

How Smart Companies Build a Freelance Network - Episode 26 with Matthew Knight

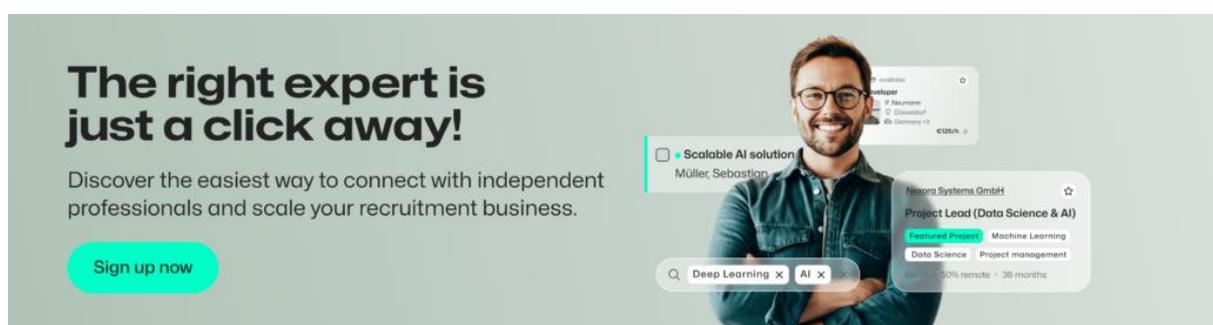
Yurii Lazaruk: [00:00:00] Welcome to the Independent Workforce, the podcast where we explore and now and the future of works through the lens of temporary employment such as freelancers, contractors, fractional experts, you name it. He will speak with CEOs, recruiters, founders, and industry leaders 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, freelance roadmap, and international platform, has been connected top independent professionals with companies for over 20 years. And my guest is matte, an independent strategist who has worked with brands like Lego, Klarna, Accenture, Adidas, and the founder of Lippers, and our winning initiative.

Supporting the mental health of freelancers, a chief freelance officer at the independency comp. Helping companies and independent, professional collaborate better together, and someone who has spent years, decades of years standing in the space between freelancers and their organizations that hire them exactly where the future of work [00:01:00] is shaped.

So welcome, atune.

Matthew Knight: Thank you. You're good to see you.



Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah, we're happy that we've connected. We've been here and there on LinkedIn. We've, I always follow the work that you are doing, all this post that you are like, when you are talking about

free answers and how important it's to work with them and how to do it better.

And finally, I am here, can ask you all the questions. It's

Matthew Knight: great to finally have the conversation. Likewise. I mean, I think we, our, our circles kind of overlap in a lot of the, the things that we talk about and are excited about and the challenges we're facing. So I'm excited to get into the conversation today.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. And you know, when I saw Chief Freelance Officer, I've never heard about a such title before, so tell me more about it.

Matthew Knight: Uh, it's a little bit tongue in cheek, uh, to be perfectly fair, you know, in that a lot of organizations don't have anybody internally who is responsible for the experience of the freelancers.

For, um, thinking about how freelancers and independent workers really add value to their business. Um, so if I can come in and help those [00:02:00] organizations think about those things, but not just from the lens of how can we make more money, how can we reduce money, how can we be compliant, but really, how can we make the most of the value of bringing in independent specialists and experts to deliver award-winning work?

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah, that's exactly what companies know. You know, on previous podcast with Ray Cower we we're talking about about exactly who owns freelance and kind of owns Freelancer inside the company. Yeah. And there are so many departments and always fighting with each other and no one knows who really owns them.

And it's amazing the people like you are who can come and just help them find out. Who actually does it, and

Matthew Knight: it does fall between the cracks a lot of the time. And I think it is because historically it's often been, oh, we've got a gap. There's somebody not in the office on Monday, or somebody's gone on holiday, who can we quickly bring in?

Last minute they're in, they do a bit of brilliant work and then they leave, and then you don't really think about it until the next time. But we've started to see a shift in the last couple of years where organizations recognize [00:03:00] actually leaning on. Independent external specialists really brings in accelerated insight and kind of project delivery capability.

And it works in a different way, economically, commercially to to headcount. You can build a team of the right people rather than just who you've got available. So we're starting to see now that organizations. Shifting their talent model and going, actually, we need to design this properly. It's not just about bring somebody in on a Monday and they're done by Friday.

How can we build that network of people that we've got strong relationships with, that we trust, that they enjoy working with us, that we can rely upon, rather than just posting on LinkedIn on a Friday and hoping for the best.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, it's so fun that you've told about this, like building relationships because I remember it reminded me of the conversation with Nouri Damir Lopez, who told that at Microsoft they built the whole community of freelancers that work for Microsoft.

So they went even one step. So they just not just worked with independent talent. But also they went one step out there and created this [00:04:00] community where they're really even connected with free. And I was like, why do you do that? Why do you care about some random people? You just in and out for the project?

And they, they just had a different approach because they understood that it's not just in and out. As you've said, from Monday to Friday, maybe it's from Monday to Friday, you never know. Sometimes projects are like that, but overall we are building relationships and then. You never know how these people will come back to your company.

How they bring this extra, extra value to it and then they bring extra people. 'cause freelancers are connected with each other so

Matthew Knight: well, it should never be random people, right? I think, you know, if you have got a. A gap on Monday, and you are looking for somebody on Friday, you don't want to bring in someone you've never worked with before.

That's a crazy risk. Yeah. You know, if you are, if you are stressed and you are bringing somebody in last minute, you need to have somebody who you trust, who you know can deliver, who knows your organization can drop in, get the work done, and that requires you building a trusted network, whether you wanna call it a community or a network, or alumni.

You know, you need [00:05:00] to build up that base of people who you've done the chemistry with. You know, where they would fit into the organization. You know how they work with you. They know how to work with the organization. And building that relationship up over time means that when the phone does ring, they're not a random person.

They are part of your extended. Workforce. And I think that's where a lot of companies, particularly those who are new to working with freelancers, sometimes trip up because they think they can just get somebody in last minute and, and hope for the best. And obviously we know that's never gonna work you, you need to go from some sort of onboarding at least, and explain who we are and what we do and why we do it in that way.

So the freelancer can do their. Best work, otherwise you're creating risk for yourself.

Yurii Lazaruk: It's so, it's so weird that companies are building databases of full-time hires. Even if they didn't hire someone, they are still on their database and they go back to them, but for some reason they're not tapping in the external workforce market.

I have no [00:06:00] idea why. Maybe it'll change. So, uh,

Matthew Knight: it is definitely changing. I, I mean, I think. Obviously every country has a slightly different level of maturity when it comes to working with freelancers. In the uk we've got a fairly mature

freelancer market, so certain sectors like film and tv, for instance, are predominantly freelancer.

Driven in terms of the projects, up to 70% of that sector are freelancers rather than employees. Across the creative industry sector, it's around 35%, but that really varies and obviously there's lots of sectors, but we're seeing a, a bit of a generational shift in how organizations are hiring. In the olden days, you know, years back before kind of the web and, and the big platforms, it would be all about personal networks.

It's who you knew, who you'd worked with before, you'd bring them back in. Kind of quite small, close knit group. Then platforms came along and changed the model completely, right? So platforms like Unno, Juno, and so on, and it was, Hey, I can go on almost like [00:07:00] Tinder, swipe, swipe, swipe, swipe, swipe until I find somebody that's available, has the right skills, has the right day rate, drop them in.

And then you didn't need to really worry about retention and, and relationship building because. Swipe, swipe, swipe. There'd be somebody after that. Now we are moving to private marketplaces and pools. So organizations are saying, actually we want to have our group of people that we've worked with, that we know, that we trust.

Um, it's almost getting back to that personal relationship and, and connection piece again. And I think the next generation that we'll see to, to your point around. Building communities is actually, how do we have that pool plus an extra network of friends and collaborators, and how do we support them? How do we retain them and engage them, not just on the project itself, but between the contracts.

So they're more likely to be around for the next time, they're more likely to work with us again. And that's a lot of the work that we are doing at the moment, both in the mental health space because supporting those freelancers. Is crucial not [00:08:00] only for the, the wellbeing of the individuals, but also productivity and creativity.

If you're supporting those workers to do well, they're gonna do better work with you, but also in the longevity. If you are visibly saying, Hey,

we don't just drop you in on a Monday and and leave you on a Friday and never speak to you again until the next brief. We are part of your support network. We are going to.

Give you access to resources and tools and peers and events and training. If we can build this ecosystem where actually you feel really supported and engaged as a freelance, one of our freelancers, then you are more likely to work with us again in the future. And the flip side is we are seeing organizations that.

Don't work effectively with freelancers, those freelancers will avoid those companies. Over 97% of freelancers who've been treated badly by a company will not work with them again. And even more importantly, those freelancers tell their friends, you know, we are all in communities. We're all talking to each other.

We will quite openly say, [00:09:00] avoid this company because they don't pay on time or they were dreadful to work with. And that just means your, your talent costs increase as a business. 'cause it's harder for you to find a freelancer who will work with you. So this is no longer a, a nice to have. Businesses need to be actively thinking, how can we work effectively with independent workers if they want to continue working with them.

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Yurii Lazaruk: You know, we've touched a little bit of the history of how freelance is developed and that it started with like this personal connection and everyone, all that. Everyone then yeah, we joined into this marketplaces where, as you've said, the Tinder, I don't know if it's healthy, but once again, it is as it is.

And now like more going into the private. So what do you see in the near future, like how it's in development, especially with all this AI coming in, like where do freelancers are in this like, uh, future of work?

Matthew Knight: I look towards a model from Rich Wilson at Gigged, and he talks about the 40, 40, 20 concept, 40% employee or perm, 40% [00:10:00] freelancer, contractor, independent, whatever you wanna call it, and 20% are gentech.

Whether you think those numbers are right or not, the concept of it being a hybrid team of. Some permanent consistent members of, of the workforce, some more fluid associates, kind of friends, uh, kind of independent workers. And then ai, I think that's spot on this, this blended workforce where actually you are using all of those different types of ways of engaging with people and, and delivering that work to create a team for the project.

Um, and I think that's, that's the way that we are pointed a lot of. Organizations are working towards more mission-based working. So project-based teams, you bring it together, you've got the knowledge there, you have a great kickoff, you deliver a piece of work, and then perhaps you, you disappear for, for a while.

So I, I think that's, that's the way that the industry, certainly in the creative sectors, but across a lot of industries are heading is that, is that kind of hybridized model [00:11:00] plus more project based work. And as a result you need the infrastructure there. Um, because you need to have, well, where are my talent?

Who are my people that I can return to? What are the tools and platforms and systems that I can build this upon? How can I make sure that all this is working together effectively? How can I invest in that talent? So actually it is upskilled for the next time I work on it. I think it's some really interesting questions around.

Previously the roles of an employer in training and developing people's skills, um, that is going to be less and less and less, and freelancers will have to develop their own skills. But does that then mean the employers, you know, no longer have a responsibility there to their wellbeing, to their training?

There's a big debate at the moment around, particularly in advertising and marketing, which is my background around the new models all seem to be just pointing towards, Hey, you have access to our experts plus ai, but where do experts come from if they're not junior and then being developed over time? [00:12:00] So there's a lot of big questions around what this shift means and who is going to be there to support.

Independent workers that don't have an HR team, don't have a legal team, don't have colleagues, don't have peers, what support systems need to be put in place for their wellbeing, for their development, for the sustainability of their businesses? And I don't have all the answers, but I do know that I think we need to take quite a human lens to it.

Um, because AI is fantastic in what it can deliver and accelerate. Um, but it is going to disrupt the market significantly. And if we are not designing. Sustainable workforces, and that includes freelancers, then we're not gonna have access to them.

Yurii Lazaruk: You never know what will happen next because at some point you can think that I, I think that it might already be a gap since companies are turning more into this AI stuff and like hiring less junior experts. So in like, I dunno, five, 10 years, we can already see this gap when. There is not enough of experts, or maybe not.

[00:13:00] Maybe we'll have Skynet and we'll need Terminator to come back and save us. You never know. And, um, you know, um, you are talking about including, including freelancers in the team, and I feel like it's something that, uh, companies are really missing as, as you've said before the recording, that some companies are hiring them behind doors and uh, they're not even telling that they're working with freelancers.

So what are. Where do you see the biggest misalignments between company expectations of working with freelancers and freelance realities?

Matthew Knight: I think there's a, there's a mindset shift that needs to happen with a lot of organizations, and traditionally the mindset

was for a lot of people. Freelancers are overflow, or when we've got a resource gap, we just need to get somebody in.

It's filling a hole. Um, as opposed to, and a lot of the organizations which I'm working on are very proud to say, Hey, actually independent workers are a critical part of our [00:14:00] workforce. They are part of our value proposition. We know that we can build. A best in class team for delivering this work, not just the people who we have available sitting inside our office, but we can go out to the market, we can find the right people for the project, we can bring them together, and it's an expert network.

And I think as a part of the value proposition to say, we are not just gonna give you who we've got available, but we are going to build the very best team to deliver the very best outcomes here. It's a fantastic, fantastic offer to the market. And clients are increasingly seeing that too. They're increasingly saying, well, hold on.

I don't just want who you've got available. I want you to build me a project team, which is is the best for the challenge that I have. Can you go out and find these people? Can you go out and manage them for me? So I, I think that mindset shift of. I don't like the word freelancer, I'll be perfectly honest.

It's got so much baggage attached to it, and it's got so much of that old mindset of just get [00:15:00] somebody in, get it done, and and move them on. They're a human resource, a commodity. Yeah. And I think that's become even worse over the last couple of years. So regardless of what you wanna call them, this idea of working with.

Independent expert specialists who aren't actually external. Right. I always like using the idea of Venn diagram, you know, kind of two overlapping circles, that it's your organization augmented by these people, but there's a really strong relationship between the two, and that's where the, that's where the brilliance of work happens.

But as we said at the start, there's. Sometimes a bit of a gap because who is responsible for designing that process, for managing that, that group of people. There's different challenges when it comes to law

and tax and contracts and how you work with those individuals. So you are making sure that they're classified correctly and.

As we know, a lot of organizations are running pretty lean. This is why they're leaning upon freelancers. Um, so you know, where does that time [00:16:00] come to ensure that actually you are working with them effectively and you are investing ahead of a project, which can be challenging. The best freelancers come into an organization and actually are really good at just figuring out that mess and working without an onboarding 'cause they have to do it all the time.

Um, and, and we're very good at just kind of landing, doing our best job despite of that. So sometimes it's a bit of a hidden problem. Organizations don't realize that that's a gap because really good freelancers are really good at figuring that one out, but there's a lot of wasted time there. You know, kind of 20% of a project could be lost to lack of productivity because you dunno how to access their intranet or notion.

You can't get onto their slack. You don't know where the files are. Your, your contract hasn't been approved or you know, late payments. Like there's a whole load of stuff, which, which just slows down. Doing brilliant work, and that's money literally walking out the door. So I think mindset is, is the biggest one a shift to say, Hey, we're, we are super proud of working with expert [00:17:00] partners.

That's part of our model process is the next piece. How can you make sure you are working with 'em as effectively as possible? And engagement and retention is the third piece. How can we not just bring them in once and done, but how can we build. Relationships that actually compound over time. So we're doing our best work with this, this Trusted alumni.

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 Freelance 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 I was like working with clients because with clients you also have to think about engagement, retention, and then so when companies think about this independent talent as kind of clients that make their life better or like move their [00:18:00] business forward, it changes all the things and it's making things so much hopefully better.

I have no idea how it'll happen in the future because what I see. From people like you are from such an experts because we have this very bright picture of the future. And then, you know, you go to organizations and even if they want to start, it's hard for them because humans are afraid of doing something that they don't know how to do about.

Mm. And then you are talking about this lean organizations. Who have this experience, but they don't go there out on the market and they don't share their experiences openly. So how to encourage those companies to share experience with a wider market?

Matthew Knight: Oh, that's such a great question. Well, I, I think there's two parts to it.

If, if this is new to you, there's two things which you can do. First. Ask some freelancers, you know, don't just assume that your way of working is going to work when you bring somebody in, ask them what do they need to do your best work here? How can we work together effectively? You know, a good kickoff, a good [00:19:00] onboarding, whatever you wanna call it, but ask how that relationship is going to work and design that together.

Um, you're not gonna get it all right the very first time, but if you design that at in partnership, you're gonna understand how that works for that individual and then you'll know that for the next time. The second point is absolutely right about how do you learn from others. One of the pieces of work that we're doing at the moment is, is a, a policy framework called Freelance Friendly.

So we're asking hires to openly say, Hey, this is how we work with freelancers. These are our kind of, um, the standards which we uphold, and the, the way in which we support our freelancers. So we have a policy around, uh, making sure we pay people on time, that we have contracts that we're investing in, in diversity of our workforce, a number of different things that we are doing, and.

By encouraging organizations to publish their, their statement, their freelance friendly framework. Others can learn from it. They can go, oh, okay, they're [00:20:00] doing this thing and that's really effective, or they're doing this thing that's really effective and we're trying to open the conversation. And that has two benefits.

One freelancers. Have more visibility of organizations who are, who are doing it well, what good looks like. So when they go to an organization, they can say, actually, it would be great if you could be doing these things. But also it creates a bit of a framework for any organization who's hiring to say, oh, okay, I can see that this thing has a really positive impact on, on delivering great work.

I'm gonna improve in that area, or I'm gonna steal some of those ideas. I find that the businesses who are working with freelancers are really proud of that they are supporting and working with them effectively and wanna talk about it because that helps 'em attract new talent. It makes them look better in the workplace, it builds their reputation, and you hopefully you create this snowball effect that if company A says, we are doing these things.

Then company B goes, oh, well we need to be doing those things as well because we want to also attract [00:21:00] the best talent. Slow and steady. But I think transparency is, is really, really useful.

Yurii Lazaruk: Bonds friendly. So what's in it for hires? Why should they create this guidelines? Why should their share their, their experience?

Matthew Knight: There's, there's two key reasons. Number one is that all of the research that we've done over the last almost 10 years shows that if you are not engaging and supporting and working effectively with your freelancers, so if you don't have a really clear

scope of work, if you don't have contracts in place, if you don't have good communication setups, if you are not asking for feedback and receiving feedback, then the productivity of that freelancer declines.

And we know that productivity means cost, right? If they are having to do all of these things and jump through all these hurdles, and you haven't got that process in place, means they are spending time on sorting all that nonsense out rather than working on your project. That increases the [00:22:00] cost of your project.

The second thing is creativity. If they are better supported, if they feel safe and they feel engaged and they're excited to be working with you, then their outputs are gonna be of better quality. And the third thing ultimately is, is that kind of retention and engagement piece. That if a freelancer feels well supported, they did brilliant work with you, they are going to want to work with you again rather than refusing to work with you again, which means you have to go back out to the market.

Find another freelancer that takes you another 10 days that costs you another couple of grand. You know, there's lots of these hidden costs when you are looking for talent. Um, that it might be a recruiter fee that's obviously got a hard line on an invoice somewhere, but it's the hidden things like actually, oh, it took me five hours to go through all the comments on LinkedIn post to kind of figure out who they were and look at their cvs and jump on the email and speak to these.

If you're having to do that at the start of every project, that's a huge amount of money which you are spending. So if you [00:23:00] can build these more supportive ways of working with freelancers and and stronger relationships, you're saving time on talent costs. You're saving money on talent costs. You are improving the output of your work.

You are improving the reputation of your organization to freelancers, but also to clients because they recognize, hey, they're attracting the best people here. So there's a real RO why. Piece. This is not a nice thing to do. It's a, it is a nice thing to do, but it's a commercially sensible thing to do and I think that's where we'll see the, the real separation of businesses.

There are businesses who don't think about working effectively with freelancers, and they won't be able to get the best TA, best talent, and the freelancers who do invest in nurturing and supporting and engaging, and they will have the best talent. So if you are a client, who are you gonna pick?

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. It's so, it's so, it's so weird.

You know, you, you are, you are talking about specifically like tangible things like money and time, and it's like very [00:24:00] straightforward. You save money, you save time, you get things done faster. What else do you need? And still, companies are ready to go for like three, six months as to hire a full-time expert for a project.

They don't even know if it'll work or not. Mm-hmm. Instead of just going into this independent talent market. Try and who knows? Maybe at some point some i, I know also some transitions of independent talent into like full-time experts. Yeah. Maybe you have like the best click match ever, and you will continue working together.

You never know. And still, okay, let's go for this. Let's imagine the company has mindset. Mindset. Uh, they have the, their mindset changed, so they already, they know that they want to hire a freelancer. Yeah. Next they need to talk to someone. Where do they find these people to talk to?

Matthew Knight: In terms of finding freelancers for their project.

Yurii Lazaruk: Uh, in, in terms of understand, so you, you've told us go talk to experts, go talk to freelancers about how to do it correctly. Where do they find these people to talk to, to ask all the questions to them?

Matthew Knight: Yeah, so [00:25:00] I would probably start with communities. There are so many fantastic communities where those freelancers hang out.

We, uh, support each other or ask questions. We are, we're sharing our wisdom and experience and resources. So there's a real wealth of community platforms where those freelancers and specialists hang

out. So that's always a good place to start because also the community hosts and leaders there will often be open to saying, actually, this is what we hear.

These are some things which, um, you can learn from or even connect you to some of their members because ultimately we, we all want to help each other find more work. I think that's a good starting place. The other, um, place is LinkedIn is actually pretty good. There are a number of. Brilliant and, and very generous, you, yourself included here, generous individuals who are talking on a regular basis about how to work more effectively with freelancers, the kind of platforms and systems and processes.

I mean, we both know Matthew Mato, for instance, who's doing a huge amount of fantastic work in in the [00:26:00] us. Um, there's people like Jack Spencer who runs Free flexor in, in the uk, who focuses on, on process and how you can build those systems internally. So there's no shortage of. Of people who are doing, doing great work.

Search them out, have a coffee with them, have a conversation with them, build a project which helps you design and, and think about how you might be working. Um, but I would say just kind of get started. I mean, I think we all learn better by trying and learning and failing and don't forget to ask for feedback and learn from it.

And I think businesses are so busy. And hectic at the moment. It can be incredibly hard to just take a breath and a step back and say, what did we learn from this experience? Part of the reason that we're doing the freelance friendly piece is actually to kind of create these examples and case studies is a strong word, but just kind of stories really from businesses who say.

Hey, we wanted to work more effectively with freelancers. [00:27:00] We did this one thing and we saw this one outcome. And if we can share those, you can learn and steal those ideas and build upon them. And I think, you know, we talked about transparency of this. The more organizations who say we are, we're figuring this one out.

No one's got it cracked yet. The new models, like who knows what is gonna. Be happening in the next five years, but we're all trying to work together a little bit more effectively. Um, and a bit of transparency is, is really beneficial.

Yurii Lazaruk: Okay, so mindset changed. They went to a community, they spoke to experts.

They have a general understanding of how to work with freelancers and maybe some MVP process or how to do it. What will stop them next?

Matthew Knight: Time. I mean, this is the biggest challenge for any organization, right? And often the reason why you're bringing in external help is because you are stretched and your resource is thin.

Um, so I think carving out some time to reflect on your processes on the projects, which worked, [00:28:00] having an evaluation. Framework in place to say what worked, what didn't work? What can we improve? Accountability is the next thing you know who in your organization can perhaps be that chief freelance officer or whatever you want to call it.

It doesn't have to be a job title, but it can be a responsibility to say. Okay, I'm going to be the internal champion, um, that can gather this insight and this information that make sure that we've got that little network that we're building. Where do we keep that? Is it a CRM or a Google Sheet or something that can gather that feedback at the end of every project that can talk to people internally to say.

What worked, what didn't work, and also start thinking ahead, what are we gonna be doing in the next 12 to 18 months? What kind of projects are we gonna be focusing or trying to win? What skills might we need? What gaps do we have and what bet bottlenecks might we face? So you can start to design ahead.

For things [00:29:00] rather than having to do it, you know, kind of three minutes before somebody comes into reception, starting to work with you. Um, I think that having somebody who's accountable

really helps because they can gather that information and shape it. It doesn't mean that has to be all be their responsibility.

I think one of the interesting things about working on freelancers is that. It touches on so many different departments, right? They might be working in the design team, but perhaps they're having to engage with accounts to get their invoice paid, or perhaps they're having to engage with ops to kind of the project management side of things.

So everybody plays a bit of a role in making sure that that work is delivered well. Um, but having a person who's accountable can to gather all that insight and say, Hey, this is. This is where we're doing it really well, and this is where we're struggling or might want to make improvements. And that person can also look at the commercial side of things.

Uh, you know, if they're tracking how much did we spend, how much money or time did we waste, what might these improvements deliver for us in terms of ROA? So there's a really clear [00:30:00] business case of why this improves things. There's a, there's a misconception that freelancers are more expensive than employees, and I don't think actually, if you run their numbers and look at them side by side, once you've factored in things like, uh, holiday and sick leave and pension contributions and insurance contributions, and onboarding them and training them and buying their laptop and all this stuff that is kind of hidden in employees, they're actually about the same price.

But what you are getting from an independent worker. Is far higher productivity. 'cause they're in their focus, they're getting the work done, they're, they're delivering, they are experts. They have got depth of experience in probably doing this for a dozen clients who are very similar. So they're bringing the whole market full of expertise.

Um, and they've got friends, you know, quite often they bring in collaborate collaborators who they work with really effectively. So what you are getting from an employer and a, and a independent. Really, really different and probably commercially more valuable. [00:31:00] But if there's no business case there, if you can't say, Hey, we spent this much, but we got this much out, it's really hard to create the case to invest in that for the future.

Yurii Lazaruk: You know, I thought about the freelancers working with multiple projects and sometimes it's a huge blocker for companies because they think that, oh my God, they work with 10 clients. They will not have time for me, or they will share trade, our inner secrets with other companies. And as Catherine Steiner, dicks recently told on, on the.

It's the benefit that this person is working with multiple clients because they are, the market needs them. It means that they have all this experience and they are happy to bring this experience to your organization. So it's really a benefit and sometimes they're missing it and coming back to a person who is responsible, so.

You told that it touches different departments and there are many people inside, but still, you know, when there are many people included and no one owns kind of the process, it means that nobody owns it. So who has to be responsible? Like what [00:32:00] is their role in the company of the person who is responsible for like bringing in the independent talent?

Matthew Knight: I don't think there's any one single answer to that. You know, if, if we're talking about a small micro studio that might be like three or four perm employees, could be like a creative director, an account planner, and you know, like just a handful of people. Then there's not gonna be a department for freelance experience.

Right. Um, in a large enterprise organization. Equally it, you could say, oh, well it's clearly the role for the people team or the HR team. But quite often they're so far removed from actually where the freelancer is doing their work and actually what needs to happen. So I think there's no one answer. You need to do a bit of a mapping exercise if you are a large, complex organization, say actually, how does this kind of freelance experience planning or design, um, sit across those departments?

And you need to have a bit of a steering group, but there still needs to be an owner of it. Um. I think people, teams make a huge amount of sense in [00:33:00] large organizations because they know processes of bringing people into the organization. They are plugged into things

like contracting and compliance and payroll and and culture and understand how people flow through a business.

But you absolutely have to have the people involved who are doing the work as well, because it's not just enough to get 'em on contract and. Get 'em into the door with a, with a badge or whatever, and getting them paid. They have to understand your internal working processes and, and the, the templates which you're using and the language that you're using.

So it's about a relationship exercise across the organization. I don't think it also adds a huge amount of time and effort. You know, a lot of these things are something which you can design. At the start, run the process for 6, 9, 12 months. Learn from it, improve it the next year, and it almost just sits as a, as a, a document somewhere or a policy document that that explains how this works.

And you can gather feedback over the [00:34:00] course of time. So it might be that you spend a couple of days on it. At the start of the year, let it run for a while, learn from it, and then improve each year, and everybody can feed into that. Um, but it, I, I think it's less important to say where should that role sit?

It's more important to agree that that role does need to exist somewhere. Yeah. And design how that works for your organization.

Yurii Lazaruk: And if, if we're talking about smaller businesses and where, let, let's imagine the owner or the founder is, uh, the decision maker and they know that they will hire a freelancer because they, it'll help them to move their business forward.

But if we're talking about the higher, like the bigger company where they have already some kind of hierarchy inside, um. What's a need for them? What's a need for people who hire independent talents? Why should they go all this extra mile to develop these processes to bring this independent talent in the company?

Matthew Knight: You know what? I find that smaller organizations quite often work more effectively than. With freelancers than larger ones. Um, [00:35:00] because communication's a little bit easier.

You're coming into a team, you can chat to the people you are working with. There's not layers and layers of management and process, and it can be really quite human.

And we're talking about process, but that doesn't have to mean like endless documents and Excels and SAP systems or anything like that. It can just be a kickoff, a conversation around how you wanna work best, making sure the invoice gets paid on time. Those are the things that. Really help deliver a better project, right?

Good communication and paying them fairly. Those if, if you get those two things cracked, then you're probably into a good place. The benefit is that relationship building, and they will want to come back and work with you again. Because unfortunately, there are so many organizations who get it so wrong that.

When we are busy and we've got two projects in front of us, it's pretty easy to decide which organization we want to work with. We are not going to go back to the organization who forgot to pay our invoice on time, who weren't clear, who ghosted us, who [00:36:00] never replied to our emails. We're gonna go to the organization who.

Might not be getting all right, but at least put a bit of effort into building a, a effective working relationship with us. And a lot of the work which we do focuses on mental health. So for the last 10 years. Much of my work has been looking at the, the challenges and the barriers that freelance face, you know, you don't necessarily have a team around you, so isolation is a problem.

Um, your income can be very variable, so cashflow and financial anxiety can be a real concern. There's lots of challenges which, um, you know, fundamentally we don't have much of a support system. We have to build our own support network of friends and colleagues and peers, um, and. More than 70% of freelancers don't know where to find support for their wellbeing when, uh, and, and their mental health when they're freelancing, which is a massive gap.

So we're trying to put a lot of those things in place through community, through resources where freelancers can find that support. But what's [00:37:00] been really interesting is. We look at

what are those big challenges and influences on, on freelancers mental health over the year. And almost half of the negative impacts come from clients come from poor behaviors, from hires.

And you won't be surprised by these. It is not paying on time. It is poor communications. It is not having a contract, therefore scope creep. Um, it's things like ghosting. And I don't think nine times out of 10 they're malicious. It's not the business trying to screw a freelancer over, it's just because they dropped a ball.

They were busy, they forgot they missed an email because that design process hasn't been considered and thought about. Um, and unfortunately, those things have a direct negative impact on the people you are leaning upon, you are relying upon to deliver your work. So really, I mean, the focus. Why this comes about it from, from my perspective, is I want to make sure that freelancers are happy and healthy and can continue to [00:38:00] work.

But if we can say, Hey, hires, you're gonna get a more productive, more impactful, more effective freelancer by doing these simple things, and that also supports their wellbeing and their mental health, then everybody's happy. Everybody wins.

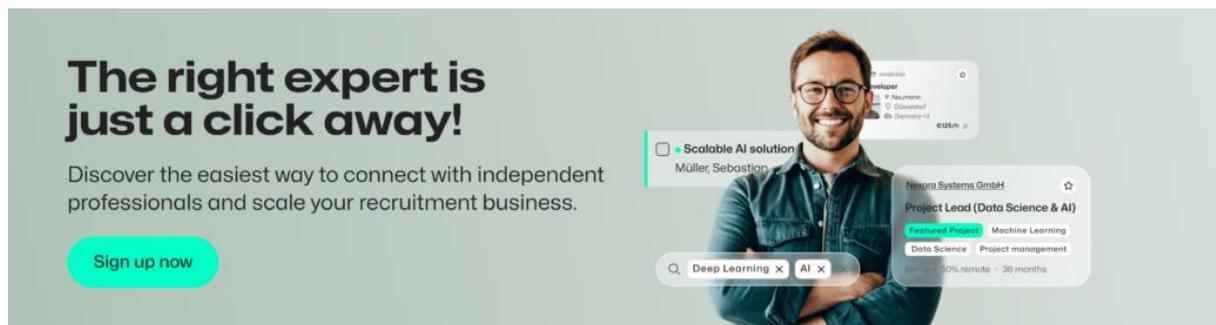
Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. Yeah. You know, like, uh, it's, it's like living in the perfect world.

In a perfect world, everyone is happy and there is no war. And, uh, people are just supporting and helping each other. Who knows? Maybe at some point it'll happen. You know, at, at least, at least we are trying to build this world. And, um, it is just, you know, just one step at a time. And, you know, Matthew, I have one

Matthew Knight: step at a time.

Exactly.

Yurii Lazaruk: Yeah. I have so many questions and I really wish to have. The sky is the limit, but time is the limit. So the final one. What advice would you give to first companies just starting to use freelancers and secondly to freelancers entering the market?



Matthew Knight: So number one, to companies, I would say, can I get, can I do two things?

Um, number one would be. Before you start working with freelancers, or [00:39:00] if you've got somebody who's coming in for the first time, it's the first time you've worked with them. Sit down, have that conversation. Say, this is the first time we've done this. We're not experts. We don't know how this is gonna work effectively.

Please can you help us understand how we can work with you? It's 45 minutes. You know, at the start of a project, have an open conversation, be honest, be human, and just say, what are the things we need to make sure, and the freelancer will help you. Step through that process. This is their job. They do this at the start of every single project.

So they will tell you what they need, what is effective way of working with them, and you'll learn from that. And apart from everything else, you're starting the project with a really kind of human relationship centric way of working. And the freelancer goes. Oh, they're taking the time to actually make this work, which is hugely beneficial.

The second thing for, for companies is very much, if you haven't got the time to be doing those sorts of things and you want to make sure that your freelancers are still, well, just hit those boxes in terms of making sure that they're [00:40:00] not being, you, are not harming them. In any way. It isn't about perfection.

It isn't about giving them free pizza and yoga sessions. It's about behaviors that do no harm. So pay them fairly and on time, get a contract in place. It's really clear of what you are delivering from each other. And we also ask that any employer signposts to support for

those freelancers, you don't have to provide that support, but signpost to community resources and platforms where that freelancer can go and find additional advice and support so they're not feeling so disconnected for the freelancers.

Gosh, there are so many things. I think number one is probably community and connection, though, especially if you are a new freelancer, the learning curve can be really steep. There's a lot to understand. You might be asking lots of good questions, but if you dunno what questions to ask, sometimes you don't find the right answers.

So being part of a community, being in digital networks and kind of face-to-face networking, whatever that looks like for you, go and spend some time, ask lots of questions of fellow freelancers.

[00:41:00] Just listen as well. I mean, you'll hear so many amazing conversations go, oh, I didn't realize I needed to, to know about that.

Spending time with other freelancers is, is incredibly valuable. And the second thing is take care of your own wellbeing. It's, it's incredibly. Challenging way of working. You don't get paid holiday, you don't get sick pay. It's very easy to forget to prioritize your own wellbeing. And if you are not looking after yourself, you are not going to be able to work.

And that's a worrying position to be in. So we talk about the A, b, C of, of mental health, of freelancers. A is the active awareness at the end of every week. Just check in with yourself, say, how was I feeling this week and what made me feel that way? Journal it, and over time you'll see some patterns and trends.

Oh yeah. Every time a client goes to me, I feel a little bit rubbish. Yeah. Well, duh. But capturing what those things are, um, is really useful because you might also go, oh, I have a really bad day if I didn't get out of the house and went for a walk. Or, I'm working really late [00:42:00] into the evenings. So that A, is that awareness.

B is then the boundaries and behaviors. What are the things that I can put in place to take care of myself? Maybe that is getting out for a walk. Maybe it isn't working with a client until there's a contract in

place. And C, coming back to that first point, community connection. You are not doing it on your own.

It might be self-employed, but that doesn't mean you have to be doing this by yourself. Ask lots of questions, find those connections. And I found, and I'm sure it's the same with you, Yuri, that the majority of folk in those communities are so supportive and willing to have a cup of coffee or jump on a Zoom and just have a chat to support fellow freelancers.

Yurii Lazaruk: Exactly. Easy, easy as an A, B, C, go and do this, and. Last, but not least, name two people I should reach out to to talk about the independent workforce.

Matthew Knight: Oh gosh. I would love you to talk to Frankie Rah, who runs a community called Doing It for the Kids. She focuses on freelancing parents, which is a really interesting set of challenges, right?

Not only are you running your [00:43:00] business, you are also running your own studio. Oh, your agency of kids. They, it's a, the client that never pays on time. Um, and she's doing amazing work, um, in, in that area to kind of identify and, and support people who are, are working in that area. Um, I also think Arla West would be really interesting.

She, uh, they run a community called, uh, not your business, um, for queer. B-Q-Q-L-G-B-T-Q-I and Neurodiverse freelancers, and again, fantastic support community for people who identify in that space with their own set of challenges and differences and lived experiences of working in that space. Both brilliant community hosts who are genuinely supporting freelancers.

Yurii Lazaruk: And final, final, final, final, final question. What is one question that I should have asked you about the freelance market but didn't?

Matthew Knight: I think a question which I'm thinking great deal about at the moment, and maybe you shouldn't have asked me because I [00:44:00] don't have the answer, is, what happens in a

world where more and more people have to go freelance because perhaps their industry has moved to a only freelancing model.

Or they've been made redundant and they can't find work, and they feel that they have to be pushed into that space. What happens in a world where actually freelancing isn't a choice, but it's the way that your industry works. And I don't know, I dunno what the answer is. I would love to continue having that conversation with you and other community founders because I think it's something which we're gonna have to start addressing and designing systems and support for.

Um, and it could be fantastic. It could be really challenging, but that's the question which I'm spending a lot of time thinking about at the moment.

Yurii Lazaruk: We'll figure it out together. And that's exactly all those questions that we keep on asking each other and we'll keep on having this conversation. And Matthew, thank you so, so much for exactly what you're already doing.

I'm not talking about the company side, but specifically about the [00:45:00] freelance side, how you care about their wellbeing, how you care about their mental health, uh, their happiness level, because that's exactly as you said, what impacts companies and businesses, because if freelancers are happy. Businesses and companies, they will get double and triple value out of those freelancers.

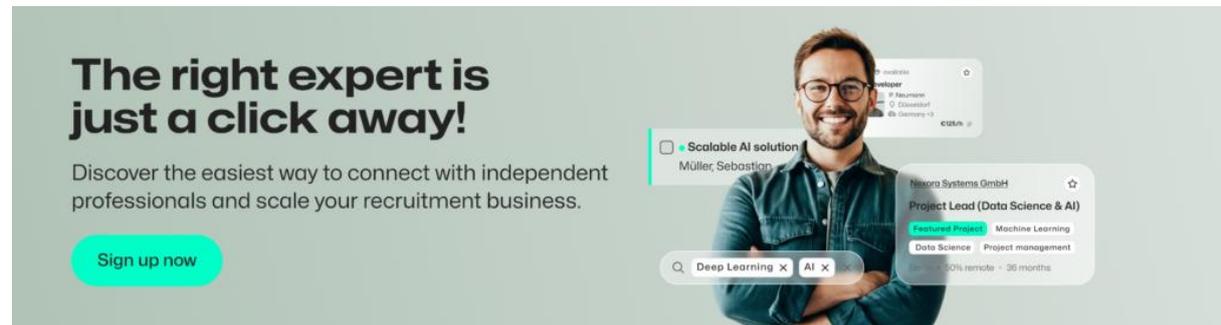
Absolutely. And thank you so, so much for growing this market and yes, thank you. I'm super happy that I finally met. Thank you. This amazing conversation. Let's do it again. Let's

Matthew Knight: do it again soon.

Yurii Lazaruk: We will do it. We'll do it, and, uh, yeah, see you in the freelance market. 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

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