

# Starting up as a Freelance

Joining the world of creative freelancing is exciting and wonderful, with lots of upsides. There are a few challenges however, but they can all be overcome if you develop a few good habits and practices early on. Bear in mind the following:

## Build and maintain support networks

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Isolation can be a real issue for a freelance. There are no impromptu meetings at the coffee station unless you arranged them! So factor this in to your work schedule. Join or establish groups of like-minded colleagues you can catch up with for support, inspiration, and to bounce ideas off.

Make sure you maintain your non-work contacts too. It's important to be able to step out of the creative world from time to time, and you don't want to do this and find everyone else has moved on.

## Embrace networking

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Networking is something you're probably going to be doing in some shape or form for your entire career, so drop the, "I hate networking" script, and make friends with it. Find another way to consider it, to make it an attractive option, e.g., free food, free training and a chance to make new friends.

Networking is rarely about a 'quick sell' but more often about getting known, and building relationships. Then, when an appropriate opportunity arrives, not only are you in the right place, but you're much more likely to be considered. Most 'lucky breaks' take years of being in the right place at the right time to happen!

## Set some boundaries

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Many creative freelancers work from home. On the one hand this is fantastic – no travel time, kettle on hand and breaks when you see fit. On the other, it can be difficult to buckle down to work, when the laundry basket beckons, or it's a sunny day and the garden needs weeding (or sitting in), or you are dealing with constant interruptions by housemates or family. The lines between work and play can become blurred.

To avoid this, figure out what works for you, e.g., if you are a morning person, allocate time in the morning when you are going to work, and tell everyone you live with that you are not to be interrupted at that time. Allocate an area specifically for work if at all possible, so you can 'go' to work, and then ideally close a door on it, when you are not working. Don't check your work e-mail when you are not working, and if possible have a separate phone. It's as important not to let your work leak into your personal life as it is to keep your work time productive.

## Keep your paperwork up to date

Everyone knows this is the right thing to do, but it's a right of passage that most of us have to actually spend those day(s) sorting out an entire year's paperwork, before we really understand the truth of it. Honestly, 15 minutes at the end of every month to update your accounts as you go, will be time well spent. But you may have to learn that the hard way first!

## Set yourself good goals

Staying motivated as a freelance is so important, because no-one else is going to do your legwork for you. The goals you set yourself, and how you monitor and manage those, can make all the difference.

- Your goals should be important to you. You won't get very far if you're aiming for something that's going to make someone else happy.
- Your goals should be within your control. You can't make someone employ you, but you can give yourself the best chance of being employed by preparing well.
- Reward your efforts, not just your successes.
- Review your progress and change what you are doing, if you need to.

## Stay in touch with your dream

Apart from a lucky few, all of us will have dips in our freelance careers. It's important if this happens that you know how to get back to why you chose this career in the first place, and what you love about it.

- What or who inspired you?
- What do you need to spend some time doing to recover your passion for this?
- Who do you need to reconnect with?



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## Be flexible

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Be prepared to take some detours. Most people's careers have a few significant diversions, and often these open up new, unexpected opportunities and paths previously not considered. Adopt the attitude that all the experience you are gathering is going to give you something useful, even if it's just a funny anecdote.

When you present yourself for work, you are putting your whole self forward, with all your individual skills, talents and experiences. No-one else will be offering exactly what you have. Remember, we are all unique. Value this.

I have often been amazed by how the most random past experience has allowed me to join a conversation, or contribute an opinion I couldn't have done without it. Read the biographies of some of the people you admire, and I'll bet many of their stories will back this up.

# QUICKTIPS

