

**Yurii Lazaruk:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Independent Workforce, the podcast where we explore the now and the future of works through the lens of temporary employment such as freelancers, contractors, fractional experts, you name it. Here we'll 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. An international platform has been connected, top independent professionals with companies for over 20 years. And my guest is Robert Luck, a freelancing entrepreneur who consults top-notch professionals and business owners on shaping their business strategy and systematically supports independent professionals.

A founder of two of the largest professional communities, freelance and eu, and Naza Doze, an author of The Freelance Way, an international business best seller. And I believe huge ambassador of freelancers. [00:01:00] So welcome Robert.

**Robert Vlach:** Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here and I'm looking forward to a conversation.

Thank you, Rick.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** You know when I heard the name of your book, the Freelance Way, it reminded me of like the last way, and I was like, oh, I have this connection in my mind. So it's a little bit random question, but are you a fan of Ted Lasso? Uh,

**Robert Vlach:** yeah, I've seen like, I would say like two or three series. Uh, so I would say I'm a fan, not a huge fan.

It's, uh, well, it's a feel good comedy, so Yeah. I, I watched it.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** So you've been in this freelance industry for a lot of years, since 1998. So tell me, share with me a little bit of your background. How did you start freelancing yourself?

**Robert Vlach:** Uh, well, long story short, when I was 20, I went to Spain with my friend.

Uh, we were thinking [00:02:00] about finding some, like seasonal work, I would say, and I ended up, uh, working there as a freelancer, uh, for a couple of years. Uh, I lived in Catalonia. Uh, I stayed and I lived in, uh, Barcelona for, uh, quite a long time and I'm very grateful for that because it was long before, uh, Barcelona got really full of tourists and Airbnbs and, uh, be before it became so crowded.

Uh, so it was a different city by then. And, uh, I enjoyed, uh, Spain very much. I lived there, uh, partially. So it's our second home. We also live, uh, in Czech Republic, and we spend some time in, uh, grand Canaria. That's our like, uh, I would say winter home.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Hmm. [00:03:00]

**Robert Vlach:** Well, as for freelancing, uh, I was working, uh, in Spain, uh, for several years and then I returned to Czech Republic.

Uh, and I already, uh, got some questions and inquiries from, uh, other people, my friends who were freelancers and they were just interested like in how to evolve what they're doing, and they were interested in my experience. So I did a lot of, uh, one-on-one sessions, basically going through their business.

Uh, originally I was studying business, so that was my original background. I was also. Um, well, I'm also from a entrepreneurial family, so my parents had, uh, like a mid, uh, size company. They were employing at one moment up to 100 people. So, uh, running a business was always a part of my life somehow. [00:04:00] Uh, so basically I, I started to do more business consultations, and I also started to create, uh, uh, some websites for my freelance friends, because originally I, I became a freelancer as a web developer.

So I was developing, uh, in late 1990s before the.com bubble, uh, burst. Uh, I, I was developing, um, um, expert portal, uh, in Spain for industry professionals. And then I used this knowledge to create like, uh, small projects to present, uh, my freelance friends. Basically, it was for free, it was just to support them.

And, uh, eventually they were like getting a lots, lots of inquiries, uh, from these small websites. And they were like pushing me towards adding new members, you know. And, uh, uh, I ended up, uh. Traveling to, um, Mexico in 2004 [00:05:00] when I had, where I had a couple of months, uh, to just think about life and what I really want to do and, uh, what makes me tick.

And I realized that I can perhaps create some greater project to create to, to, to support, uh, freelancers. Uh, and when I came back, I sort of finished, uh, all the, uh, client work I needed to finish before starting something, uh, greater, uh, on my own, a bigger project. And in 2005, we launched Novel Nanos ced, which, uh, was a really small portal with a directory of freelancers.

It was an open directory even then. So basically anyone, uh, could contact our members directly. Uh, that's, that become, that became our rule, I would say. Mm-hmm. Um, [00:06:00] and, uh, it grew, it, it, it was growing year by year. And, uh, currently we are supporting, uh, over quarter million of check freelancers in their business.

We publish newsletter, podcasts, news items. We do a lot of meetups. Uh, so, uh. I'm basically traveling all the time to some business debate or meetup, and, and I think this is, this has been really important in shaping my, uh, view about the free on the freelance economy because, um, I, I never really actually took the top.

Down, uh, perspective. All my insights about the, uh, about how freelancers do their business actually grew, uh, from meeting thousands and thousands of them, by training them, by having these, uh, debates, [00:07:00] uh, mostly in private, uh, whether discourse, of course looks completely different, uh, from the public discourse.

So, uh, that became a source of, uh, uh, knowledge, uh, uh, for my book, uh, that was published in, uh, 2017. And then the International Edition, uh, came out in 2022, uh, published by Harper Collins, uh, which was also a major. Uh, milestone for me, uh, because it, it was published by Harper Business, which is a pretty elite, uh, imprint within Harper.

It's basically their main, uh, business imprint for books, basically for managers and for people who run big companies. Uh, they are not used to publish books for freelancers. Yeah. But actually the editor, uh, who purchased, uh, my book [00:08:00] for, for Harper, he told me that, uh, he really liked the evidence-based, uh, approach combined with the stories of individual freelancers.

So it's, it's a blend of both and well, um, after that I also started freelancing, which is a younger project, uh, connecting freelancers across Europe. We do also do meetups. And so on. So this is in nutshell, like how I got here and, uh, what I'm about as a, as a professional, active within a freelance community.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** It's been a long journey. You know, it's like starting from a freelancer yourselves and helping your friends and like turning into a business, writing a book and expand on your community. And I'm curious, what changes did you see, like through your professional way in the freelance economy? Like, are there any like milestones, for example, something happened in two Southerns and something happened in thousand, in 2000 fives, et cetera.

Do you, do you see [00:09:00] some kind of milestones happening over these years?

**Robert Vlach:** Um, quite a few. Um, uh. First of all, as I said, I started in 19, in, in nineties, in late nineties, uh, which was a different era. Uh, you know, modern freelancing was greatly enhanced and supported by the onset of, uh, digital economy. Uh, no, the, the, the boom of the internet.

Basically allowing people who were isolated in some way, uh, to offer their services to anybody worldwide. So that was the first major shift. Uh, uh, that was already happening when I started as a freelancers, uh, as a freelancer. I would say. Uh, the second was, uh, more relevant to the, uh, Czech Republic, where, where I, where I started [00:10:00] with these, uh, projects, uh, supporting freelancers.

Uh, I think in 1990s, uh, um, the check market was more company oriented and, uh, if somebody went, uh, to be a self-employed, it was considered to be something a bit. Less than owning or starting a company. And it was understandable because after the Aval revolution, the check market was virtually empty of real businesses.

All the businesses there were, were state businesses, you know, sort of transformed into, uh, uh, private ones. But the spirit of like newly founded companies that shaped the check economy, uh, was more company oriented at the beginning. But in the early two thousands, uh, something shifted, uh, like the next generation of professionals of millennials, [00:11:00] uh, I'm part of the generation.

Sort of, uh, uh, became split into these two carrier paths. So some of them were more, you know, in that competitor direction, uh, start still starting companies and doing this company work, but there were already some really independently minded people who, uh, preferred, uh, freelancing or freelance career as their, uh, best choice.

So that was really new. I, I, I saw it within my generation how it changed and how, um, the, the, the understanding among the wider business public was slower than that, you know, uh, another major shift, uh, happened, I would say, uh, after the financial crisis, 2008, 2009, uh. Um, that was a huge [00:12:00] one. It, I think it affected, uh, uh, all the Western worlds.

Um, part of it was that many companies were, uh, getting more careful about hiring and about, uh, downsizing, about optimizing their costs because, uh, the markets, uh, the economies were pretty stressed, so they, they started to be much more likely to work with the freelancers than before. Yeah. Uh, so I, I would say that it legitimized, uh, working with independent professionals on every level, basically.

Mm-hmm. Uh, so, uh, with our project, uh, with Ano Caid before 2008, we were just like a small community website. After 2008, we were. Well, one of the major players in the hr, um, [00:13:00] among the HR sources, because the companies were rushing to our websites to, to, to seek, uh, to filter, to pick their preferred independent professionals.

So for us it was like a breakthrough, but I know that it happened also elsewhere. And well, you had other milestones that you already know for sure. From your own experience. Uh, COVID, uh, start on, uh, of the Ukraine War and, uh, the onset of AI and the difference it makes, uh, in, uh, in the job market, at least partially.

So these are all major shifts, uh, that happened and that, uh, resonated throughout the whole, uh, community.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** How do you see what's happening exactly right now?

**Robert Vlach:** Um, well, let, let me, [00:14:00] let me give you a question. Uh, I had, I had, like, I did, uh, uh, pan-European book tour, uh, in last two years. So we had meetings all over Europe in Mar, in Madrid, in Barcelona, in Dresden, uh, in British lava in, in, uh, in, uh, Sofia and Bulgaria in Antwerp. Everywhere I met lots of freelancers, I, I held a, a business discussion basically everywhere.

So ba possibly hundreds of freelancers, uh, across Europe. Uh, not to mention, uh, the local meetups we do here in C Republic, like. How many questions do you think I got related to freelance platforms?

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Hmm. Now? Nowadays, [00:15:00]

**Robert Vlach:** yeah. Like in the last two years.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** I wanted to say that everyone knows about them, that they exist, but I believe that you've got many questions because as for me, if I'm becoming a freelancer, yes, I know about platforms like Upwork, but I can't say that for me is the platform that I would go myself. 'cause I believe that it's more like for Gig Works or something like that.

**Robert Vlach:** Yeah.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** But if I wanted to go, like as a professional senior expert freelancer, I would definitely ask you what platform would you tell me to go to?

**Robert Vlach:** Yeah. So I got hundreds of questions and. I think related to platforms was one, only one was really related to, uh, a platform other than [00:16:00] those that I run as fris communities.

Because sometimes people ask me about like, technicalities about what we do, but this is not what I mean, I mean, what I mean is that, uh, if I read public discourse about freelancing, it is mostly related somehow to platforms. Because platforms, they have their marketing budgets and it's completely fair. I mean, like they try to promote their point of view, uh, and their, to offer their services.

I think they are valuable in some cases, pretty much. But what I see is that freelancers are not really that much interested in, in this. Part of this discuss what they, what they ask me about are really things that are more related to their individual businesses. Uh, like, uh, business negotiations, pricing, time management, uh, teamwork, [00:17:00] uh, growing their business, uh, personal marketing.

So I would say that one of the major shifts I've seen in the last, uh, year or two is that, um, uh. Uh, freelancers are less, uh, interested about the content that platforms are creating, and, uh, they are more oriented towards topics. There are core business skills and topics that are totally unrelated to debt.

I mean, uh, you may even see it reflected in the fall of stocks like Fiverr or Upwork. Just take a look where these stocks were like in 2022. They were at the peak of their influence and, uh, I would say market share or market, uh, presence. Now, it's kind of interesting, but I think it's, uh, uh, it's, their [00:18:00] influence is in decline in a way.

I, I, I don't say that. Uh, this platform, uh, or a gig work, uh, uh, part of the freelance economies in over, in, on, in, in an overall decline. I just say that in the discourse that I see when talking to freelancers. This is something rarely, very rarely mentioned. I, I just had a tour last week. Uh, it was like four cities, uh, four discussions, several hundred people.

Not a single question about anything related to platform work or platform offerings. They don't care. So that would be my honest answer. Uh, I think we are seeing a sort of shift. We don't know where it leads. It may be temporary, it may be related to AI because, um, some of the, you know, platforms are [00:19:00] basically intermediaries between.

Uh, clients and not the top skilled work. So it may be that the clients are looking for this kind of work elsewhere or that they sort of change their hiring strategy. We don't know yet because we, we don't have the data. I, I'm just trying to describe what I observe. When speaking, two hundreds of people who are freelancers themselves.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** This episode of the Independent Workforce is brought to you by Freelancer Map, the Home of Freelancing. Whether you are looking to hire top freelance talent fast, or a freelancer ready to find your next big project, freelancer Map connects the right people with the right work. No endless job boards, no guesswork.

Just direct access to verified experts and opportunities across the globe. Visit [freelancer map.com](https://freelancermap.com) and start building your next success story today. It's interesting because I [00:20:00] also believe that you are talking to rather experienced freelancers, uh, because you know, from my perspective, I can also create kind of like different categories of freelancers.

First of all, we have like top-notch experts who are. Already knowing how to build a brand who worked with at least dozens of clients who has the word of mouth, and most likely they have projects listed and clients can even wait for them. Then there is another category of freelancers who are great experts, but who are not visible online and basically very rare expert, uh, client know that they exist.

Those people, they still need platforms like LinkedIn or for example, freelance. I'm not talking about like gig work parts because they overgrown those parts.

**Robert Vlach:** No, I don't see LinkedIn as a freelance platform.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Ah,

**Robert Vlach:** yeah, I get it. The platform is, uh, uh, something that promotes itself as a place for freelancers to get in a, um.

[00:21:00] Touch or in a match with their potential clients. So, uh, I wouldn't, I wouldn't even say that. Uh, uh, small agencies that do matching between freelancers and their clients are platforms. I see a platform as a, something more general in a way. Mm. Uh, for example, you have all over Europe. You have, uh, rather small specialized agencies that, for example, look up, uh, SAP developers for their clients, or, uh, they look up independent professionals, uh, for their clients in the pharma industry, this is not, uh, in the terminology.

I, I would use a freelance platform. It's a specialized hiring agency. And by the way, this is like super useful if you, if you look for somebody who is highly specialized, who is not, you know. [00:22:00] Promoting everything they do on LinkedIn or I don't know, on Instagram. Uh, so getting through an agency like that can be really helpful.

And it may be also very helpful for freelancers themselves, uh, especially in the cases where, uh, some special kind of contract or in extensive, uh, uh, contractual, uh, uh, commitment is needed because these agencies also help, uh, these experts to, uh, to set the fair conditions of the business deal that they advise them and so on and so on.

So, uh, I would say that this is a, like a different, uh, thing. Uh, platforms, a general platform is basically someone who is an intermediary, but who is not specialized in like certain professional or industry. It's, it's more like a general thing.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Got it. Got it. And you know, I also [00:23:00] see that a lot of freelancers are being a little bit afraid of calling themselves businesses because they're like, nah, no, I'm just a freelancer.

I'm just an expert. And then at the end of the day, no, you are business because you are have, in addition to what you can give to the world, you can, you have to also sell your expertise. You have to also build a network around it.

**Robert Vlach:** You're absolutely right. I, I I, I would add to that, that they also need to realize, and this is as important as realizing that you are a business, that you are a special kind of business.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Hmm.

**Robert Vlach:** That's, that's very important. That's actually the main reason why, why I wrote my book. Because, um, well, is this one, I don't know if it's like seeing Yeah, I can say it.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** It's

**Robert Vlach:** being, yeah. Uh, because I was missing a title that describes a business know-how, uh, relevant [00:24:00] to freelancers because so many things are done different, done differently, uh, in a freelance business, and they, they, and, and the freelancing has to be, um, grasped from the business per perspective as well, you know, so I, I totally agree with that.

I would just say that people need to seek knowledge and, uh, knowhow there is relevance to what they do as freelancers and to their unique, uh, uh, form of doing it.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** And I also believe that no matter how amazing freelancers are, let's imagine that they are like really good experts. They know how to sell, they know how to market.

And still we need those other parts, those people who are creating projects for them. Those companies who are some, um, giving them some extra, extra work. Maybe something that they can't do [00:25:00] internally. Maybe something that they need support with. Maybe something that, let's imagine they want to test and they don't want to hire a full-time person to, to a test, but they want to discover some different opportunities.

And I'm curious, so definitely you work with both sides. What are the main blockers that prevent companies from getting and hiring more and more freelancers?

**Robert Vlach:** Um, that, that's a pretty general question. Um.

Uh, well, I mean,

well, it de I would say it depends on the industry. It depends on the country. Uh, it depends on the, on the business owner, you know. So, uh, perhaps this is like a too broad question for me to answer. Uh, because there are specific [00:26:00] issues in each of these elements. Different countries have different, uh, business, business culture.

Uh, so first of all, uh, what I see, uh, is that if you have a more advanced, uh, freelance economy within the country, the companies are way better informed, uh, how to work with freelancers. Like what to expect, uh, how to manage this kind of work. And this knowledge is being, uh, shared and, uh, uh, preserved within companies.

If you have a less developed freelance economy within the country, so many issues occur, uh, because, uh, for example, the mid-level management may be opposed to hiring freelancers because they see freelancers as the potential competitors, uh, to, to what they do to, to their position. So it's also a matter of, uh, [00:27:00] internal politics.

And I believe that, uh, uh, the more advanced the freelance economy is. The more this kind of attitude disappears because the company owner or, or the CEO sort of, sort of, uh, uh, promotes the culture where, uh, the work with talent is more fluent and where also the company follows some best practices, how to deal with this special kind of business, which freelancers are.

So that, that's one, one thing I would say. Then you have like industry differences. This is like a huge difference because as I said, uh, before we started the interview, uh, people don't often realize that there are hundreds of industries. Where freelancers work, uh, that thousands of professions [00:28:00] within these industries and some of these industries, some of these, these professions have like different habitual, uh, or, uh, market shaped ways of, uh, deal making of, uh, uh, creating the business arrangements, uh, the contractual, uh, basis for work and so on and so on.

So, so I prefer not to generalize too much because I'm so much aware about these niches, uh, where things just go in a completely different way and it's the same country, same economy, but a different industry or different profession. And, and suddenly you see that, uh, the way the business is done and conducted is, is different.

So, so that would be my. Um, perhaps honest, general answer to that.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** No. I believe that if you are talking about the country that have like freelancing for like 20 years already, that they definitely develop some internal regulations and there are problems and all that are [00:29:00] countries where you can just create your freelance business in one day and then just start getting money already.

And then there are countries where you have to just register as a business for like months and you have to wait and you have to like get a lot of documents. It's also blockers for that. And if we are talking about, let's say. Develop an economy, uh, for example, those are country where full-time is like 95% of the market, or at least they think so.

And companies heard that the right in, in independent talents. They usually call them consultants and they hear the word freelancer and they understand that it's experts. Those are experts. Those are someone who have something to give to the company, although not, not just random people on the market. And still, from your perspective, what prevents.

People who got used to full-time hiring these [00:30:00] independent experts.

**Robert Vlach:** Um, well, as I said it, it's probably the lack of know-how and the best practices if they're honest about hiring them. So, as I told you before we started, like I, I wrote a, uh, article a couple of years ago where I tried to outline what would be my recommendation for companies to, to hire freelancers.

Uh, we can go through these points one by one. Uh, I still, I wrote it like four years ago, but I still, I would still subscribe to the article, like 100%. First of all, I would start it if I, if I would advise anyone to, to, to do that, uh, I would create a subset of, uh, like who are we going to hire? Uh, because, you know, there's so [00:31:00] many levels in freelancing.

Uh, in general, I think that companies want to hire either like, good solid freelancers, top-notch freelancers or elite freelancers. You know, I'm not really concerned about hiring like, uh, like, uh, uh, Mr Know-it-alls who do everything for cheap and then just don't follow any, uh, rules of doing like, reliable, solid, professional work.

So I cannot really advise anyone who, who just wants to hire someone for cheap and then suffer the consequences. So first of all, I would basically narrow the scope. From like, uh, solid quality professionals through to, not through topnotch level, to really elite, like ba basically like industry celebrities.

Like this is the scope I'm talking about. Um, so [00:32:00] then there are like, uh, couple of points. Uh, first of all, I would advise, uh, these companies, uh, to be careful or to avoid, uh, freelance platforms where freelancers are basically competing by submitting the lowest price. I, I don't think, uh, I have never seen a company, uh, that was serious about hiring, like, quality experts that would go

to this kind of like, competitive, uh, directory or platform, and they would get like, uh, this quality work that they would expect.

So that would be my first, uh, um, recommendation. And I think it's quite counterintuitive because like, uh, why would, why would, uh, you recommend that, right? Like it has some internal issues that are related to freelance economy. I would say that the quality experts, they are, they [00:33:00] have, they have high demand, so they prefer to work with clients directly, and they prefer, they are, they're less and less likely to have some sort of intermediary, uh, in between them and the clients where the intermediary is pushing them to set the lowest price.

So, so I would say that, that would be my first recommendation. The second recommendation would be also quite counterintuitive. It would be to explore and to enter, uh, freelance communities. So basically, if there are communities that allow people from the companies to join the meetups, to join the talks to, to join the conferences, just go there and talk to freelancers like about whatever you do.

Uh, have some, some really nice, um, standing conversations with people from various industries and just ask them like how they work with companies. Just take this [00:34:00] insight and incorporate it in how you think of freelancers. If you are in a bit of hurry, uh, then I would probably recommend to hire connectors.

Uh, if you, if you, if you read, uh, uh, a book by a Malcolm Gladwell, I think it was a tipping point. It's called Tipping Point. He sorts of, uh. Uh, categorizes like, uh, people who are, who are, uh, special in social networks. I don't mean online social media, but real social networks. Um, and one of that type is a person who he calls, uh, a connector.

That's somebody who is really extremely well connected within an industry and who often works as an informal. Uh, expert for connecting people. So knowing these experts, perhaps [00:35:00] even hiring them as, uh, consultants, just to get the direct recommendations for, uh, well-regarded and proved experts. That's an invaluable, um, uh, service.

By the way, I, since I run, uh, freelance communities, I often work in this role for my clients. So basically we, we, uh. Usually hire freelancers on my personal recommendation that I work with this or that person for a number of times on various projects, and I know exactly how they work, how they fit within the team and so on.

So, so I'm also connecting myself, I know when I'm speaking about, so that the second recommendation, just entering the communities of freelancers. It may be a professional community, uh, within an industry like just freelancers, I don't know, in project management or as industry specific. Me one, it doesn't have to be a general one.

And, and working with connectors. That would be [00:36:00] my second, uh, suggestion. The third suggestion, uh, would be to be really thorough in, uh, uh, in the search because, uh. Quality experts, uh, they are quite rare and they are busy. So actually to find a person with a certain qualifications, with a certain level of, uh, professionalism and who is also available, that's quite a hard search.

I mean, like, it, it, it, it's a hard work. It's not like, you know, calling this or that guy and expecting, uh, that, um, uh, this professional that she would come, uh, tomorrow for a business meeting and, uh, next week they would start, uh, working on a project. I mean, like, this is not how it works. Uh, the really quality people, they, they, they have to be [00:37:00] approached, um, uh, in advance a little bit.

So they have to be kept in the loop when the project, project is in preparation and the, the search has to be done professionally. The research, I mean, the research for these people has to be done thoroughly, professionally, and, and, and not in a backhand way. So that would be my third recommendation. The fourth recommendation.

Would be to prepare a budget, because quality experts are definitely not cheap, and definitely not in an industry where there is a demand. You know, these people, they would, uh, some of them would perhaps ask you right away, what's your budget? And if, if, if you don't have a, any specific number in mind, then they, then they may directly downgrade you as a, like a potential customer or client somewhere in the future, but.

Since you don't, since, since you are not really prepared, [00:38:00] you know, to, to, uh, to, to specify like what's the budget? What are, what are you willing to pay, or what is basically the level you are working on, uh, that already sends a signal to a well experienced, uh, professional that more work would need to be done in order to smooth this assignment, uh, and, and, and, and, and get it to a deal.

Uh, it's a lot of work and if you are busy, you prefer not to go through these, you know, lengthy, uh, negotiations and so on. So, so definitely like set your

budget in advance. Uh, expect a question related to that. It may be framed in a variety of ways, but actually. This would be one of the first questions I would ask if I'm approached by a prospect.

So, so get ready for that. Uh, the fifth [00:39:00] recommendation would be not to overestimate your, uh, negotiate negotiation, uh, negotiating position. You know, people who work at larger companies, they often think that since they are working for a large company, that they are like a big client, that they are playing a stronger hand against, uh, quality expert.

That's completely opposite. Uh, how the reality really is, uh, these people, they, they tend to be booked, uh, for months, if not years in advance. So they have a, like very, very strong position if they run their business efficiently and professionally and. They know that if this deal or, or this negotiation doesn't go through it, it doesn't bother them too much.

You know? Uh, to be honest, they pretty much often, uh, expect many hurdles when they are approached by, uh, like a regular [00:40:00] company because they are, you know, purchasing departments that trying to push the price down. And, and they are, they are expected to go to lengthy meetings where they are just, you know, uh, discussing the possible negotiation and so on and so on.

So, uh, I think there's a real mismatch. You know, like if you, if you are a company looking to hire, like, uh, uh, from quality to top level to elite, uh, uh, freelance experts, the higher you want to go the, the, the weaker your position actually is. And if you are trying to hire. Influencers, I mean, like industry influencers or industry celebrities, like that's a way different story.

Like you may, you may be ready to really overpay by a huge margin unless you, if you really want to work with these people. Uh, a six, uh, recommendations. Number six, uh, [00:41:00] would be, uh, also quite, uh, counterintuitive. It's better if the negotiations or if the, if the, uh, if the contact is made by person who is actually able to make and call the decisions.

Because many experienced freelancers, they, uh, have an experience that if they are approached by mid-level management. Who actually doesn't make the decisions that it's like a, sort of like a, it may be a waste of time. So they're very careful about, you know, not over-investing in communication with someone who actually doesn't make the decision after all.

So my recommendation would be that you would have a, a decision maker, more specialized to deal, uh, in, in dealing with the freelance experts and who is

also able to close these deals. It would make the, uh, communication way smoother. And, uh, [00:42:00] the freelancers, especially the quality, quality experts, would be much less hesitant, uh, to, you know, to really discuss seriously the matter at hand if they talk to a decision maker.

Uh, so I would definitely, uh, uh, recommend to skip the lower level management in dealing and hiring freelancers if they don't make the decisions. It's, uh, it's, it doesn't lead to good outcomes overall. It may lead sometimes, but it's, I wouldn't say it's a good practice. Um, and my recommendation number seven, uh, is a bit more general one.

Um, it's, uh, basically, uh, creating a culture of, uh, trust and respect with these, uh, experts that you want to work, uh, long term with. Uh, [00:43:00] because I believe that if you hire a top level, uh, freelancer, a top level freelance expert who becomes loyal to a company, that's a huge asset for the company. If you are able to have this person to work for you for years.

And providing you with the current UpToDate industry knowhow, that's a huge value. But in order to get there, you really need to figure out how to treat these experts with the trust and with respect, because they have so many other options, what to do, that if they, uh, feel that they are somehow managed, like a, like a resource, they would may, they may have a urge to seek, [00:44:00] uh.

Uh, clients elsewhere. Clients where they can have some really real direct human to human connection, uh, mutual trust, uh, where they get the respect they, they think they deserve. And I think many companies just don't understand it. So they have this top level experts for a while, but since they mistreat them in a way, they lose them pretty soon.

And, and what they get is basically a cold shoulder. Uh, when they do the next level of negotiations, the price goes up and they don't understand why, because, you know, working with the company wasn't really pleasant. So everything is more difficult. Uh, you sort of price it in and, uh, uh, collaboration just goes nowhere.

You know, so it would be my seven points recommendations. I, I'm sorry for like, this lengthy answer, but, but I think, uh, since I have it written, uh, and I, I, I thought [00:45:00] a lot about these points, uh, in the past I thought I would give it to, as it is.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** And it sounds like a, an, uh, an instruction. So a practical guide that PE companies can take and just go through one by one.

Yes. And really apply it to practice. And I can tell sometimes it's hard. And what I've heard of, um, getting really to good freelancers, to great experts is like building relationships with them. And relationships takes time. And the earlier company starts, the earlier they get there. And also to your point, when you hire one such expert, you get access to pool of other similar experts.

Because usually those people are also well connected with other freelancers in, um, similar, in similar technologies or in complementary skills, for example, who are talking

**Robert Vlach:** about Great companies understand this.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** Yeah.

**Robert Vlach:** And that's why they treat, uh. These relationships on a, on a different level, uh, than the regular [00:46:00] suppliers.

They know that this is like a really untangible hard to estimate, uh, asset. And, uh, if there is a culture of trusting freelancers and working with them, and of course you, you need to have a process, uh, of selecting the right ones because of course, if you just don't have any experience and you hire the wrong people, you may have like completely different impression like what freelancers provide and how professional they are.

Let's be honest here, uh, the number of completely reliable and professional people is pretty small.

**Yurii Lazaruk:** Mm-hmm.

**Robert Vlach:** So you have to be really able to be. Uh, you have to have a process to go slowly, uh, with testing [00:47:00] completely new, uh, hires that you didn't get to through a recommendation. So have some testing assignment or, you know, some process for evaluating how this person fits within your company culture and be ready to, uh, elevate, uh, the, the level of collaboration where, where you are when what you are getting are only the positive, strong, positive signals.

So, so that's, I I think that's really challenging because you need to have a, hmm. Evaluation process for sorting out, like who are the real professional people who deliver, who are always reliable, uh, who have like solid, uh, price, price to value ratio and so on. You know, I think it's good to mention that [00:48:00] sometimes companies can be really shocked how expensive freelancers can get

if they are like, uh, elite enough, you know, in, in, for example, in my profession, uh, like I do business consulting, uh, on the level of internationally published authors, speakers, uh, people who have like 20 plus years of experience within the industry.

The prize may be like a couple of thousand euros per hour, uh, without any issues. I mean, like, uh, these are the people who are really well known, well regarded. Uh, so, but it's definitely like shocking for someone who is just hiring people for, uh, I don't know, a 100 euro per hour work, something like that.

Uh, so you, you need, you need to have a, like a, you need to have a certain, [00:49:00] uh, knowledge where the price scale goes in a certain profession. Each profession has a. Uh, like a different price scale. You may have people working with the \$10 per hour or 10 euro per hour, some really cheap work. They are just starting and they're just trying to attract clients.

But there is also the opposite side where the prices are not really published, you know, but they exist and they are, the deals are closed at this price. So that's why I wouldn't be too enthusiastic about, uh, websites where people sort of share their freelance prices, because most often they're not the top level experts who charge like several times higher rate than is the, like, upper average in the industry.

They're not [00:50:00] represented in this, in this, uh, in this service or, uh, uh, or estimates. To that information you need to speak to, uh, industry insiders and to have really private conversations with serious people. Uh, this is usually not a public information, so I would say that this, this may be quite challenging.

How to estimate, like what is the fair value of this or that expert? I think I, uh, I think I described one of the cases in my book where, uh, where were a friend of mine who works, uh, who works for a corporation, described me how they were hiring, uh, uh, an expert in logistics, like world class experts basically.

And it was like the price was pretty big. Uh, like definitely more than \$10,000 a day in debt back, [00:51:00] back then. And they sort of like went through like. Like a thorough evaluation, whether it's price that is affordable for them. Then they decided to go for the deal and they were excited. Like the, uh, the professional they hired was like completely professional, provided like excellent value, had like really like huge scope and knowledge on, on the global scale.

So like how the global market is, uh, doing, uh, in their field. So they eventually reached the conclusion that, uh, it's definitely worth the price, but it was quite a journey to, to reach that conclusion. So I see this quite often when hiring, uh, top level or elite, uh, professionals, that companies are not really led ready for that kind of dynamic pricing that some experts may be really way, way, way above.[00:52:00]

Uh, the, the regular level and then you really need, uh, that, uh, decision maker, possibly even the business owner to say, well, I want to work with that person. And you figure it out.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Yeah. Yeah. You know, Robert, you've told already so many things and insights and I still have this feeling that we all only just scratching the surface and I totally have so many extra questions and I really wish to have the sky as a limit to our conversation, but time is the limit.

So I have this like, final very fast question. What is one thing that you are afraid of about the freelance economy and what is one thing that you are excited about?

**Robert Vlach:** Well,

um. That's a hard question. I think [00:53:00] I would be slightly inclined towards the s geist issues, especially the alignment problem for ai, uh, within the next 10 years. I think, uh, misaligned AI might be a huge problem for humanity, not only for freelancers, but I think that, uh, freelancers might be maybe bit more exposed in a way because, uh, if there are any really dramatic changes to job markets, uh, we are by definition, less protected than people who are employees and who are on employment plans and who are sort of, uh, uh.

Better covered by, uh, government plans and protections for employees. So that would be [00:54:00] perhaps my appeal to freelancers to really, uh, stay up to date, like what's going on with the development of, uh, advanced ai, uh, and the effect it has in their industry. It may be also quite positive, uh, in many ways. So it's not only a risk or some negative impact, I would just say that, uh, what we see in some cases, for example, I see that the language industry or language services industry is quite affected by this technology.

Like many, uh. Experienced translators, interpreters I know are already reporting like huge decline in demand and they are basically forced to, uh, reinvent themselves. Uh, which is okay if, uh, the economy provides lots of other opportunities. You know, they're generally really [00:55:00] smart people,

uh, who are well educated, so I'm not afraid, uh, um, for them, but I'm also not in their skin, right?

So I can realize how hard it can feel and how emotional it may get if you are running your fiance business for 20 or more years and then suddenly a technological comes that turns whatever you do upside down. And I realized that this may happen to many other professions. So, so that would be my. I would say challenge to all freelancers to really think about it.

Don't just, uh, don't just pretend that it doesn't exist and or that it does, it cannot happen to, to your business because we don't know. We really don't know. And if you are actually look at the market, uh, especially the stock market, uh, you can [00:56:00] see how big the expectations are, uh, whether we reach them or not.

That's another question. So that would be my, uh, think that would be the thing I'm afraid of, uh, for the community I care about. Uh, s for the other, what I'm most hopeful or happy about.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Excited. Yeah.

**Robert Vlach:** Um, that would be a bit more personal. Because I was, I, since the publication of my book, I was much more, much more involved with the international freelance community, uh, having awesome conversations with you and all other people across the globe.

I'm excited about the pan-European freelance community being created. I think it's really new. Back when [00:57:00] I was starting, uh, in late 1990s, and then when I started the, the Czech Freelance Community in uh, uh, 2005, 2005, it was not a thing. I think it's a thing now. It's, uh, thanks to people. Like, uh, owl Link, Alina util the professionals, you surely know, people who are excited about reaching out to other countries and exchange ideas and, uh, best practices, how to support freelance businesses, how to, uh, educate people who are on universities, how they can possibly become freelancers and run their business successfully.

So this is what I'm excited and very hopeful about. I think we are living through a period [00:58:00] where when we. Take a look back in 2040, uh, that it was the time where the European freelance community was actually being shaped and being, uh, interconnected. And I definitely want to be a part of that. Um, since I consider myself to be an European, I strongly identify, uh, as, as such, and I'm really excited about it.

I think it's a new thing.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** You are already a huge part of that and you're already doing a lot of in, in the European world. And, uh. Uh, from my perspective, thank you so much for that. And, uh, please keep doing what you're doing and I believe that, uh, the freelance economy will be just growing and who knows what we'll see in like five, 10 years.

Let's, let's just see, Julie,

**Robert Vlach:** I think, I think with the, this podcast and the freelancer map, you are already, uh, big important part of that too, because their survey, for example, I think [00:59:00] it's awesome. It's excellent, it's ambitious. It's like super, uh, well, um, uh, presented. Uh, I'm always looking forward to their, to their annual survey and since you are working with them doing your podcast, that's a huge thing.

I mean, like, uh. Um, I hope that you will be able to record it like for many years to come.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Let's, let's, let's cheers for that and let's move forward. And last but not least, name just two people who I should definitely reach out to who are like you shaping the freelance economy and who I should have this conversation with.

**Robert Vlach:** Yeah. Well, I think I already named her. Uh, Alina is a great expert and she has very unique take on, uh, freelance economy and Matt Dowling, uh, he's also great. I think he's doing groundbreaking work with [01:00:00] the UK universities and since I am involved in a university course in, uh, in Berno with Mussel University.

Uh, I'm, I, I'm always, uh, looking up, uh, looking at what he's doing and I think it's amazing. I think we really need, I think that would be a great conversation, you know, in general, like how they are. Presenting, uh, freelance business to university students. That that's a great topic in my opinion.

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

**Robert Vlach:** Well, just Google me. I'm, I'm, I'm, I think I'm, I'm easy to find and, uh, I'm basically accepting everyone on LinkedIn as well, so people can connect with me, uh, pretty easily. I'm not always responsive because I'm working on a new book actually at the moment, and it's like, it's been year in

[01:01:00] the making right now, an odd year, a half year, half year, about the two years of research before that.

And it's going to be about, uh, financial self-management, and it is going to be inspired by freelancers, business owners, and independent professionals. It's going to be quite different from the typical book in the genre.

**Yuri Lazaruk:** Hmm. I believe that very, very soon. We'll have one more conversation and, uh, you'll have my, some more insights to share.

And definitely, once again, as I've said, we were just scratching the surface and you have a lot of experience. And I'm, I'm all, I'm happy that we've connected. I'm happy that we've had this conversation, and once again, I still look forward to learn so much more from you. And thank you so much for what you are doing.

And, um, yeah, let's see what, what the future holds.

**Robert Vlach:** Thanks a lot

**Yuri Lazaruk:** and see you in the freelance world. [01:02:00] And for listeners, thank you for joining us on this episode of The Independent 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.