

Why Freelancers Are The New Competitive Advantage – Episode 10 with Matthew Dowling

Yurii Lazaruk: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Independent Workforce, a podcast where we explore the now and the future of work through the lens of temporary employment such as freelancers, contractors, fractional, experts, you name it. Here we speak with CEOs, recruiters, founders, and industry leaders about how they work with independent talent, the wins, the challenges, and the lessons learned.

My name is Yuri. I'm growing the freelance market at Freelancer Map and international platforms that's been connecting top independent professionals with companies for over 20 years, and my guest is Matthew Dowling. The founder of Freelancer Club, a platform that's been educating, elevating, and empowering the next generation of freelancers for over a decade, who also advocates for Fair Pay and freelancer rights from Chen and no free work campaign to lead an initiatives like Rise Freelancer with the goal to empower and support 1 million individuals by 2026.

So welcome Matt. Hi. Great to be here. It's been forever. I've been [00:01:00] following your work in the freelance world for ages and, uh, the craziest thing, but it's our like first face-to-face conversation. So I'm here just to ask you everything about freelance and like, just to get all the pieces of your experience.

I know it's close to impossible in the, the time that we have still. Let's start with, share a little bit with me, your. Background, and why did you decide to focus your professional efforts on working with freelancers?

Matthew Dowling: Sure. Well, my background stems from falling outta university and straight into freelancing, very accidentally.

So it was never in the cards to set up as a freelancer. Rather, I was going down the traditional route of applying for full-time jobs. But. I wasn't able to land the type of position that I wanted. Um, and in the meantime I was being asked if I could help out with some photography projects. So it was very much a thing that crept up behind me.

And before I knew it, I realized I [00:02:00] was earning a little bit of money as a photo. The job I wanted in traditional employment wasn't materializing. Uh, and bit by bit it just became what I did. It, it sort of snuck up. And so, uh, that

was the origin story of, um, becoming a freelancer. However, I had no clue what I was doing.

I really stumbled around the dark for the guts of two years, and I got away with it most of the time. Uh, and then I hit up a company that. For the first year I had a fantastic relationship with, but in the second year, um, they didn't pay me for some work that, uh, I had done. Uh, the following month there was also some, uh, issues with their payment and this went on for a number of months until I had to break into their.

Head office, not literally, but open the door and see that they had gone bankrupt. And unfortunately, um, they had, um, decided that they weren't going to pay the freelancers as well as a lot of the, [00:03:00] uh, overheads that they had, but rather continue to use the talent. Uh, to sell more of their stock. And subsequently a big group of us, uh, found ourselves, um, in trouble.

So we had no contract that was naivety on our part. Um, and we had no way of getting that money back. So that very much sowed the seed. And a journalist heard about that story and it, it ended up making the national press that was both, um. Slightly embarrassing, but also the starting point of, I guess, what would become my life's work, which is ensuring freelancers are more educated, that they're more protected, uh, and hopefully that things that happen to me won't happen to them.

Uh, so from there I started to set up, uh, companies that would eventually become the freelancer club, which is a 10-year-old. Community platform that, uh, hopefully tries to provide freelancers with a lot of the aspects I've mentioned on my journey.

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Yurii Lazaruk: You know, there is a book called Accidental Community Builder, and I feel like it's very similar, like Accidental Freelancer and I talk to many different, uh, experts in the, in the freelance market.

And, uh, how did you start your journey? Oh, it was just by accident. So, uh, it's. It's like, you know, pretty, pretty interesting, uh, story. And you told that you are advocating for freelancers, so it kind of like came from your inner needs to be seen, to be heard and like to be protected and how, how do you do it currently?

Matthew Dowling: Yeah. You know, that's always been a really central, almost unofficial part. Of our business. We're a bootstrap company, so we don't have to answer to any investors. Um, which, you know, has pros and cons, but certainly in terms of being able to move away from just purely commercial business ideas, it's given us the freedom and flexibility to do things we're really passionate about.

So I guess the first formal initiative was the no free work [00:05:00] campaign. When we launched the business, we decided we would never post unpaid work on the website. And so we started that with a hashtag on Twitter, you know, before Twitter became X and whatever it is today. Uh, it was a great community 10 years ago, it was filled with individuals who were very passionate about injustices and righting wrongs, and the hashtag and the campaign went viral.

Um, we trended number one on Twitter more than once. Uh, we managed to make the press. We, we made a big splash and it was really clear that freelancers were pissed off at this. You know, there was a lot of anger in the community about. Exploited of unpaid work. And so we knew that we had to do something in this space.

That campaign led us to some incredible thought leaders, communities and individuals who felt the same, and we brought the uh, idea to see if we could. [00:06:00] Um, request legislation to the UK government to see if we could get freelancers more rights. Now, unfortunately, uh, Brexit came along and a lot of those conversations got pushed back to the end of the line.

But over the past few months, as part of both the work that we do here at Freelancer Club, but also the work that I do as a chairman for a working group with some incredible companies, organizations, and individuals. Um, we have been able to get a freelance champion or certainly the commitment of a freelance champion, um, as part of the government.

And that will be the first time, uh, really that the, the word freelance has been used in a job title, but also. That freelancers will feel that they have a voice and

that they feel they've got a, a place at the table when it comes to big decisions around legislation and around protections and support for workers in the uk.

So, uh, it's been an incredible [00:07:00] journey, I would say a 10 year plus journey to try and see some material change, um, that has happened, but also the. Operational work that we do has seen a lot of change, uh, across multiple different sectors. You know, not just individuals, but also in the education space. We do a lot of work in education and we've seen complete attitudinal changes, uh, around the way universities view freelancers, the way industry views freelancers.

Um. And although we are a very small drop in the ocean, we like to think we, we played a small part in that change.

Yurii Lazaruk: What is the difference between educating, let's say full-time experts and freelancers?

Matthew Dowling: So the training that we provide and the support that we provide is very much tailored to any individual that has entrepreneurial aspirations.

So either running a side hustle whilst at university or. [00:08:00] They have plans to go full-time freelance after they graduate. So the training and education that they'll receive won't change in terms of their specialism. And so what everybody knows and has, might expect that one would get at university exists and we would often exist, um, and compliment in an extracurricular capacity, although we do do some in curriculum, uh, support.

Most of the work we do will help them identify those individuals who aspire to freelance. And then we have a roster of experts. We have the IP technology and um, support mechanisms. To be able to help them develop certain skills that we think are essential. So the three pillars that we operate under are business essentials, mindset and core skills.

Hmm. Uh, we believe that you can be the top of your class in terms of the thing that [00:09:00] you are offering, but if you lack those other components, it can be very difficult. To sustain a freelance business or even run a side hustle without having to spend a lot of time, um, dedicated to the non-billable hours.

So that's really what we're trying to do. We wanna instill the confidence as well as the scaffolding and framework to be able to become a highly successful in whatever that means to that individual freelancer and be able to thrive.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, there are many freelancers that I'm talking to who think that, oh, I'm an expert.

I'm right. I'm now a freelancer. I can do whatever I want. And then like, um, yes. And you are also a business owner, so on top of your expertise, you have to be a sales expert. You have to be marketing expert, networking expert, you name it. And it's just a small part of it, and it's very clear. At least for me and for other people, that you need to have those business skills and you need to [00:10:00] run a business, not just being like some random individual, but if you are talking about end clients, people who are hiring freelancers, what they have to be educated on to start work with this independent talents.

Matthew Dowling: Well, you know, on our platform we operate a matchmaking component. So we deal with a, a very large number of hiring clients and individuals actually. So not always businesses. It can sometimes be a member of the general public, but we've noticed that there is a. Big knowledge gap when it comes to really understanding a lot of the key components of both hiring and managing and working with freelance talent.

Uh, it can start from the, the moment they post a job and some of the briefs that we receive are incredibly thin and. They lack any nuance, which often makes it nearly impossible for the freelance talent to be able to accurately apply for that job. Budgets are all over the place. In fact, I, I had an experiment with a group recently where [00:11:00] I showed them three different job posts.

All of them were real. And I asked them to guess what the budget was, and within a room of about 30 or 40 people, the price ranged from 150 to 6,000 pounds for the same job. So that gives you an indication of what we experience and we see on a day-to-day basis. So I think a little bit of understanding as to the value of a project.

Which of course is, is highly complex because there's so many variables and components to that. But there is a naivety around, um, pricing for, for projects. And then I think the hiring process has always and historically been very casual when you compare it to hiring a full-time member of staff. And that lackluster throwaway attitude.

For example, we often hear of companies that delegate that work to maybe an administrator or an assistant or a junior of the company. So you might have an intern hiring a freelancer for a very [00:12:00] important piece of work. It sets a pretty bad precedent for that, uh, experience for both sides. A freelancer isn't

gonna feel loved if from the get go, they're stuck in a corner and asked to do the work without any help or support.

And a company isn't gonna get the best results outta that freelancer when there's such a disconnect between that relationship. So we fully appreciate that a hiring company doesn't wanna invest or dedicate a huge amount of time to something that might be a short term project, but equally, we would encourage them to invest the appropriate amount of time.

And pay a fair fee that is not only gonna get them a fantastic piece of work, but someone who they will almost definitely use again in the future. And someone who is gonna go out there and evangelize about their company and about this great experience that they had for the brand that they work for.

It's effectively a. Human advertising board, if you can treat that freelancer with, uh, respect, [00:13:00] professionalism, dignity, and fairness. Um, so that's something that we've been working on a lot. Um, we have a concept called ethical hiring where we speak about this idea of getting a much more level playing field between freelancers and companies.

To the benefit of all parties, uh, as well as helping hiring companies integrate internal hiring systems that are very seamless and, um, can work with their existing strategies, but ultimately have a much better and more productive, productive experience, uh, on both sides.

Yurii Lazaruk: Tell me a little more about ethical hiring.

Like what, what it includes.

Matthew Dowling: So we really broke down some of these power imbalances that we started to see between freelancers and then the hiring client. And there are, you know, sites that have materialized over the last number of years that are quite faceless. Uh, I'm sure you know who they are, but you know, and, and that's okay.

There's, [00:14:00] they're quite transactional and there is a place for that, I suppose, in business. Um, but then there's that attitude or that approach we don't think works very well when it comes to hiring somebody that you may wanna use on a more long-term basis. Or, um, if you wanna integrate that person into your, into your company, where they might have to collaborate with other members of your team, either other freelancers or full-time members.

Um, so we wanted to talk a bit about. Um, company culture. Mm. And how a freelancer could be treated in the same way as you might treat an employee just in terms of respect and inclusion. Um, the idea of having them buy into your mission is a really big aspect of getting the best work outta somebody, but also having them.

Feel like they are contributing to the wider project or the thing you want to do. So ethical hiring speaks to a lot of different [00:15:00] components. Um, fair payment, prompt payment, which unfortunately is another issue. Um, inclusion and diversity. Uh, the idea of, um, really understanding the power of building out your talent pool and your workforce.

With freelancers, not as an add-on, but often as the central driving force to what can be an incredibly powerful and malleable way to run your business. So I mean, just a couple of quick things on that, if I may. I mean, about eight or nine years ago, we had an office. In the Creative District of London, we had full-time staff and we thought about this and we decided to shift our business model completely to exclusively use agile talent and get rid of our, our, our office.

So we very much started practicing what we preached, and that was a, a game changing moment for us as a small business. But then over the past, uh, few years, more recently, we've started to see the [00:16:00] evolution of something called workforce blending, where we have the three pillars of agile work or flexible work.

Which is a legacy of the pandemic and we're all very used to now freelancers at the center of the workforce and then AI agents and that concept of humans working with AI to be able to develop, develop work. We are seeing the top tech organizations and corporations start to envelop workforce blending as the, uh, leading methodology to run their business and move their business forward.

And this is gonna start to trickle down into, uh, smaller companies and we're already seeing that. Um, and this current landscape of AI, I think is even more showing us how freelancers are becoming essential. Um, as a driving force to that, uh, to that workforce.

Yurii Lazaruk: This episode of the Independent Workforce is brought to you by Freelancer Map the Home of Freelancing.

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I love how you phrase it like blending workforce, and it's something that I also heard from John Younger. Matt motto, Mina ba. And I feel like that if you really want to be on the edge, of course you can. You cannot not have full-time employees. You will have them always, they will be, uh, a huge part of your team.

Still, you cannot work without AI because it's like the future. If you're not using ai, you are definitely missing out. How on earth people are forgetting about freelancers, those experts who have a ton of experience, who are working with different companies who are bringing new blood and speed to your company.

I, I still have no idea. And also to your point, uh, of ethical hiring. [00:18:00] Um, I believe that, okay, so if we are having, like, if we are onboarding a full-time expert and they, it usually takes, I don't know, a few months so they can. Read all the documents. Hopefully they can talk to other team members. They can catch up at some meetings and um, maybe, uh, three months later they're ready to fully start to work on a project.

But in freelance, and it doesn't work that way. Sometimes in three months time, you already finish and the project you were hired for. So I'm curious from your experience how to, how to make this. Let's say ethical onboarding rather fast, that you don't spend a lot of months on just making people to feel valued, but also that you make it in a way that people.

Are feeling valued instead of just being this, uh, person who you say goodbye to in like one, two months?

Matthew Dowling: Well, I, I think it probably starts by challenging some assumptions and maybe some existing biases that have existed for a long [00:19:00] time. Um, you know, and each country will have its own governments and there, there, there will be.

Barriers and blockages that I'm sure a lot of in, uh, companies will take a look at and say, well, you know, it's just not worth it. Or, we don't have that system already integrated. And so it would take a huge amount of work. I mean, it rarely is a complete overhaul. Um, in terms of the practicals of how one would do it, it's very much a case by case basis.

So I wouldn't wanna try and give a, um, a template that fits all because it, it just doesn't happen. But certainly the common denominator that we've seen with the companies we've worked with. Is that they're always all surprised at how seamless and quick it can be to try and introduce this additional element to something that they're already running.

It. It's not an overhaul of an existing system, it's just an addition or sometimes a tweak to an addition to, uh, an existing system. Um, in terms of the actual. Onboarding process. There is a skill to [00:20:00] develop when it comes to hiring anybody, and we know that, and freelancers are often no different. It, it's a, uh, a process where you, uh, will have, uh.

Certain boxes that you want to tick in terms of what you're looking for. And then you'll probably have an onboarding process that's already in place that can be adapted to, um, sufficiently support that freelance workforce that you wanna bring in. So what we've noticed in the past is that is completely bypassed when hiring a freelancer.

I think some. Organizations, um, maybe don't trust certain platforms or have not tried platforms, and so there's still that barrier to overcome. There's a confidence piece. I think those who have found. Great resources online and talent funnels to be able to bring in, uh, the agile, uh, freelancers to, to get things done are zooming ahead because they've got a very seamless methodology and, and strategy to be able to [00:21:00] bring that type of talent into play, um, without any friction.

Um, and I think really it, it, it's not rocket science. Once you start to invest time and make the decision that you want to, uh, overcome some of these barriers and integrate systems that are gonna do the job for you. So it's as much mindset as it is. Practical tweaks.

Yurii Lazaruk: When you talk to companies, when you explain them like what is the best way to hire freelance?

What is the best way to prepare a job description, a project description, and like how to onboard them, et cetera. What are the biggest concerns they raise, what they do not believe?

Matthew Dowling: So again, it might be country by country. So just to give you an example in, in the uk. Uh, we have something called IR 35, um, which is a whole nother podcast to discuss, but that I think has, has created a bit of scare

mongering and it's put some fear into companies to think, ah, there's a huge amount of paperwork.

We're not sure how to tackle that, and we don't think it's [00:22:00] worth it, so we're just gonna ignore it. So the first thing you, I, I, I think we hear from companies is that there are administrative and legislative issues that are blocking the way to bring in. Freelance talent or that it's messy, that they'll have to involve other departments that again, they think it's, it's too much work and we don't wanna do that.

So we would try and identify what the realities are and actually dispel some of the myths that they might have, um, and try and tackle that first piece. I think that the second element can often be, um, around freelancers just not investing in the company and how that they can come in and leave whenever they want, and.

I mean, technically that, that, that's true. But isn't that technically the case for, for a full-time employee, they'll have a contract in place, they can walk if they want. So I think there's probably some misconceptions that, um, freelancers are, are, are just dipping in and out without any care that. And we're, we're having to train both sides here because [00:23:00] when you get it right, when a freelancer really buys into the mission of a company, um, loves what that company does.

They may also have two or three other clients at the same time. But that does not necessarily mean that their, um, dedication to that project and that company waivers in any way. You know, we've been using and hiring freelancers for a decade for our company, and anecdotally it's very clear the ones who, uh, I need to, uh, or would like for them to buy into the mission of the company.

You know, and they talk about us in, in glowing aspects. But let's be clear, there are certain projects and certain freelancers that do not do that, and. Nor do I need them to do that. And they do a fantastic job. It, it, it's quite transactional. It's very practical and they can choose to dip into the, uh, non-work related components of working for a client if they want.

So [00:24:00] just to give you some practical examples, our main communication channel is Slack. And within Slack we would've channels that are dedicated. To non-business conversation. So we have one called the Water Cooler Channel, and the only rule is you're not allowed to talk about business in that channel. And rather, it is, it's a place for freelancers to have a virtual water cooler.

That they don't have because they don't work in an office full time to be able to chatter bay banana bread recipes or the type of dog that they have, you know? So we wanna try and build a community and connections amongst all the members of the team to try and smooth out what that looks like. Uh, build empathy, build ties between those individuals.

And we find that. That helps with teamwork. It helps with collaboration and it helps with longevity. Um, it also reduces turnover and churn, so all of these micro [00:25:00] adjustments can have really significant knock on positive effects.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, coming back to being inspired, uh, I, I believe it's like human nature.

If you're inspired by something, you will do the best that you can. And if you are treated like shit, uh, most likely, you want to be very motivated to do whatever they want from you. And I feel like it's exactly the thing that, um, some companies are missing out on. That then where they work with freelancers, with independent times, they think that it's like very short term engagement.

One month or two months as they will be out, why should we spend our time on it? And it's like counter human. It's like very, very weird. Uh, and I feel like it's something that people have to switch on their cell because you never know what will happen next. At some point this person may continue working with you like for two years afterwards, or maybe this person will refer you.

Some, another amazing freelancer because freelancers usually have networks of freelancer and if you like, are being good to one person. You are being good to thousands and hundreds of [00:26:00] other experts. It's like, you know, just joining the, let's say, closed, uh, private freelance community. Um, by doing this, and we were talking about the companies, but from the freelancer side, what are some common frustrations they face that when they work with companies.

Matthew Dowling: Well, I think you touched on a couple. I think a lot of freelancers feel very isolated when they go in and work for companies. You know that they are, they're, they're not seen, they don't feel heard. Um, you know, the, the kind of stereotypical images. If you wanna know who the freelancer is in the company, just look into the corner.

They're the one on their own with the computer not looking at anybody. So, um, I think that. That, that, that would be a frustration. But you know, there are also parts of our community and freelancers who actually want nothing to do with, with companies, and they much prefer that transactional feeling of, of popping in, doing the work and going out and, and that's why they became freelancers.

But it's probably worth asking that question. Um, to get to know [00:27:00] what each individual's working style is or what the preference looks like. Um, I think other aspects that are frustrating to freelancers is that idea of, um, not being able to see the fruits of their labor, you know, so often. You're a cog in a much bigger machine.

And there, you know, the work that you do might not have any impact for at all, but maybe not for a number of months. You may never see that. So to be kept in that loop or to start to feel like your, your work has had some sort of impact or even from a, a selfish point of view, they might want that work to put into the, to their portfolio and show to the next client and start to build on that.

But. You know, freelancers also require job satisfaction, like the rest of us, and I think a little added context as to why they're being brought in can go a long way. So freelancers who are speaking with companies and just get told that specific [00:28:00] brief and project, but not the wider context as to where it's gonna be used, or, or, or why it's gonna be valuable to that company, um, can feel quite frustrating.

Um, so there's a few different elements in terms of that early stage process. Um, then while they're in there, you know, not getting invited to any social aspects or feeling a little bit isolated or ostracized, again, is a preference. But if you ask, they might want to be included. That can always be, uh, a very easy win.

Um, and then there are the elements and frustrations around getting paid on time and scope creep and getting asked to do more work than was agreed in the contract and all of the usual things that, um, I'm sure come up on a day-to-day basis for you with your work. But, uh, certainly from our freelance community, yeah, all of those fairly well-known bug bears still exist.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, it's so, it's so weird for me to hear sometimes, for example, if [00:29:00] companies like paying their employees every month, let's say on the 24th, and then they pay freelancers in like within 30 days. And I'm like, what's, what? The point, like you've got the job done, you've got it fast and great, and then you are paying to a person like months later.

Go and try to pay your full-time employees a month later and see what will happen. And for some reason they're like, nah, I don't know. Like, why should we care? Um, so we were talking a lot about like expectations from both sides, from company side, from freelancer side. What, where do you see, where do you personally see the biggest misalignments between company's expectations and free realities and vice versa?

Matthew Dowling: Well, I think it comes down to this piece around communication. You know, um, identifying a lot of the things we've spoken about already and having that conversation, figuring out preferences, you know, even to the point of payment. Um, just to loop back to that quickly, that, I mean, I, I empathize with, with larger [00:30:00] companies because it's quite a sophisticated process and it's, it's not simple, but I would argue if you are utilizing freelancers on a regular basis.

To again, integrate something that is gonna work for both sides because you're right, there is an expectation that, ah, we'll pay a freelancer whenever. You know, we've heard of stories of freelancer's not getting paid for 90 plus days and there's such a power imbalance. That a freelancer is always very fearful to confront the company.

Uh, they don't want to damage their reputation, and they're worried they won't get paid if they push too hard. Mm-hmm. And they won't work with that company in the future, you know, so it, it's, it's apparent imbalance that unfortunately, uh, we've not yet been able to level up and companies are, are the ones really that I think we wanna help and support in this space.

To shift their attitudes so that it has this positive knock on effect across all of the points we've touched on. And one of those key [00:31:00] points is a freelancer needs to pay bills. Cash flow is incredibly important to a freelancer. If you've done a project for three months and you're not gonna get paid.

For another three months. That can be really devastating. You know, that can be the difference between being able to pay your bills, your rent, food, whatever. So I think, um, the big picture stuff here is how do we shift that attitudes across the board to try and positively impact a lot of these points. And then the micro version of that is, can we start to have a better understanding and clear.

More empathetic communication when both onboarding and working with Agile talent to be able to discover how they prefer to work, and equally from a client's perspective, we can get into those preferences too for, I think a more frictionless. Um, and more amenable way to, to get things done,

Yurii Lazaruk: you know, to a point of like three months payment.

Uh, sometimes companies think, ah, whatever, it's just a [00:32:00] few thousands, why should I care? But exactly, sometimes few thousands is the question of like being able to like, deal with your daily expenses and not, and like, ah, they just don't get it. And if you could design the perfect system for integrating freelancers, what would it look like?

Matthew Dowling: Well, we wanna try and get rid of as many of, uh, of the barriers that currently exist as possible. So a lot of the red tape stuff is, is tricky and that requires, you know, some nuanced. Changes or use of technology or whatever that looks like, that's gonna be a company by company basis. But how can we start to streamline that process of identifying the talent to begin with?

Um, whittling that down to a short list of individuals that you can start to have a conversation with. I think it's important to invest time into that conversational piece, you know, of all of the stages. I would say that one-on-one. Aspect, which is often rushed through. I mean, the whole interview process across the board is [00:33:00] bonkers anyway, but certainly with freelancers to give them that opportunity to have the conversations that we've been talking about today can really take care of a lot of the hassle that might come further than the road.

It really looks after so many of those potential, uh, pitfalls in the future. Um, and then. Onboarding the, the, the actual process, like I said, will be very much on a personalized basis, but really to, to try and smooth out as many of those as you can to avoid even from a freelancer's perspective. You know, having to invest a huge amount of time in any sort of onboarding process, any chasing of invoices, you know, involving legal components.

All of that is time. That the freelancer isn't getting paid. So how do we smooth out, uh, all of those steps and key elements to be able to, what we're essentially doing is pretty simple, right? We're trying to match, make two people together. Who are suitable for a project to be able to work in harmony for both parties [00:34:00] to, to get, um, a fair value out of that transaction, um, and then continue to work or move away and move on.

You know, it, it's something I think we've over complicated, um, with a combination of. The culture and attitudes around freelancing. Um, and then some of the, uh, logistical and administrative barriers that we've put up. Um, some we can't help. We have to, we have to deal with. But others, I think we've built ourselves internally and so looking at ways to either I.

Put in some new doors to walk through or knock them down completely.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, I feel like hiring a freelancer is very similar to hiring a full-time person, but so much faster and so much more effective. And that's exactly the main blocker because the companies get used to have this like, long, long, long, very, very slow process of hiring and they just don't want to do, uh, other work.

They just want, why, why should we? Spent, uh, not even spent. Why should we be faster if we have all these processes? If we know that [00:35:00] this takes one month and I will get paid for this one month, this will take two months. As, and I as a full-time person will get paid for this two months. As why would I do it in one week?

If I can do it in two weeks? Uh, in two months, as I feel like it's also some kind of like, maybe, maybe internal blocker. But once again, to your point, it's all about creating this processes. If they just want to work faster and work better, if companies want to get their business results, like better business results and, um, you've also pointed beforehand, uh, that companies have like, sort of like blended workforce? Yes. Like we talk, talking about AI and uh, also independent talents. So, um, I truly believe that it's unavoidable to deal with ai. Still many companies avoid to deal with freelancers. So if we take two companies, one who is using freelancers and one who is not.

What is the difference? What is this company who is not using this independent tons? What are [00:36:00] their risk in.

Matthew Dowling: Well, a a, again, it's company specific, but I think there are so many use cases for freelancers that offer a huge amount of advantage, right? If you think about certain positions in, in your organization, just quite simply don't require full-time support.

You know, you may not have the workload or to to hire somebody, and you're gonna end up bringing somebody in who is is working at. 30, 40% capacity. So in those instances, you would look to agile talent, you would look to freelancers to try and bring in some, some skill gaps, but more than that, you were bringing in a senior individual who you could potentially not afford or not want to pay for on a full-time capacity.

And that level of expertise to fulfill a project, to bring insights, to offer advice. These, this can completely transform a company. It's like being able to hire the top mind in your industry for a couple of weeks or a couple of months. Um,

[00:37:00] and their legacy once they finish that project lives on throughout that company.

And that learning and that capacity is transformative. So a company that's utilizing freelance talent is often highly flexible. Um. You know, I'm very low at predicting anything, and in 2025 I'm particularly low to do that because the world is so unpredictable at the moment. Yeah. But I think one thing we can be sure of is that it is unpredictable.

And because of that, I think as organizations we're going to have to become incredibly good at adapting and pivoting, you know, depending on the environment and, and the landscape. And freelancers are perfect for that kind of movement. You can bring individuals in to help you create new avenues, new directions, um, and then not have to, uh, feel like you're anchored to something, knowing that there might be another turn in the road [00:38:00] pretty shortly.

And that's certainly something. Um, I've been observing over the past number of years. We, we think about in the UK we've had Brexit. Globally, we've had the pandemic, and globally we've had ai. There are three things that have completely shifted the way organizations and companies have been able to trade and move forward in a very short space of time.

And freelancers fit that model of, uh, quick adaptation, uh, and ability to shift gears perfectly. Mm-hmm. So I think a company that is, um, not only utilizing freelancers but has also culturally, uh, fully bought into the idea of agile talent, uh, has a huge advantage over a company that doesn't in that capacity.

Yurii Lazaruk: I feel like it's time to become anti-fragile. And that's exactly what freelancers can bring you and you knowed I wish to have. The sky is the limit, but time is the limit. So the final question, what advice would you give to company just starting to use [00:39:00] freelancers?

Matthew Dowling: Well, I think there's a, a few things to consider if, if you're starting to look at the hiring process, make sure that you give a little bit of time to both, um, laying out what your mission is, maybe the broader project, and giving more context to the freelancers, uh, so they can understand better.

Not only the project, but how it's gonna be used and how they may be useful speak to the freelancer. So if you're going to use a platform that's very faceless and transactional, try and make time to have a conversation with the freelancer. Now, if it's a short and very binary project, fair enough. But anything more than that, jump on a quick call and have conversations around.

Working styles around the broader concept of the project, because guess what? The freelancer probably can solve more than one problem for you, and you will almost definitely be able to utilize them for, uh, so many more aspects of what you're trying to achieve, which will save you a huge [00:40:00] amount of time and money.

And then treat a freelancer in the way you would treat an employee, or really the, the way you would treat another human. You know, show empathy, show kindness. Include them in certain aspects of the company because you're gonna get the best out of that individual. And we always say this to new freelancers.

It's all about trust. You know the whole idea of building your brand, developing marketing strategies, connecting with individuals, it's about trust. Are you gonna show up and do the job? Is a company going to think you're gonna work well with my team and you're gonna add value? And the job of a freelancer is to communicate that.

So for a company, uh, hiring freelancers, I think building up that element of trust, which happens over conversations and project by project moments, you're gonna end up with a fantastic relationship whereby projects will get done. You'll feel good about yourself, you'll be able to open up new doors and avenues, uh, and I think you'll save yourself an absolute fortune.[00:41:00]

Yurii Lazaruk: And I feel like the best time, uh, to start working with France was yesterday and the best next time is today. So just go and do it. Last but not least, name two people I should reach out to to talk about the independent workforce.

Matthew Dowling: Oh, well, I've had a look at your podcast.

You've spoken to a lot of folks that, uh, that, that I, I think would be great. Aaron Peters is someone who I think is a, um, wonderful. Individual, first and foremost, but also a fantastic expert in, in the future of work and someone who I think would bring a huge amount of value. Um, and then, uh, una, the CEO of indie list in Ireland is doing incredible things, um, and has really strong.

Thoughts and opinions about freelancers and the entire freelance landscape, not ju, not just in Ireland, but globally. So I think there are two powerhouses that you might like to have a chat with.

Yurii Lazaruk: And what is the best way to connect with you?

Matthew Dowling: Well, [00:42:00] freelancer Club is. Fairly well established. Stick it into Google and, and you'll be able to, to find what we do.

Uh, and if you look me up on LinkedIn, um, you'll also see some of the work we're doing around education and advocacy there too.

Yurii Lazaruk: No, Matt, I'm finally super happy that we met here in this setting. At least we had this one-on-one conversation and uh, I am happy to see not just your LinkedIn photo, but three of you.

And thank you so much for this opportunity and thank you a lot for sharing your experiences and. For doing what you are doing for bringing this freelancers, for helping them to strive to grow, for connecting the dots in the freelance market and for growing it overall, especially working with government, I feel like it's the hardest part to deal with.

It's even harder than to work with end clients with companies. So thank you so much for what you're doing and, uh. Yeah, it's been a huge pleasure to talk to you.

Matthew Dowling: Pleasure. So Omar, URI, thanks a lot

Yurii Lazaruk: and, uh, yeah, see you in the freelance world. And for listeners, thank you for joining us on this episode of The Independent [00:43:00] Workforce.

I hope you've taken one step closer to working smarter with freelance talent. If you enjoy this conversation, subscribe to, learn even more and share it with your colleague. And remember, the future of work is now.