Think Freelancers Have Easy, Flexible Lives? Think Again.



Don’t believe these six myths about the freelance life.

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Six years ago, I quit my desk job. My friends were divided by two thought channels: No. 1: Are you crazy? and No. 2: What are you going to do with your life?

Weeks — maybe even months — before my resignation, I decided working in an office wasn’t for me. At the time, I felt like every day was blurring together: meetings, phone calls, agendas, checking in and checking out. Commuting was an awful time-suck. It was leaving me uninspired, exhausted and yearning to do my own “thing” (spoiler alert: I wasn’t quite sure what that “thing” was then). Even so, that one day, I

thought to myself, *I can do this differently. I can make it work.* And so, confidently (and naively), I collected my belongings and departed with excitement.

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My parents were concerned. My then-boyfriend was encouraging (but he also strongly encouraged that I look for work … immediately). My friends were still confused.

In 2012, I perceived freelance life as a vacation from office-life, which to me (at the time) meant: freedom to do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, as long as I got my work done. That was before I knew better.

Having survived more than a half decade as a freelance writer, I've confronted many stigmas, including the notion that we work when we want to (the reality is, we're on everyone else's schedule). In case you were curious, or thinking about going out on your own, here is a breakdown of the six most common myths and misconceptions regarding freelance life.

1. We exclusively take on assignments we want to work on with people we want to work with.

Just like people at desk jobs, (sometimes) the work we are tasked with isn't the most exhilarating, educational or challenging. While many freelancers have carved out a network of great clients who they love to work for, and get along with famously, it doesn't mean that their contractors aren't giving them dirty jobs or less-than-sexy assignments. It also means we still have tough people to report to. Freelancers are tasked with headache-worthy conflicts, too, as politics can extend beyond cubicle walls. Lastly, we can say no to work if we don't want to do it, but that results in no pay. Just like a desk job, there's greater chance of getting fired for

turning down too many projects.

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2. We work when we want and take vacation at the drop of a hat.

Even though we don't have to physically check into the office five days a week, more often than not, we are on the same schedule as our clients. In summary: The more clients we have, the more calendar conflicts we juggle. Working remotely in a beautiful destination, in a different time zone, is certainly an option for some. However, bringing a laptop to a zip lining excursion or out on the beach isn't ideal – or a real vacation (i.e. there's less time to enjoy the surroundings if freelancers are on the clock or stressed to make deadlines – or needed on a conference call).

3. We hang out at home, on the couch, in our PJs all day.

OK – admittedly, sometimes this does happen. But, it's not what it looks like. Going into an office requires putting on real (read: professional) attire and commuting to work. Being a freelancer, one perk is that we (sometimes) aren't required to leave our apartments or see other people. With that said, certain mornings we don't even have time to get dressed and walk out the door to our local coffee shops or WeWork spaces. Projects need to be executed ASAP. Sure, there are days where leisurely breaks are feasible, but there are definitely weeks where we eat cereal for breakfast, lunch and dinner in yoga or pajama pants. (I know I'm not the only one.) It's not because we're lazy, it's simply the most efficient way to get through hours of cranking out work. Which brings me to …

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4. We catch up with friends whenever, because we have flexible schedules.

While many freelancers have befriended others with alternative work situations (i.e. not in a corporate, desk setting), many contract workers are on their own clients' schedules, too. When the stars align, meeting up with familiar faces during the workday is a bonus, but it's not a guarantee. (Note: "Hanging out" typically means sitting in a co-working space in silence as we type religiously on our computer keyboards.) Scheduling conflicts happen often and emergencies can pop up instantly, so plans often aren't set in stone. Additionally, many of our friends (at least mine) work in traditional settings, so they usually spend business hours with their co-workers … at the office!

5. We are disorganized and there's a ton of free time.

While my Instagram is plastered with cool photos of delicious food, celeb interviews and awesome travel shots, there's a lot of hustle that goes into making connections, pitching ideas, taking meetings and scheduling everything – in addition to billing clients and following up when invoices go unpaid. Giving these tasks the respectful amount of time they each deserve – and keeping track of it all – is imperative. A popular sub-stigma is that freelancers have a leisurely approach to labor. The opposite is true. Sure, freelancers can block out hours of their days to relax and have me-time, but that can enormously affect one's bottom line. And, if freelancers aren't strategic with their calendars, opportunities will pass them by.

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6. We are pursuing a hobby, not a career.

The first few years of working as freelancer writer, my friends and family often asked, “But, what do you actually want to do with your life?” as if I wasn’t producing work read by millions of people and (yes, independently) paying my credit card bills and rent in Manhattan. Even today – after six years of hustling – this thought emerges among new acquaintances. Strangers often ask what my goals are, what I want to do after this “phase” and how much longer I think this segment of my work life will last. My answer usually sounds like this: I like my schedule. I live a different story every day. Like many other freelancers, I thrive outside an office. In fact, I’m more productive (and less distracted).

In the past six years, I’ve interviewed A-list celebrities like Brad Pitt, I’ve contributed to *The New York Times*, among 45-plus other publications, and I’ve appeared in national TV segments on FOX and CBS, Most importantly, though, despite the stigmas, backlash and any other obstacles that correspond with the title, I firmly believe the ability to accomplish all of these feats could not have happened had I not been a freelancer. It’s been a lot of work, not a lot of sleep and an incredible journey. And it’s certainly not finished.

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