

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. He will 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 Freelance Map, an international platform that's been connecting top independent professionals with companies for over 20 years. And my guest is Tony Ham, a transformational HR leader and head of enterprise strategy at Amazing Human Clouds that I personally love this company and amazing people behind this who works with global enterprises.

Investors and governments to design flexible workforce programs and unlock the power of independent talent, and also who lives by the quote of another Tony Robbins. Don't be afraid of new ideas. Be afraid of old ones. So welcome, Tony. Excited to be on this podcast with you. You know, the funniest thing that I'm currently reading, the book of Tony Robbins, [00:01:00] uh, money Master the Game, and, uh, I, I really.

Fired by him. So I feel like one more thing to click and uh, just in addition to, you know, those freelance economy and all the things, so let's jump right into it. So tell me, what role do you play in shaping how large enterprises access freelance talent?

Tony Buffum: Yeah. Thank you for that question. And again, thanks for having me on this podcast.

I love. Talking to folks that have been a part of trying to make this what's clearly the future of work, a reality for so many people and organizations. It's happening, but we can be an accelerant and that's, that's one of the key roles is accelerating adoption for enterprises, making something that seems scary.

Just like that quote, people tend to be afraid of doing something that's new. And different, but it's not that different and, and it, it can be challenging, but we can make that easier. What I think they should be afraid of is continuing to do the same thing that they've always done. And in a, a market [00:02:00] dynamic and economy that's dramatically different thanks to technology and just changing preferences.

So I think of really one of the, the key roles that we play is building the front door to define how organizations can, can start to embrace and engage. When to use freelancers versus FTEs versus to sows versus traditional staffings or staffing and, and standardize that approach just to make it more approachable.

Um, and I think another key role is translating and architecting. What that experience is like to help leaders move from being, you know, that, that ad hoc or sometimes rogue freelancer spend to an intentional, what I call talent access strategy instead of acquisition. And that, that to me, sums up the, this new world that we live in.

[00:03:00] The idea that you're going out and acquiring talent, they belong to you, they're, they're fixed on just you and your organization. And, and they can't do anything else, is really a bygone mentality. Instead, organizations should be thinking about the skills that they need. How can I just tap them when I need them, how I need them to get this work done and, and also always have them available for when the work comes back.

So those are all different roles that we juggle in trying to deliver the acceleration of this future of work to enterprises, small businesses, and talent alike.

Yuri Lazaruk: You know, I feel like it's a huge part of shifting Exactly. From owning someone to accessing them, you know, like from owning person to accessing their skills.

And I feel like it's a, it's a huge gap in between, I feel like just we are starting to tap into this, uh, uh, economy and into this market. And you've been here on this market for like dozen years. You know everything. So what, what's [00:04:00] happening, what's going on in the market? Like, tell me.

Tony Buffum: Yeah, I think we're seeing a pretty significant pendulum swing, but from the historic long-term staffing that, that my dad went through, my dad graduated from college, went to work for Xerox, and spent his whole 40 plus year career there and retired with a pension.

Just like we kind of grew up thinking that most people would. But that same company is well known for massive layoffs that eventually hit just like Kodak, both of them in in Rochester, New York where I grew up. And we continue to see that dynamic where it's become. Very common, almost expected that large public companies that you know are under pressure when they're getting ready to announce some earnings.

Just use this as a really easy lever to pull, to just dump a bunch of employees when they want to change direction. And that loyalty and that commitment, or almost paternalistic [00:05:00] relationship that companies have with employees has really disappeared. It's far more transactional, and that's to be expected too.

It's a lot easier, it's a lot more frictionless to move from company to company. You know, and to find new opportunities when all of us, you and I, we connected first on LinkedIn and our whole resumes and all of our experience and all of our skills are listed electronically. So anybody that needs our skills is interested in what we do, can find us in seconds.

And those dynamics come coming together, have created this, this desire to change, this paradigm that we've lived in. And we're seeing it, you know, in a large part, driven by talent itself, especially, uh, white collar talent, you know, traditional office jobs. We see those. We see the people or the talent in those jobs wanting to be independent, choosing to work independently or as freelancers, and choosing to have multiple [00:06:00] clients and have a more customer driven mentality towards their work instead of, I just want this one full-time job and I'll just climb a ladder slowly towards, you know, what will be my eventual uh, retirement.

So I think there's this massive pendulum swing. Talent has a lot more leverage than they used to, and there's a need for organizations to move dynamically, change dynamically, and you can't do that. I lived it for, you know, decades. You can't adjust very quickly with, all you have is full-time talent. Even when you have kind of temp to hire traditional contingent talent, it's, you're not gonna get the skills you need when you need them.

You're not gonna able to respond to changing technology and market dynamics if that. Those are your only two levers. So I think organizations are, are waking up to this fact and looking for what are those alternatives? How do we engage them while staying compliant, [00:07:00] and how do we make sure we do that in a way that delivers ROI to the rest of our business?

Yuri Lazaruk: Yeah, I feel like it's a good question to ask every company that is currently still having this old, uh, own people model. And I feel like, uh, I, I have like dozens of conversations with hiring and, and recruiters and they tell that it's getting harder and harder to get good talents. And of course. Um, if you are okay, if you can spend time like three, six months this year on hiring the person you want, nah, maybe it works for you.

But I feel like the world is changing so fast, especially with all this AI thing. You know, I hear the use and every podcast that I hear about AI or every book that I'm reading about AI, it's like as a moment of now this is how it works because in like in a week or in a month, it can change. Yeah. And I feel like we are.

Really, really like running the same thing with a workforce because right now, okay, it's still pretty, pretty, like it was like 10, 20 years ago. Plus minus, you can still go and hire talents. It's [00:08:00] getting harder. There are more and more freelancers. The more and more people want, as you've said, work with multiple clients.

They don't want to be owned. They want to be cherished, and they also have to feel that they're experts. And also the career ladder is such a huge question. And you know, you've been. Insight in the organizations. You've done this yourself and now you are working on kind of on the other side of like helping the organization to tap into this world.

So tell me how they actually, how large enterprises actually hire freelancers in reality in practice?

Tony Buffum: Yeah. Large organizations, I think there's a, a couple different avenues. One, they might already work with independent contractors that they've organized through themselves. They, they might have very loose controls.

I've talked to enterprises that know that they have dozens and sometimes even hundreds of independent workers that they, each, they have a, a, a, a contract with each one of them, each worker, there isn't a [00:09:00] whole lot of standardization. Importantly, there's very little tracking or management, and in those situations.

What they desperately need is some kind of freelance management system to organize it. And, and there's great ones out there. But, uh, I think the important thing is when you're managing that type of population and you're not doing it through a partner, then you, you need to have some control over it so that you can ensure remains compliant and so that you can mitigate.

So you're tracking what that spend is and also what type of work is getting done. And, and I looked at it when I was an HR practitioner and I was bringing in freelancers and independent workers. There's always, always this kind of tug of war between procurement and HR who really owns this relationship.

'cause it's not full-time employees. And a lot of HR people feel like if it's not full-time, I don't want it on my radar. My view was if it's a person working with our company, I want to be aware of what's going on and [00:10:00] I want some way to track and measurement measure it. Because if we can get data around that utilization, we can make better decisions in our workforce planning around where do we make investments in full-time versus a more flexible and agile contractor, independent workforce, but that tug of war.

Is, is valuable as long as those functions are working together. And they're typically also working, of course, with where the demand is coming from. Some operator, oftentimes it starts in marketing and technology. Um, they're partnering with finance to make, you know, build that argument for where they're, they, they transfer budget or reallocate, uh, a budget to, to support these kind of programs.

And they're also working with legal. And so all the functions you'd be getting involved, which is a lot. And I think that's the biggest challenge inside corporations, even small and medium sized businesses, is when you are thinking of this [00:11:00] as an opportunity and you, the light bulb goes off and you're like, this, this can help us solve a lot of needs, a lot of burning platforms.

This can really address, um, some of our, our capacity issues. Then when they start to think of the implementation, it feels like a lot of work because the making it happen, especially if you can find a marketplace that has a great history and has great reputation, you can find the right compliance partners.

It's not as hard as it seems, but it seems hard because it's so different. When I was at off work, we used to talk about our biggest competitor was status quo. And so I often say the the, the challenge inside organizations is often not understanding that this is an urgent issue and that there's a great solution.

It's the change management that goes along with it and it's getting the, you know, helping to drive the mindset shift. Around working with people that [00:12:00] aren't full-time employees for you. But then do want to be a part of your success, and how do you delegate and manage that work, and how do you embrace that skills and, and the talent that you need may not always be in a commutable distance from your headquarters building.

So I think that's, that's the biggest challenge, and that's where there's. There's a lot of work that needs to be done is in that change management and getting all the functions on board and committed to this as a part of a, a really valuable and

important workforce strategy. Not only now, but into the future to create some sustainability for your workforce.

Yuri Lazaruk: Like what can we do? I mean like what? People like you and me and platforms and all those people in between recruiting companies who are working with freelancers and with companies, with end clients who are helping to be this intermediary and to deal with all this management part. What can we do? How can we take all this extra work from the plates of hr, [00:13:00] procurement, you name it.

How will we make it? How can we make it easier for them to finally work with freelancers?

Tony Buffum: Yeah, I think, you know, a lot of marketplaces when they start interacting with the business and the business has shown some interest, there's, they're curious about how they can leverage this, this different, uh, kind of alternative staffing approach to work for the organization.

They're, they're looking for small successes and we always hear, start small, get a couple success stories, and then share that within the organization and when, when a marketplace can take. A project or a deliverable and, and deliver that below the, the traditional budget that a, a, a enterprise might have pursued originally.

They can deliver it. The number one value proposition is much faster 'cause they can find talent really quickly. Get them deployed in days, not weeks or months like we talked about earlier. Those are, and, and do all that [00:14:00] with quality. Those are the things that I think help win over those, those small success stories that then convince the champions to the, to run through the rest of the business.

Say, we can do this, this can work. When they can do that, then the issue and the challenge is just scale. It's getting more people to buy in to those success stories. What we can do, even without getting fully engaged with an enterprise. Is make sure that we're documenting and sharing those business cases that other folks can read about and learn about and say, Hey, I've got a similar challenge in my business.

I wonder if I could deploy the same solution. And when they do, that's again, that's, that's a catalyst. That's when the light bulb goes off and they start to recognize, this is easier than I thought. Now we just need to take it to the next level. So it's more than anything, it's just getting started, finding the right

marketplace that fits all of your cross-functional needs and just get started with some projects so that you can build from [00:15:00] there.

The sooner the better because time is going. Like all these challenges. Are getting more complex and more challenging, the more time goes by.

Yuri Lazaruk: You know, when I hear the word finding, I can already imagine like the fear and the people, oh my God, I have to make a research. How do I choose the right one? Is there is so much responsibility and it's always like, you know, to start small, to share small success stories, you have to get quality from the very beginning.

So if someone is. Starting just to tap into this, contractors, freelancers, whatever you name it, like this market, where should they go? How should they start doing it?

Tony Buffum: I mean, uh, the, the most obvious answer is human cloud. That's why we exist. That's why I joined Mato and Human Cloud, because it, it, it, it is, it fits right in that gap where organizations are trying to get started.

They need to bridge to identify the best solutions and. As we both know, being in this space for a while, it's huge. [00:16:00] You know, back in 2017 when I started looking for a freelance marketplace, there was, there was probably 50 or so that I would, I would check out, and we went through our own RFP process. Now there's thousands, because this is such a massive.

Growing part of the labor movement globally. So it can be overwhelming. And then that's just selecting and trying to identify the right marketplace. Nevermind how do you make sure you've got the right compliance with that market marketplace? What level of indemnification do you feel like you need?

How are you gonna classify work? Um, what, what do you do about things like business insurance? There's so many things. How, how's everybody gonna get paid? There's so many things you might have to stitch together at Human Cloud, we've done our best and we're continuing to pull in all of those solutions into one place.

Leverage things like posting their business cases in a way that people can download them, share them across the organization. [00:17:00] Um, things like kudos, that, that are really the, the reputation builder. We, that's how we shop now. All, a lot of our work is, or a lot of things that we buy as consumers, whether it's, you know, in our personalized or professional.

We wanna know what other people thought we want. We want that trust. That's the number one thing that human Cloud tries to bring to this space is trust through things like reputation, building through, through things like badging and certifications, things that make you feel more comfortable with what all these different platforms are that tie to that matching process.

What's your need? What are you looking for? And we can provide not only that marketplace, but maybe the supporting solutions that help you stitch it all together. That's what we exist for. And we can even help you find the consultants and teams that can help you, help guide you through that change management process.

So that's, that's the purpose of human cloud. Um, and we were, it's, we endeavor to automate [00:18:00] and speed that up. Every day because the faster and easier it happens, the more accessible it is, the more organizations of all sizes will embrace it and get started.

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

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Now coming back to mindset and change management. So when stakeholders hesitate to hire freelancers. What are they really afraid of? Like what's behind it? Is it like they are afraid of losing control or about the risk or getting some fines? Like what's, what's really bother them? [00:19:00]

Tony Buffum: I think there's, there's kind of two buckets.

One is just the myths that exist around freelancer, or words like gig, you know, um, people have historically associated that with low skill, quick turn work, and I did a, i, I did a presentation with, um, uh, a while ago, arou with Jeff. Mike, who's a guy. I respected this space, um, because we wanted to address that head on and we called it, you know, just.

Uh, kind of debunking, um, the myths around freelancing and there's things like that, like it's low skill work. It's not, uh, Alpert did some really interesting research last year that highlighted that over 28% of white collar workers

identify themselves as freelance or independent. So this more high skilled, typically also remote work.

It's being done from folks that are [00:20:00] contractors or working out of their homes or working remotely, um, because they chose, choose that kind of work. And as we see students coming outta school, more than 50% go straight into independent work full-time instead of just taking one job with the company long term like, like we've historically seen.

But it is the myth that, okay, it's this, it's only this kind of work. Or if it's kind of like a gig work. Well, that's like for people that can't get a real job or let's take it to another level, it's, it's often their fear that there's no commitment. You know? And you mentioned that the, the sense of like a lack of control over the loyalty or the, the relationship, the culture that will, will be impacted by having freelancers, independent contractors on your team.

And the fact of the matter is those folks have a very customer-focused, driven mentality where they want to make sure that they're very clearly identifying what the, excuse me, what the deliverables and objectives are, [00:21:00] what success looks like upfront, which frankly, we don't often define for full-time employees.

It's just kind of this moving target. And they want to make sure they exceed that goal, especially because regardless of the marketplace, they're a part of, there's some kind of reputational grade, the five star, you know, rating or, or whatever, um, that, that reflects the work that they've done. As opposed to, you know, the traditional, you're just looking at a resume and trusting that whatever they say they can do, they, they actually can do in this world, in this, this marketplace dynamic, all of it is based on reputation.

What's, what have you done? How can you prove that you're, you can do what you, what you're saying that you, uh, that you can do for us? So I think those are the biggest hesitations, but even if they get past that, it's often things around classification and compliance. They hear a couple of really scary stories about misclassification [00:22:00] lawsuits and fines, um, impacting organizations.

And they just immediately said, I don't want that to happen to me. I either only want to directly employ people or I want to shift that responsibility to a another provider. And so I think those type of things hold organizations back. Um, and understandably, those regulations are constantly changing. In 2024, there's a new.

Federal contractual rule in the us There's a new, a, a big new rule, uh, getting implemented in the uk. So there's so many things that I think make organizations really, really scared to step into this space. But the fact of the matter is marketplaces, EORs, all the providers rounded, they're solving for this, for the enterprise.

So don't be scared about the potential of what might happen. Certainly get your risk and your compliance folks involved, but, but the answer is out there, it's, it is been solved. Um, it's [00:23:00] just a matter of getting past those fears and embracing what's possible.

Yuri Lazaruk: You know, I recently finished the book of our previous guest, neuro Deir Gi Lopez, and, uh, he wrote a book, the Future of Work, and he, he talked about the system based on blockchain that actually has all the feedback, all the work that freelancers did, and they have, it's like in the system and everyone can easily check this, so I feel like.

It's, these times are common. I think that it'll be easier and easier for freelancers to actually tell them like, Hey, here is how it is. Here is how it works. And uh, I think that it can be also some of those myths be busted because of that. And since we were go, we were talking about myths, uh, what the reality looks like.

What are the benefits of hiring freelancers? Like, are those benefits actually higher than all those. Uh, things that people are afraid of.

Tony Buffum: Yeah, they are. I mean, the biggest thing [00:24:00] that I think organizations, like I just touched on, that they need to mitigate is risk around classification and compliance.

There's so many solutions that help 'em do that, that shouldn't stop anyone. Um, but the biggest benefit we can, I'll talk about costs, I'll talk about, you know, talent and tech, but the biggest benefit is really speed. You've got talent that's vetted and it in this contractual relationship. You got marketplaces that are really exceptional about matching the right talent to your skill need and your deliverables.

It the fact that you can bring the talent that you need on in a, a matter of days when I was a practitioner, it's sometimes it was hours. You, you need to get a certain kind of work done. You're struggling, like you said it. Uh, organizations already right now struggle to find the, the staff that they need.

When you boil it down to just the skills required to deliver the, the tasks you needed to deliver the outcomes that you're [00:25:00] projecting. When you focus on those skills, you can actually find that talent in incredibly fast, and sometimes it may exist in one person or it may exist across a small team. But you can get that talent, you can and you can get it deployed so quickly that it, it allows you to, uh, turn projects around so much faster, close gaps, you know, from a product development standpoint or a delivery standpoint or, um, even when organizations are going through major tech implement.

Or they're trying to, uh, centralize some features or activities within their business, leveraging technology automation. That can feel like a pretty foreboding task if you're not the most advanced technology team, but you can rent. That technology skillset to help you get that implemented so you don't keep putting it off and you get the benefit sooner.

It's a long way to say the number one value proposition, I think, in this space is speed to talent, speed to get it [00:26:00] talent working for you. But because I'll add to that because. You're really focusing on just what you need to get the job done. You're not holding on to talent for all this extra time.

You're not paying for all this other, you know, uh, ambiguous activity that happens. You're really just paying for the deliverable. I think that's also what makes fractional executives so desirable now, especially for SMBs, but really at any level. Um, is you, you get the expertise you need. They give you, they deliver for you when they, they, when it makes sense and when you need it.

And then they move on to something else. And at the same time, they're getting broader experience working on similar or, you know, uh, complimentary projects at other places. All of those things benefit the organization that they're doing a, a current project with. So speed. And at the end of the day, it is going to cost less than going out and hiring [00:27:00] full-time talent.

And it most importantly gives you, especially in this really unpredictable. A fast changing environment. It gives you agility with your workforce. And I think the best example when, when chat JBT blew up and all of a sudden people wanted to get their heads around, uh, LLMs how they can benefit their organization.

They immediately went out and wanted to hire prompt engineers because they didn't really understand how can you get the most out of these tools, but do you really want to hire that skill set if it's brand new, or do you just wanna rent it until you understand it and you can demonstrate or prove that this is something

that we need long term, we need it 40 hours a week for 52 weeks a year, or we just need it through this phase, through this quarter.

When organizations can experiment more and test new technology capabilities with the skill sets they bring on board and learn from the talent they're bringing on board, they can make [00:28:00] much faster, smarter decisions and they can flex in and out of those needs as the the market dictates.

Yuri Lazaruk: You know, it's also a great use case of how to really work with freelancers because you can always hire them as coaches, as trainers, as consultants, as an expert who've been there, done that, who can even like move your team forward.

So they're working with your team, of course, they're not working in like their bubble. They're working with your team, and then your team is getting up to speed and they can do all those things by themselves afterwards. So you are, as you've said. You are renting skills and then you are implementing them in your, in, in your workforce, in your, in your working model.

And let's imagine the situation. So someone, some project manager initiated the process of hiring freelancers. They went to their manager. Manager, said, okay, here's the budget. Go for it. What will block them? Where will they stop in hiring influencer?

Tony Buffum: Uh, if, [00:29:00] if they, once they've gotten the budget, probably what's going to slow them down is just being overwhelmed by the selection process.

I mean, ideally there is already a marketplace that the organization has a partnership with so that they, they're, they don't have to worry about the hurdles of compliance or even the administration. Um, the next thing that might overwhelm 'em is. I'm not used to defining work in this way. I'm used to writing a job description that's somewhat kind of generic and covers all types of things that might need to happen, and just getting a body with general skillset that now I can delegate things to and that they can figure out how to close all the gaps.

Uh, so it's when, when I first started, uh, looking for freelancers, I remember the, the, the marketplace I was working with when they asked the question. Alright, beyond, beyond kind of what you have in a traditional job description. What does success look like? I, I immediately had that the [00:30:00] mentality of, why don't we always ask this question?

Because anybody looking for a job, they wanna know that 'cause they wanna be successful. When we're looking at a project and we're posting a project, that's a different way of thinking about how to find someone is. This is what success looks like. These are the skills required to deliver that success. Can you do these things and can you work around this, this schedule?

Or can you, uh, meet these project deliverable timelines that that's it. But it is very, it's very new to a lot of folks. And when, once they post those jobs and they start getting people bidding or, or, uh, or trying, you know, sending you offers to work on those jobs. That's a, a very different dynamic than what they're used to, which is that traditional, you get the resumes to go through the interview process.

Again, just the fact that it's different can make people uncomfortable and feel like they're not quite sure how to manage in this dynamic. But the, the fact of the matter is oftentimes, whether it's [00:31:00] it's a broad marketplace where they're bidding or if it's a curated marketplace where the, the marketplace is matching you directly to that, uh, preselected talent, it's, it's just different.

And, you know, for, for folks that are looking to hire that talent, it can be overwhelming. One of the things I often tell folks, it's, you really can't make a bad decision once you have all the data and you know, it matches what you need to get done. It doesn't have to be perfect if, if, if you're meeting all of your needs, and if you're not sure, then well, once I get, once I select that person, how do I manage them?

Have a candid conversation with 'em about it. I think a lot of times hiring managers. Uh, when they're experimenting or they're trying something like this new, they feel like they have to have all the answers, and that's a part of feeling like that. That means they're in control. The fact of the matter is they're working with someone that probably has more expertise in this workforce dynamic than they do.

Just ask them. They're happen to tell you, tell you, this is what works [00:32:00] really well for me. This is what has worked well in the past, these kind of rhythms or these kind of updates. This type of, uh, sharing of communication, both Async or Live, they can help you find what the right boundaries are and work that out upfront because they've had a lot of experience with it, and that can help reduce some of that friction or some of that hesitation for new hiring managers in this on demand workforce

Yuri Lazaruk: when they finally hired this person.

What they should give to a freelancer, contractor, you name it, to ensure that this person starts working right away. Not to block them from like getting what they are there to, to bring.

Tony Buffum: Yeah. I think they need to think really clearly, carefully about what's necessary for success for this contractor or freelancer.

Um, because when we onboard an employee. We don't necessarily think of what's required. We just think [00:33:00] of how do we expose them to everything, and then as they move through that orientation or that assimilation period. They will figure out where to prioritize themselves and we'll hook them up with a buddy and they'll kind of point them where to go with a contractor.

They don't have to try to boil the ocean when they get on board. They just need to know what's pertinent to their project and their deliverable. And that includes who are the right team members, get them introduced, what are the tools they need to use? What are establish those communication? Uh, rhythms and, uh, channels.

You know, set those expectations clearly upfront and make sure to ask them what they feel like they need. That's a really quick, easy conversation, and that's a, a, a, a simple checklist, but not doing that and kind of tri it like it's an employee that's gonna figure out as they go, will slow down their ability to hit the ground running.

Um, it'll slow down their, the traction to, you know, getting results out quickly. [00:34:00]

Yurii Lazaruk: Now, if you were to remove just one blocker from this, I don't know, hiring, payment, procurement, you name it, process, to actually speed up the moment from having this project description to actually hiring finance and starting working, what would it be?

Tony Buffum: I mean, to me, the biggest blocker is often getting tied down with the MSAs and, and trying, you know, it's, it's usually, uh, an employer identifies a marketplace they wanna work with and everybody's excited and they've got projects that they've been discussing that now they're, they're ready to test out and, and deploy with within a marketplace partnership.

But then everything gets bogged down. Between legal and procurement and hr, everybody taking their turn to try to redline all the risks, everything they're worried about out, you know, on a paper to, to get all the [00:35:00] scary

things away. And it's usually by folks that haven't done this before, so they're just trying to take all liability and get it away from their company.

The fact of the matter is there has to be some give and take. There has to be some level of agreement and there's. Organizations where these marketplaces have figured this out successfully with large, you know, huge, at-risk organizations, uh, multiple times over, there's a solution in there. And it doesn't have to be overly bureaucratic, but oftentimes that's where everything slows down.

And when you take that momentum of. Discovery and interest and intrigue and, and, and energy, and you slow it down with that bureaucracy. All of a sudden, when it is time to go, things have been diluted, like the interest level has faded away out of the necessity to keep work going. You've kind of already gone back to the old way of doing things now you need to kind of shake and, and energize that, that base all [00:36:00] over again.

So I think that part of the mid, I, I, I would love to be able to speed that up. That's actually what we're working at Human Cloud now, is trying to automate and standardize those steps. To get you confidently into that process so much faster. Literally from, I have a need to now I have a marketplace and I have talent in days, as opposed to the, the first time I started doing this at, at a large enterprise, it was literally months until, you know, summit, higher level executive than me lit a fire under the team and said, we need to, we need to, you know, put this into action more quickly.

So oftentimes. That's where things get slowed down. It's not really in, uh, once all that's cleared. Certainly there, there's growing pains, but things keep moving relatively quickly. It's, it's that bureaucracy that slows things down.

Yuri Lazaruk: You know what I also hear behind the words is that you have to start somewhere.

And as you start, as you move forward, you are keep building, you are developing the processes. And like [00:37:00] sometimes later you are like, oh my God, we didn't have this process three months ago. Is it even possible? It's so easy and straightforward. Why didn't we do this before? And I feel like as, as to your point, as you've mentioned it like many times before that people are afraid and afraid of change and they're afraid to start.

And I feel like the, you have to start, you have to do this first step and, uh, I feel like you are doing a really amazing job at Human Cloud, you know, of helping

people to make this kind of like, you know. Guide them. Like take them by the hand and show them, Hey, here is what you have to do with compliance.

Here is a marketplace. Here is how you get free answers paid. So it's, it's super easy. Yeah. They need to

Tony Buffum: definitely work with you. Yeah. It makes me, you, it makes me think of as you're talking, I'm thinking of, man, I don't remember the, the internal battle I went through before I finally started using Uber.

Versus, I used to travel all the time and always land somewhere, rent a car. So you have to go to the rental car place or, [00:38:00] or just get land, you know, in a new city and hail a taxi. And that was, you know, I just kind of, that that was the way I assumed it'd always be done. Now if I travel somewhere. I almost never rent a car.

Um, I'm always just jumping in my, my Uber or my Lyft app. But there was, there's a a, there's an internal battle you need to go through and all of a sudden trusting that this person in their own car is gonna come pick you up in, in this location and drop you off. And that they're gonna know how to get there.

Things like the invention and adoption of GPS and these transparent rating systems, um, have made us a lot more comfortable with this. Happens the same thing as like. Rather than just find somebody in my neighborhood that's gonna walk my dog, I can go on an app now, find an independent worker that's nearby, that has all these ratings and loves work.

I can see pictures of 'em and their history and I can hire 'em to go walk my dog. But [00:39:00] there, it, it, it doesn't just happen automatically. It took some adjustment and adoption for all of us. To start trusting these systems at Human Cloud, we want to build that trust through transparency, through credibility, through rating systems, the things that we're accustomed to in a lot of our consumeristic, you know, uh, parts of our life.

Bring that to this experience. To make it easier to get over that hurdle. But I recognized like it, it wasn't, it's not like Uber announced that it existed and I immediately downloaded the app. I pro it, it probably took me a while to start, you know, uh, embracing that and now. You know, I use it every day.

Always.

Yurii Lazaruk: They are, there are always some trail blazers and, uh, someone who has to go first and then share it with their friends. And I think that there are a lot of companies already out there such as NASA, Microsoft, Airbus, who are trailblazing this path and show, Hey, it's not that hard. Here is how it works.

Like, go follow us. And you know, like I, I really love this example [00:40:00] that you made with Uber because people trust their lives. To random people on random cars and they cannot hire a frug. It's so weird, you know, like in, in a work usually, okay, there are some professions where some life risk involved, but usually currently where people hire lancers the most, there is no life risk.

You won't hire freelance surgeon most likely. Uh, but overall, you know, all the dentists. And also surgeons, they kind of freelancers, uh, all, all, all the time and yeah. You know, Tony, I really have so many questions and I still wish to have the sky is the limit, but time is the limit. So the final one, what advice would you give to companies just starting to use freelancers and to freelancers entering the market?

Tony Buffum: So for, I'll start with freelancers entering the market, I think. There's lots of opportunities. There's lots of great marketplaces. I think they can find a marketplace that's a great fit for them. Um, I don't, marketplaces [00:41:00] aren't mutually exclusive. You can belong to multiple marketplaces. The, the biggest challenge with freelancers getting started is just getting those first several jobs.

Because like I mentioned earlier, this is a reputation based marketplace place, so in a reputation based workforce dynamic. So when you don't have history that you can point to or ratings or customer reviews, it's harder to get those first few just like it's, it's probably a little bit intimidating to get in an Uber that doesn't have any stars yet.

Any reviews yet? You don't already, but when you get into one that's 4.9 stars and they've done a thousand rides, you've got a lot of confidence. Well, that's how a lot of enterprises buy. So whatever you can do to build out those initial experiences will help you get started that much faster. A lot of times that's partnering through a marketplace that will put you on a team or help you find those opportunities.

So I encourage people to look at all of those options, just [00:42:00] like I tell enterprises, just get started. And you don't, you don't have to be a full-time

independent worker to get started. Lots of people, um, already freelance or do independent work, uh, as a side hustle to their full-time gig as they're starting to build this safety net before they make that full switch.

That's very common. Um, what I'd say for enterprises, you've already touched on it. One, it is just get started. But if you are getting started, really make sure that you're tracking. Uh, I always, to me it's incredibly important. Establish your baseline. So if we hadn't gone to this alternative, uh, staffing or resourcing path, what would we have done?

What would we have spent? How long would it have taken us? And you can assess that by, you know, what you've done in the past. Look at your typical, your standards, uh, hiring process, maybe for similar roles or skills. Um, how long it took. What was the cost, what's the fully loaded cost, how long it takes for that person. [00:43:00]

We used to always measure this, especially with sales, but we technicians in the field, um, how long until they're accretive to their, their role, like they're adding value versus just, you know, still learning and, and, uh, absorbing resource and, and help from others. When do they become independent and where are they driving value?

Um, so measure all of those things identify because when you start working with, uh, freelancers, you'll blow all of those statistics away, but you won't know how good you got it if you don't know where you would've started. And you can't contrast it to the alternative when you can show how much faster you're able to engage that talent, what the cost was, and how quickly you got the result, that is a win that you'll wanna share across the business.

To build confidence and trust that this isn't something that's as scary as it seemed at the outset. It can. It can be a secret weapon, frankly, and I think we're past the point of. Um, trailblazing. This has been [00:44:00] around for quite some time. Like you said, you've been dabbling this in 20 for 20 years. Um, I've been at this for almost 10 years already, which feels like it's gone by really fast, but a lot of independent workers and freelancers have been around longer and so have marketplaces.

So it's, it's no longer like you're dipping your toe in uncharted waters. It's here. Lots of large organizations are already doing that. Figure out where this fits within your organization. 'cause ultimately it's going to be a big part of your overall workforce transformation, but you're never gonna get to that point.

That's going to meet the moment of technology driving incredible change if you don't get started now and get past all those, those brand new, you know, jitters around doing something different.

Yuri Lazaruk: You know, it's so fun because there are that you mentioned, uh, uncharted waters because there are experts such as Steve Rader or John WinDor or John Ger who were, who were freelancers before I was alive.

[00:45:00] And for me it was like, uh, maybe it's not that scary after all. And you know, last but not least, name two people I should reach out to, to talk about the independent workforce.

Tony Buffum: I mean, to me, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention my co-founder, Matt Ola. Um, and I say that not to be self-serving 'cause we were both at human cloud because even when I started, um, working with freelancing at a large corporation, I met Matt and he was doing the same thing.

And we shared our stories, our experience. And ultimately that's how we wound up working together in the future. So I, he's built an incredible experience that's different from mine as well, having been a freelancer himself, having built business around this. So he has a great perspective. He also has tremendous network and relationships in this world of freelancing.

He knew you before I knew you. So Matt, Matt, I think is one of the, the outstanding experts in this field. Frankly, that's why I partnered with him.

[00:46:00] The other I'd say is Kelly Monaghan. Kelly and I worked together at Upwork. Uh, she led the Upworks Research Institute. She's independent on her own now as well, which happens to, it seems like all of us.

Eventually we go on own. 'cause, 'cause we're, we want to, you know, drink our own Kool-Aid. Um, she's brilliant, has great experience in this and has done and continues to do great research. Um, and I'm, I'll actually just throw in a bonus. I think anybody starting, regardless of the side you're on, but especially for enterprises, they need to read the book.

Work Without Jobs. Work Without Jobs is written by Robin Desu, Pasan, and um, I don't know why all of a sudden I'm gonna blank robin and a good fr Wow. I'm gonna totally bring blank. Gimme one second. I'm gonna grab the book. Okay.

I keep it good friend of mine, John, but now that as soon as I started talking, I realized [00:47:00] I should bring this up. So I'm going to start from the

beginning. Anybody getting started, uh, in this space or even just curious, should read the book, work Without Jobs? Work Without Jobs written by Robin Ja, Pasan and John Boudreux, both who I've met, had tons of conversations with and interviewed on a podcast in the past, but to me.

This is a great starter's playbook for, uh, getting around the mindset of deconstructing jobs into those tasks and skills. Thinking about work. Uh, away from jobs, away from the hierarchy that we're used to and thinking about the best ways to resource getting that work done to me, it's a, it's a terrific starting point.

It's a great read. It has a lot of real world examples and case studies. Uh, so it's a terrific place to get started

Yurii Lazaruk: and it's also great. One more book to my list. So thank you very much for sharing that. And what is the best way to connect with you?

Tony Buffum: Best way to get in touch with me is on LinkedIn. [00:48:00] That's how we got in touch.

You'll see articles from me, our own podcast, our human cloud podcast. Um, and what we're working on. But you can also reach out to me through our Human Cloud website. Just go to human cloud.com. You can go find a link that says, meet with Tony, and set up 30 minutes and we can talk about your challenges, the opportunities, your curiosities.

Your favorite books in this space, whatever you want. Uh, and I'm very responsive.

Yurii Lazaruk: Tony, thank you so much for bringing such a huge energy, wisdom, experience, and passion to this space and making it moving forward. I'm super happy that we've met. I'm happy to talk to you. Like I, you know, I have a lot of fun.

I have a lot of, I have a lot of learnings myself, so thank you for doing that. And, uh. Yeah. Once again, I just loved our conversation. Thank you very much for that.

Tony Buffum: Me as well. Listen, I'm so glad you reached out. I'm glad we're able to talk about this. We know this is a really exciting but [00:49:00] also challenging space to be in, and I love what you're doing in this space, especially with Freelancer Map.

I think you're doing great things and to have this podcast and get more of that understanding and break down some of those barriers. We'll only continue to accelerate what we know is the real future of work.

Yuri Lazaruk: By the way, if you are not getting enough of this podcast, go listen to Human Cloud Podcast because that's a podcast that I'm listening myself.

So definitely go check it out. And yeah, Tony, see you in the freelance world. 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.