www.beachheightsdentistry.com/yen-dream-art.