

THE 9-TO-5 JOB IS DYING

STUDY SHOWS 40% OF THE WORKFORCE MAY BE FREELANCERS BY 2020

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FREELANCING, gigging and contract work are no longer new concepts in today's workforce. Changes in the workforce have resulted in an increase in people setting out to pursue their careers through freelancing and "gigging".

This change can be largely caused by millennials having different expectations (i.e. work culture, environment, job scope etc) as compared with the generations before. But can we truly blame them given the freedom and autonomy they have to choose when and how they work as opposed to the typical nine-to-five daily corporate grind?

The number of freelancers in Kuala Lumpur alone has increased by 31.2% in 2014. In 2015, millennials became the largest demographic in the workforce. More than one-third of millennials are independent workers.

Additionally, online service platforms provide opportunities for independent talent to connect with businesses. More companies are leveraging on temporary expertise rather than a permanent workforce.

Before you quit your job and run out into the world with your savings account, freelancing also has its disadvantages. While you may be your own boss with greater independence, flexible hours and the ability to pick jobs that you prefer, setbacks include an unpredictable income and little to no employee (and not to forget employment) benefits depending on your job.

From an employer's perspective, however, freelancers can not only work-on-demand when needed, but businesses can pick and choose when they need ready talents with specific skills.

Is this rising gig economy really the way to go from 2017 onward? We will let these freelancers and an employer answer that for us...

Nina Ng,
freelance graphic designer

After spending six years in an advertising agency, I began to tire for various reasons. Design is passion-driven and I had lost that passion. To stay on wouldn't have been fair to myself or my workplace, so I planned a break for myself and took the plunge.

At the time, I didn't know what was coming next, but I knew I needed to renew my drive. Shortly after, people started coming to me, friends started pointing opportunities my way, and before I knew it, I was freelancing!

It was easy for me to start freelancing thanks to the knowledge I had accumulated while I was living the agency life, and I enjoyed being able to control my work and processes.

Eventually, I found that freelancing allowed me the right balance between choosing jobs I'm passionate about, planning my processes the way that best suited me, and spending my time the way I desired. This became very fulfilling.

By staying balanced in the way I uniquely need, I'm able to perform better and stay motivated.

However, I do think that freelancing is very different from full-employment and doesn't suit everyone. But personally, I find that the pros outweigh the cons. The pros are that I enjoy planning ahead and



managing my resources such as time, creative ability, and even communicating with the client directly. Because I'm in control of those things, I'm a happier creative person and deliver better quality work.

But because of that flexibility, I have to compensate by being strict with myself in other areas. While you are attached to an agency, your timelines are managed and teams are there to support any setbacks in terms of performance. The freelancing world is the exact opposite. Your performance, good or bad, is reflected on you. But these areas also provide opportunities for personal growth.

Darshana, independent communications consultant

I think employers should practise both the gig economy and traditional way of hiring. The current workforce sees value in questioning the purpose and contribution of their work; some even take it as far as to ensure their life's work adds significant meaning to the society and communities they live in.

Some upsides to the gig economy is access to talent across borders, and the ability to encourage a wider platform of knowledge and learning. Having standard contract periods for a year can benefit many in the long run, especially with positions that do not require long term commitments. Look up *Jobbatical*, which is a platform that caters for contract positions across the globe.

The flipside is of course, the issue of accountability and continuity. However, many business models nowadays already have mechanisms in place to address these.

Long-term hiring makes sense for senior positions especially. Traditional hiring will give the stability needed when looking at senior management positions within an organisation.

I can't say one is better than the other, but in today's world; a good balance of both will help organisations and employees alike in the long run.

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Then there are people like me, who do not really feel like they want to spend their 20s and 30s building an empire or climbing the ladder. The yearning to have freedom, the need to explore and create something from scratch directly related to work that I love was a big push factor to go solo.

It gave a lot of freedom and time to breathe, and at the same time was a powerful teacher in discipline, hard work, strategy, business and communication skills but most importantly, it teaches you how to accept failure with grace, and persevere.

At that point in my life, it was the best choice made. If not for that chapter, I wouldn't be the person I am today. Today, my choice would be to take on contract jobs that last no longer than a year.

Given a chance, I would want to go back to freelancing at some point in the future.

Y.S. Ting, freelance photographer

Some companies do not use certain services as often, (i.e. photography etc). So, hiring a photographer on a permanent basis is just a waste of money.

From the photography perspective, you get to hire different people with different skills set. Certain photographers are better than others in different categories. You can hire someone who is good at everything but it will not be cheap on a permanent basis.

A challenge employers may face in hiring external staff is finding a replacement. As freelancers, there are plenty of companies looking to book you for

projects. So, if the particular person is booked, it may be difficult to find someone else whose work you can trust.

Depending on how often a service is needed, hiring the traditional way and hiring temporarily is subjective. For example, if a company hires a full-time photographer, a good one will not be cheap and a cheap one may not be as good.

When a photographer who charges a lower rate improves and demands for a higher payment and the company is unwilling to pay, then there's a possibility that you will have a high turnover rate.

I started freelancing because I felt like I was overworked to the point that my health was deteriorating. I felt underpaid for the amount of work I did. As a freelancer, I have more time to myself, more time to do my own projects, and it pays fairly well. The more work I do, the more pay I get, so I have no reasons to complain.

Jegatheeswaran Manoharan, director of a training and development company

When work is project based with each project lasting between one and three days, it is unnecessary to hire permanent staff. It makes sense to go for full-time staff when projects come in bulk with multiple overlapping days and continues for a longer period. The work we do is a specialised function that requires professional skills which is another reason why we hire on a temporary basis. It is just too costly to hire a full-time employee.

Are there other specific reasons that make it beneficial for companies to hire temporary staff?

It keeps both parties in a professional environment. We hire based on an agreement and both parties choose to part ways if we are not happy with the quality of service. As an employer, we are not bound by the employment act to layoff an underperformer. It also places the employee in a default position to sharpen their skills and that makes them more valuable with time.

What challenges do you face when hiring external staff on a temporary basis?

One challenge in hiring temporary staff is similar to hiring a permanent staff: we won't know how well they work until they start working.

Another challenge is the availability factor. Sometimes they are difficult to find when the lead time for a project is short. A major setback is familiarising them to the rules, culture and how-to. It is a learning curve.

The gig economy is something employers should look more into. People perform better when their performance has an influence on their survival. Just like a performer, if your performance is bad, you are toast. Honestly, I will pay more for a performer than to punish a non-performer by paying less.

IN A NUTSHELL

The gig economy concept is fast becoming a great and viable idea. It's not just for millennials as a recent study shows a growing number of seniors participating through applications such as Airbnb and Uber.

Will this be the future of our work force?

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Tamara is an assistant editor and writer with Leaderonomics. When she is not writing, she styles bridal hair on the weekends. Will the gig economy be our future? Share your thoughts with her!