It’s Way Past Time to Get Over These 3 Stereotypes About Freelance Workers

You may be under some misconceptions about the freelance economy. The truth is independent contractors can help you reach your corporate goals.

February 22, 2019 6 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Been waffling over whether your company should hire freelance workers or contractors from the booming gig economy? If you think the concept offers more cons than pros, you may have fallen for some common misconceptions surrounding freelancers and the work they do.

For businesses from every industry, relying on help from a cadre of remote workers or freelancers can be a boon. In fact, so many organizations have recognized this truth that contingent workers now contribute about $715 billion to the U.S. economy, according to “Freelancing in America,” a study conducted for Freelancers Union & Elance-oDesk. As if those numbers weren’t enough to get your attention, by 2027, an Upwork report predicts that contractors and temps will make up the majority of the country’s workforce.

A social shift in working habits

The considerable influence of freelance workers didn’t happen overnight. Gig workers once operated on the outskirts of the working world. They weren’t anomalies, but they weren’t thoroughly embraced, either. Then came two things: the

internet and the Great Recession of 2008. Oh, and perhaps a third: Millennials.

Related: 6 Millennials Who Quit Their Day Jobs Share How They Did It

By the time the economy took a tumble more than a decade ago, more individuals were willing to join the ranks of independent contractors. While corporations were downsizing, freelancers were taking matters into their own hands. Millennials – who didn't want to experience the layoffs that their parents did – picked up the reins. Now, nearly half of them freelance to some degree.

Today, 57.3 million workers among all age groups in the United States proudly freelance. They enjoy being in control of their schedules and setting rates that help them pay for what they need, including insurance and the occasional vacation. Their clients appreciate not paying directly for their benefits, worrying about providing them with office space or having to spend time training them on the tasks at hand.

It's a beautiful marriage, the contingent worker and client. Still, common myths about gig workers persist. Check to see whether any of these whoppers have stopped you from jumping into the freelancer pool.

Myth #1: Freelance workers can't do complex work.

Executives and managers might assume that they can't find a highly qualified freelancer. They're wrong. As one Staffing Industry Analysts piece notes, around half of all freelancers hold at least an associate's degree. In other words, you could have access to contingent workers with just about any qualification you need to fill the gaps in your workflow. Had an internal IT specialist quit today? With a little effort,

you could soon have someone to handle at least some of his or her responsibilities so operations continue to flow.

Be aware that many freelancers actively develop niches, too. For instance, instead of being a jack-of-all-trades, a contingent worker might hone a deep specialty. Chances are strong that no matter what type of professional you want, you can find him or her in the global freelance workforce. For instance, some websites like Upwork make a variety of freelancers available – including writers, developers, and marketing and sales experts – while the website Kolabtree works specifically with freelance scientists.

Myth #2: Freelancers want one-off assignments and nothing more.

Here today, gone tomorrow. That's the impression many leaders hold of contingent workers. While it's true that freelancers may not want a traditional in-office job, they're hardly believers in the one-and-done style of working. Michael Burdick, CEO of Paro, an outsourced finance department, knows that freelancers are open to long-term working relationships. "What's more, half of these freelancers say no amount of money would sway them to take a 'traditional' job. Marketplaces now exist for every business function you can imagine, which makes it easier, quicker and more cost-effective to find incredible talent," notes Burdick.

From what he's observed, you don't need to worry about a freelancer you rely on leaving you in the lurch to return to a full-time position. That said, some freelancers are willing to consider a full-time position – on *your* team. One survey found that 31 percent of freelancers would willingly take a full-time role with one of their clients if the fit was right.

Related: What WeWork's Department Store Takeover Means for Freelancers and Your Blended Office Culture

Myth #3: Freelancers have no loyalty.

While it’s true that freelancers don’t necessarily have bosses hovering over them, they can be tenaciously loyal to their clientele. After all, those clients are basically their managers. It’s rather like having many supervisors rather than none at all. In fact, according to a Burson-Marsteller study, 42 percent of companies consider freelancers as devoted as their full-time employees. Gig workers strive for flexibility, but not at the expense of losing a valuable revenue stream. They recognize that if they don’t perform the job to the best of their ability, someone else will.

Therefore, the talented ones communicate like crazy, take their assigned tasks seriously, and put clients first – even if they have half a dozen of them. They may just show their loyalty in a different way. For instance, perhaps you’re working with a freelancer who shows his or her dedication to a specific project by throwing in an extra couple of hours of work on something, even when it’s not required and you’re not paying extra for it.

Related: 6 Tips for Getting the Most Value From Your Freelancer

The next time you start to convince yourself that you need to hire another part-time or full-time employee, step back. Could a freelancer or contract worker be a better solution, at least in the interim? You won’t know the extent of the opportunities for you and your team until you give the gig economy a try. Who knows? You might just become such a huge fan of the system that you eventually join the freelancing ranks yourself.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/327747