How to Kickstart Your Career

Top tips from the experts

Read more about:

- Setting Meaningful Career Targets
- Building Your Personal Brand
- Creating a Great Video CV

(totaljobs)
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Making the Most of the Candidate-Driven Marketplace
Ian Burke

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It's amazing how quickly things change; especially in the job market. It wasn’t long ago that a lack of job opportunities meant companies were in the hot seat when it came to recruitment. Now that dynamic has been reversed. With figures for June - September 2015 showing that UK unemployment fell to a seven-year low at 5.3%, employers will know that competition for jobs is not what it once was. They are no longer spoilt for choice, so have to work far harder to land the talent they need to grow their businesses. And this is where you can play things to your advantage.

It’s a great time to be looking for a new job! Here are six tips to help you make the most out of this candidate-driven climate:

1. **Take advantage of the wider job market**
   
   Start your search by using social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to network, find job openings and connect with recruiters. Once you’ve made those connections and are discussing opportunities, don’t be scared to tell recruiters that you have a number of openings on the table as this will motivate them to work harder for you.

2. **Only apply to meaningful job descriptions**
   
   In a candidate-driven market, employers need to be working harder to grab your attention. Positions with vague, generic job descriptions demonstrate that the employer is not really making an effort. Cutting these jobs out of your search will help you avoid wasting time with companies that don’t actually know what they are looking for, and instead allow you to focus on finding positions that will help advance your career.

3. **Remember that your prospective employer needs to sell themselves too**
   
   As employers are often looking within the same talent pool, the onus is on them to differentiate themselves from others as much as it is on you to sell yourself and your skills. You need to leave an interview feeling that this opportunity is the best compared to any others you may be involved in. Make sure they tell you exactly why their business and opportunity would truly benefit your career.

4. **Drive the timetable**
   
   Your potential employer should know that they need to be prepared to make a decision quickly in this market if they are to land the best people, so do not be afraid to drive your interview timetable to encourage a quicker process. Establish a timeline for the application process early on, and keep in contact with hiring managers and recruiters.
Stand your ground on your salary requirements

Don’t be arrogant, but do make sure you know the market rate for what you do. Competitive employers will offer most candidates at least a significant increase on their current package. These employers are the ones winning the best talent. Remember if you’re worth hiring, then you’re worth paying for.

Never settle

Your job search should be about finding a position where you can succeed, grow and advance your career. Don’t settle for taking a position at a company that forces you to compromise in areas you don’t want to. Waiting for the right position, with the right company, will increase your chances for success, and set you on your way to a long and fulfilling career.

Remember, a candidate-driven job market puts you in the driving seat and allows you to be more aggressive about what you want. Compiled by leading online job board totaljobs and featuring advice from recruitment experts from across the UK, this eBook will guide you along that journey. Chapters 1 to 5 will help you get your job search off to a great start and drastically increase your chances of landing that dream job. Chapters 6 to 11 will then advise you on how to make the most of the job you get and successfully advance your career.

Ian Burke, Sales Director at totaljobs

Ian Burke is Sales Director at totaljobs, part of Totaljobs Group Ltd the UK’s largest and fastest-growing online recruitment company.

www.totaljobs.com
@totaljobsUK
Whether you want to find a new job, change career direction or get a promotion, it’s always a great idea to set some career goals to get you focused. As specialists in the area of career change and career planning, our team at Position Ignition would like to share some career guiding tips with you.

1. Establish what you are trying to do

Think about what your goals are, write them down and lay them out in some sort of priority order. Plan how you are going to tackle each of your goals and try to be clear about which ones are most important to you and why.

If one of your goals is to find a more fulfilling career, watch our short animation on 7 Tips to Finding a Fulfilling Career.

2. Make a plan

Decide how much time you have and want to dedicate to your goals, and devote this time towards achieving your goals. Give yourself enough time – whether it is a little bit every day, every week or every month – and make sure that you stick to what you decide to do. This will take self-discipline and determination but it will be worth it when you can see your goals coming to life.

3. Create key milestones

It is important to have some checkpoints to help you stay on track and to act as times when you can evaluate your progress and establish whether or not this is the path that you still want to focus on.

4. Reflect on your strengths and experience to date

If you are thinking of a career change or getting a new job, a great place to start is to first think hard about what your unique strengths, skills and experiences are. If you can fully appreciate your asset base and capabilities, you will be in a strong position to move forwards. For many of us, however, it can be hard to pinpoint exactly what these are, and so we would recommend exploring tools to help you like our Identifying Your Skills workbook.
Explore your options

There are a number of ways that you can explore, review and expand your options. Look for opportunities within your current organisation as well as outside it. Talk to people about their careers, roles and what made them choose their specialist area. Let your close network know that you are changing careers and be specific about what you’re looking for and what they can do to help you. Click here for more of a step-by-step guide to changing careers.

Nourish and nurture your network

Re-connect with old contacts and nurture your connections. Send people a text, email or phone them and invite them for a coffee or lunch. Stay in touch with old colleagues, friends and contacts so that when and if you need to turn to someone for help, they will be there. Let people know what you are up to and ask them about what they are doing and what they need. Be as helpful as you can to your contacts and create stronger bonds with your network.

Build your resilience and be patient

Making a significant change in your career can take time and requires patience and determination. You may experience some setbacks but it is important to have the resilience to overcome these, to stay positive and to keep moving forwards towards your goals.

To prepare you for what is to come, make sure that you are both physically and psychologically fit. Take care of yourself, your health and fitness as well as mentally preparing yourself for this time of change and uncertainty. If you stick to your plan and remain focused, you will be able to shape your future as you feel is best for you.

Review your online presence and personal brand

To get ahead in your career it is becoming increasingly important for everyone to build and develop their personal brand. This means thinking about and working on your reputation and branding both online and offline. Spend some time reviewing, re-vamping and aligning your online profiles to match what you are doing or looking to do now.

Commit to continuous learning

Whatever stage you are at in your career, it is important to keep learning. This is especially true if you are thinking of moving into a new role or industry. To stay at the top of one’s game, you must continuously think of ways to develop your skills whether it be by attending seminars, conferences, reading, training or through courses or other career building tools like the Career Ignition Club.

Nisa Chitakasem

Nisa is the founder of Position and the Career Ignition Club, which specialises in helping people find fulfilling careers.

www.positionignition.com
@PosIgnition
How to Manage Your Career for Success

Having worked at the forefront of the recruitment industry for over 10 years, the message I give at MiddletonMurray is that there are countless jobs out there. However, in order to be successful in your job hunt and career management, you need to focus your efforts on the things that will help you be the top candidate. Securing a coveted first job, a new job or achieving a career change relies on self-discipline and pushing yourself to do things you might not always want to.

Having a positive mindset

Self-discipline and determination are crucial to securing the job that you want and I strongly believe that much of what we do is dependent on maintaining a positive mind-set. In order to do this, it’s vital to eat healthily, drink the right things, take regular exercise and get enough sleep. Maintaining a healthy, positive lifestyle underpins everything that you do, so if these things are not right, take steps to ensure that they are before setting ambitious career goals. Taking this a step further, I’d encourage you to create a life plan which takes into account your goals and aspirations. If you visualise yourself in 5, 10, 15 years’ time, your career goals will seem so much more tangible and you’ll be inspired over and over again to achieve them.

Inspiration is another huge factor in helping you to achieve your career goals. If you find someone who you see as an inspiration, you will be more likely to be motivated to work hard to achieve that. Visualise where you will be in the future and connect this with your life plan. This more than anything helps you see how your choices will affect your life and career in the long run.

Sticking it out

If you already have a job and are looking to change roles, it’s important to see the bigger picture and not make any rash decisions. I often see people enter a job totally enthused, only to feel very unsure about it shortly after. This is a completely normal feeling – once you get over the excitement of the new job you start to find you are pushed out of your comfort zone.

It’s vitally important to hold fire and work through any issues you may be having. It’s very common for the same people who don’t like their job to contact us again a few weeks later to say that they are loving it. Remember, feelings of discomfort during the first few months are completely normal and if you are not out of your comfort zone then you aren’t growing. During this time, think about what you want to achieve at the company and how you can make a positive first impression, which will help you to overcome any difficulties.

Even if you do decide that a particular role isn’t right for you in the long term, I would caution you to never do a job for less than one year. If you end up with two or three companies on your CV where you have worked for less than a year, you can start to look like a job-hopper, which can put serious potential employers off.
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Getting a promotion

A great tip if you’re looking to stay at your current company but move into a different role is to write everything that you do down in a daily journal and at the end of the month compile an extensive report. This is then something you can send to your manager with a covering letter/email requesting a meeting to review how the past few months have gone. It is there that you can tell them all the hard work you have put in, demonstrate your value, and then negotiate a pay rise or promotion.

Standing out

If you are looking to change jobs, think about what sets you apart from the competition. Think about what you do as part of your hobbies and link those qualities to the job you are seeking. There nearly always is a link – for example: “I like playing football; I want to be in sales. Football is competitive and results driven, as is sales. I believe my competitive spirit in football will underpin my ability to be competitive and results driven in sales.”

Secondly, think about your personality. Once again, how does it link to the skills and qualities required for the job? Finally, think about your skills. Always try to make your next career move a stepping-stone building upon the skills you already have; never discard all your experience and start completely over. There is always a link from one career to the next.

Overall, if you can map out your aims and ambitions, and stay fit and healthy you will feel more naturally motivated to secure the job you really want or make the most out of the role you are in.

Finding the right job

If you’re looking for a new job outside your organisation, it’s important to explore what I like to call the ‘hidden jobs market’. Approaching companies you want to work for but who aren’t necessarily proactively looking for new staff publicly is a soft skill in itself. You never know what is going on behind the scenes at a business – staff members might be about to resign, take a sabbatical, a position might be available but hasn’t been posted on the job boards as yet. Showing proactivity is often rewarded as it shows candidates have the ability to take initiative.

Angela Middleton

Angela Middleton is the CEO and founder of MiddletonMurray recruitment agency and the author of ‘How To Get Your First Job… And Build The Career You Want’.

www.middletomurray.com
@MiddletonMurray
If you are not being invited to enough interviews, it is likely because you are not tailoring your CV to specific jobs or you are applying for jobs you are not really qualified for. Tailoring your CV/resume to each job you are applying for might sound like a time consuming task, but it can significantly increase your chances of securing an interview. Here are some tips to help you get more job interviews – even in a competitive job market.

**Make sure you understand the requirements**

If you’re looking at lots of job descriptions on a daily basis, it is easy to assume that the positions you are applying to are similar enough that you can just send off your CV without really looking into what each particular job entails.

However, this is a major mistake. What one company may define as “Account Manager” or “Marketing Manager” may have a completely different set of responsibilities in another company.

Make sure you only apply if you fulfill most of the requirements of the role. For example, if I am looking for a Nordic speaker and most of the candidates who apply do not speak any languages apart from English, those candidates are only wasting their and my time.

**Tailor your summary/skills section to match the job description**

Your summary of qualifications and skills should be different for each job you apply for. Make sure you draw the recruiter’s attention to the relevant skills/ experience you have by creating a strong ‘Skills’ section on top of your CV.

**Ensure your application is keyword-optimized**

A lot of companies use ATS (applicant tracking systems) which mine data from your CV by looking for relevant keywords or phrases.

Make sure you highlight all of your relevant skills and experience. Your CV must contain keywords that correspond with the description in the job posting, especially if it is industry jargon. Examples of keywords might include specific computer programs or words like ‘e-commerce’ or ‘marketing communications’.

**Mention recent and relevant achievements**

Many CVs I see in my recruitment job are very “duty-oriented” – there are no accomplishments listed and even if they are – they are not specific and measurable.

If you want to get noticed, you must list some accomplishments that demonstrate the value you bring to an organisation and what problems you solve for your employer.

If you’ve hit quota for a certain number of months, streamlined a procedure or have done something that’s saved your company time and money or both – state that. You only have a few minutes to impress an employer!
Once you get the interview, how do you make yourself stand out?

It is actually pretty simple – always back up your answers with examples, quantify your answers as much as you can and make sure you have a few examples prepared of what you’ve done in your current/previous job that would benefit the employer you’re interviewing with.

If there is one thing most of my clients have in common is that they struggle with answering competency or behavioral interview questions during job interviews.

The questions will start with “Tell me about a time…” or “Describe a situation…” and then you might be encouraged to elaborate further with questions like “So what were you thinking at that point?” or “What was your decision making process?”.

The interviewer will try to establish what benefits you will bring to the company, and where your benefits might be greater than those of other candidates.

Therefore, when giving examples, I’d recommend that you use the S.T.A.R. statement format:

S – Situation
T – Task
A – Action
R – Result

S.T.A.R. represents how your key skills are applied in work. Your STAR examples should illustrate your depth of knowledge, level of ability and value for each key skill.

Situation/Task

Describe a work-related situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. Be very specific and give details, but keep it short and concise.

Action

Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did – not the efforts of the team.

Don’t say what you might do, or would do – tell the interviewer what you did do.

Results

Describe what you achieved. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? How much time/money did you save?

Create S.T.A.R. statements from the jobs on your resume that you want to bring attention to. As you use the statements as examples, your interviewer will become familiar with the various positions you have held, and will get a good idea of your track record of success in those various positions.
With more and more video content being created and viewed online, video now plays a huge part in how we share and receive information. With this in mind, video CVs are likely to become even more popular in the coming years. Not only are they a fantastic creative tool for job seekers to set themselves apart from their competition, but now more and more companies are requesting them as part of their application process. One of these recruiters is advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather Group UK who uses video CVs to recruit for its Ogilvy Fellowship scheme.

A video CV should in some ways act as a covering letter would. A written CV will always sell your skills and experience. Similarly, a video CV should give employers an introduction to the person behind it. Below are my top tips for making the best video CV you can make.

**Before you start**

Video CVs work for some industries (namely Sales, Advertising, Marketing, Creative and Media) but not all. So you should carefully consider whether or not including a video CV will add value to your overall application.

**Framing and appearance**

I would suggest framing yourself from the waist up. A close up headshot might look and feel a little intense. With a full body shot, some of the connection between you and the viewer may be lost. Also, remember to position the camera at eye level, especially if using a webcam set up.

Think about your posture and remember to stand tall. Keep your clothing professional, or fitting of the position you are applying for. Remember to talk directly to the camera. Imagine the person viewing it is right behind the camera lens.

**Find a good background**

Before you start filming, think about what background you’ll film in front of. Make sure the background is tidy and clutter free. Go with a plain background where possible, as you want the focus to be on you, not a busy background.

**Tone of voice**

Keep your tone light, smiley and upbeat. Try not to come across as being too serious or direct. To lighten the overall tone, you may want to add music. As long as it doesn’t distract from what you are saying, music can add a professional touch.

**What to say**

You may want to script what you will say, but I would suggest bullet pointing each section you want to cover instead. It’s important that you know what you will say, but you don’t want it to come across too scripted or over rehearsed.
Watch the ums and ahs

It is so easy to add in the occasional 'ummm' between sentences, especially when you're struggling to find your next line, but too many ums and ahs can become distracting to the viewer.

Keep it short

I would suggest keeping it to around a minute in length, definitely no longer than two minutes. Take the same approach as you would with a CV – short, sharp and to the point. Only include information that really sells you as a person. Think of it as the trailer to the main event, your written CV.

Quality

Make sure the video itself is of good quality. Check that the sound is clear, and there are no distracting background noises. Make sure the lighting is good. Try and film in a well-lit area with natural lighting.

Get creative

For the creative sector, video applications are the perfect way to tell a recruiter a little bit about you, as well as demonstrating your innovative skills. The more creative the role, the more imaginative you can be with the editing, sound, style and content of the video.

Try, try, and try again

The great thing about video CVs is that you can do numerous takes until it's right so – keep going until you've nailed it. If you're struggling to capture everything in one take, try splitting up the video into sections and add text slides in between.

Feedback

It's important to get some feedback on your video before sending it off. Show a rough cut of your video CV to someone who will give you their honest and constructive opinion. Take their feedback and use it. A video CV can be time-consuming, but also free to make, so if it can be improved then don't be afraid to try again.
If you’re a jobseeker, it’s vitally important in an ever-competitive economy that your CV stands out more than ever before. You have to ensure that it sets your best foot forward. Your CV is essentially a marketing tool that you should use to promote a very certain someone: you! You need to be able to sell your skills, abilities, qualifications and experience to employers and convince them that you are the right candidate for the role. A good first impression can often create a lasting impression.

It is often said that employers and recruitment consultants make a judgement on a CV within the first 30-60 seconds. So with that in mind, you really have to make sure that you stand out from the crowd. There is no fool-proof way to construct a good CV – it is your document and it can be structured as you wish. However, you can use the basic framework described below to help get you started.

**How to structure a great CV**

When structuring your CV, the aim is to keep it simple. The following list provides an easy guide for structuring your CV in a simple and logical way:

- Personal Profile
- Career Objective(s)
- Key Transferable Skills
- Career History and Key Achievements
- Education and Training
- Hobbies and Interests

Your CV must begin with a personal profile and career objective, followed by your key transferable skills and employment history, which should be linked to your key achievements that describe how you added value at each company. Next, you should give details about your education and formal training, before wrapping up with your hobbies and interests.

**How to make your CV stand out creatively**

These days, many candidates are too keen to replicate what many other jobseekers have done previously. As a result, many of the CVs employers receive are all too similar. The majority of CVs circulating the Internet and online job boards are simply black and white, and use the Times New Roman font.

It’s highly encouraged that you change your approach when creating your CV to make it more marketable and effective in securing interview opportunities. Taking a more creative approach to writing your CV can have a huge impact on your success in securing more interviews. You may want to consider the following to help you develop a more creative CV:

- **Font**: Nine times out of ten, CVs will be created using fonts such as Times New Roman, so it may be worth experimenting with fonts that are easier on the eye such as Arial, Cambria and Calibri.
- **Language**: Words are very powerful, so it’s important to use words that have a positive and lasting impact. Adding positive words to your personal profile will help you set a great first impression. You could also use phrases such as “An award-winning”, “A positively energetic”, “An internationally experienced professional”, and so on.
- **Colour**: By default, many people design their CVs in black. Try adding some colour. If you are going to embolden certain elements of your CV, such as headings and subheadings, it’s recommended to use subtle colours like navy blue. Doing this increases your chances of standing out and receiving call-backs for interviews.
- **Number of pages**: It is usually recommended that you limit your CV to two pages. The reason for this is simple: it saves employers’ time. Try your best to select effective wording that will fit two pages of A4. One-page CVs are more appropriate for graduates who tend to have less work experience. As a guideline, you can follow the requirements of each organisation.
- **Format**: You can create your CV in Word, PDF or both – either format is acceptable. Once a word document is converted to PDF the format, structure and content is set, so the layout will not change when your CV is uploaded to job search sites.
- **Photo**: In some countries, CVs and résumés are accepted with a professional photo, particularly in the UAE, Europe and the USA. This is becoming a common trend, with the likes of LinkedIn advocating the use of a profile picture on user accounts. So again, to stand out, it may be worth adding a picture to your CV, so that you can leave a lasting impression.

Action these simple steps, and be sure to watch your new CV generate a great response.
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Jerry Frempong
Jerry Frempong is the founder and Principle CV Writer at London’s leading face-to-face CV firm, CVLondon.

www.CVLondon.net
@CV_London
Personal branding was THE buzzword in 2015 and will continue to be in 2016. We all have a personal brand, but what is it? Put simply, it is what people say about you when you are not in the room. People will have an opinion about you. You can choose to ignore this and allow your brand to be shaped for you, or you can control it and start cultivating a brand to be proud of; ensuring that people see you in a way in that you want to be seen.

There are huge advantages in doing this from a career development perspective

- You will become more self-aware, knowing who you are, understanding your strengths and knowing the environments where you thrive will have a huge impact on your career journey, whether you are looking to secure a role, secure a pay rise or move jobs.
- Considering how you stand out from the crowd will be key to securing valuable future roles.
- Your reputation will precede you, people will know of you and your abilities, you will become a credible and trustworthy person that people want to deal/be associated with.
- It will give you focus and help you to work towards future career goals.

So how do you go about cultivating your personal brand?

Define who you are and what you want to be known for in your industry

No-one knows you better than your friends and family. Ask them to tell you your best and worst bits. Think about one-to-ones and appraisals, what personal positive messages have come from these? What is important to you, what do you want to be known for?

Consider the following questions:

- What is the “one thing” that people think you excel at?
- Why do you do what you do?
- What gets you excited?
- What are you truly passionate about?
- What have you accomplished?
- What makes you get out of bed in the morning?
- What do you enjoy doing most?
- What do you love the most about your job?
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Aimee Bateman

Aimee worked for some of the largest recruitment companies before setting the award-winning consultancy careers website, careercake.com.

http://careercake.com/
@Aimee_Bateman

Produce a killer brand statement

Once you have established your strengths and qualities, you will need to create a clear, concise statement that is authentic and definitive; your value, who you serve and what makes you different. This is your Unique Selling Point (USP) and communicates your personal brand. Use it on your CV, on LinkedIn and across all your social media platforms.

Accept that social media is your friend

Google yourself – what do you see? Is it promoting you in a way that you want to be perceived? Does your current activity reflect your brand? What social media platforms are you using, and how do you use them? Think about the message you would like to communicate – and make it happen. Ensure all your bios are selling your brand consistently and cohesively.

Remember that being invisible is not a good thing, it might suggest you have something to hide or are just not interesting. However, more importantly, you allow another person to influence a decision-maker to meet them instead of you.

Use an appropriate professional photo on LinkedIn and try and use this across all platforms, so that clients, employers and potential employers can find you.

Never take your eye off the ball

A personal brand needs constant attention, it takes both time and commitment. Your personal brand is you on your best day. Nurture it, allow it to evolve and show the world how good you are.

Engage with your audience

Follow key influencers in your field and industry, and respond to their posts by liking, commenting and retweeting. Join groups, chats and communities and get involved, don’t be afraid to post an opinion or comment.

If you are passionate about a subject then blog about it! LinkedIn allows you to write posts, you could even create your own website and blog. Wordpress, Tumblr and Weebly are all really simple platforms to use… and free!

Network like crazy. Be the one that offers to go to industry events and conferences, and allow people to really get to know you.

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Network like crazy. Be the one that offers to go to industry events and conferences, and allow people to really get to know you.
“The trouble with the world is that frauds and idiots rarely experience ‘the imposter syndrome’, whilst the smart and intelligent are full of self-doubt” - Bertrand Russell

I have coached hundreds of clients, whose lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem hold them back from landing their dream job, climbing to the top of the ladder in their field and returning to work after having children.

Why do you need self-confidence?

Confident people set larger goals, determining their own definition of success rather than adopting anyone else’s. They successfully deal with difficult conversations, plan strategies, execute policies and make decisions that influence others. People trust them, rely on their judgment and value their opinions. They have the courage to stand up and be counted, and ask for pay increases, appraisals and promotions.

What is the art of self-confidence?

The art of self-confidence is how to be self-assured, how to believe in your abilities and how to step up to your full capability in an assertive way, while not behaving aggressively.

What’s stopping you from having more self-confidence?

You are your biggest barrier. It is possible you still buy into messages bestowed upon you, such as “don’t rock the boat”, “don’t upset anyone”, “don’t show off”. As a result you will lower expectations of what you feel you can achieve.

Annie’s 3 steps to self-confidence

Step 1: Raise your standards

Have higher expectations of how you want to be treated based on your values, character traits and unique attributes. If you don’t set bottom lines for what you will accept in your life, you will slip into behaviours, attitudes and a quality of life way below what you deserve.

Step 2: Fire your committee

Your committee in your head lies to you, telling you that you are not good enough, not smart enough, and not worthy enough and tries to shame you by saying “You’re an imposter”. It focuses on faults rather than strengths and insists you add derogatory labels to yourself.

Step 3: Challenge yourself

Step back, evaluate and predict future challenges by thinking outside the box and dismissing traditional thinking. You can only see what you’re really capable of when you make the effort to go over your pre-conceived limits. Don’t limit your challenges, challenge your limits and trust your intuition as it will give you the courage to be bold.
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Annie Ashdown

Annie Ashdown is a highly successful corporate trainer, motivational speaker, mindfulness meditation teacher and master hypnotherapist.

www.annieashdown.com
@Annie_Ashdown

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Tip 2: How to get noticed for all the right reasons using confident body language

Your body language will reveal how confident you are. Make eye contact when handling a difficult conversation. In meetings don’t cross your arms, (you’ll look defensive). At interviews, mirror someone else’s body language to make them feel like there’s a connection between you. Imagine you are speaking to your favourite teacher at school, keeping your body language warm and open, whilst respecting boundaries. When pitching, don’t fidget with jewellery or hair as this reveals lack of confidence.

Tip 3: How to ask for a pay rise or promotion and get it

Ask for a meeting to discuss development, not a pay rise or promotion. Collate facts and figures on salary trends in your field. Focus on what differentiates you, causing you to stand out. Choose three key points and read them aloud in front of a mirror. Keep saying to yourself, ‘I can and I will’. Gather feedback and testimonials from colleagues, ex-bosses and managers to demonstrate how much of an asset you are to a company.

Prepare a clear list of goals to illustrate what your plans are to add value to the organisation within the next 12 months. Gain clarity on your clear purpose, whilst including your accomplishments from the past 6-12 months. Practise, plan, prepare your pitch and spend five minutes a day visualising your ideal outcome – feeling it, sensing it, and believing it. Deliver your pitch in a compelling and snappy way with attitude, energy and enthusiasm. Do not speak afterwards as this will deflate the impact. Remember: ask, believe, receive!
At Netmums.com – the UKs biggest parenting site, with 8m unique users per month – working from home is one of the most popular search terms onsite as well as one of the most discussed work-related issues in our Coffeehouse forum. And we totally understand why.

A good solution for parents

It isn’t just about wanting to spend more time with our children, although of course that is part of the reason. For families, work is always inextricably linked to two other variables: money and childcare. Without childcare, paid-for work becomes nigh on impossible. And when it comes to money, we know that parents are forever weighing up how to make sure work pays.

Thanks to the rising cost of childcare (the cost of sending a child to nursery part-time has risen by over a third in the last five years), work can often fail to pay enough to cover the cost of childcare and to leave some leftover for other expenses. For many families, working from home can offer – at least in part – a solution to the work, money, and childcare conundrum.

While childcare costs are rarely eliminated through doing paid-for work from home, the saving it represents in terms of time means some savings on childcare can be made, as well as savings on travel expenses.

But working from home doesn’t just ease the money and childcare burden; it’s also helpful in terms of practicalities. With less (or no) travel time to and from work, plus closer proximity to children when they’re sick and/or enjoying the 13 weeks’ annual school holidays, working from home can help ease the stress of the daily work/life balancing act.

How to make it happen

The good news is that, thanks to modern technology such as email and Skype, working from home can be facilitated in most jobs that don’t demand an onsite presence. The even better news is that more employers are starting to see the benefits of working from home for businesses, too, e.g. fewer office-based costs; higher productivity of staff due to fewer interruptions and less time spent travelling, less work-related stress – on working parents in particular; fewer staff absences, which means more opportunities to work from home are available to us. For millennial mums, working from home doesn’t have to mean going it alone. Working from home nowadays can often become reality when working for others. Any employee who has been working with an employer for at least 26 consecutive weeks has the right to request flexible work, including the ability to work from home.

For tips on how to do this, see here. If you’re applying for a new job and know you will want to work from home at least some of the time, ask about this upfront.

The future of work?

A wide variety of sources predict that by 2020, half the UK workforce will be working from home – a great opportunity for parents who are trying to balance the family books as well as work and family life. But as with all things, parenting is a challenge that’s best shared with others in the same boat. If you’re keen to discuss working with home while raising a family, visit Netmums.
Extra totaljobs tips – how to be productive at home

Tip 1: Create an exclusive working space

Whether it’s a whole home office or just a corner of the lounge, define a space in your house that’s only meant for working. Within these four invisible walls, your only focus should be your job. This will make it easier to compartmentalise your life and ‘switch off’ at the end of the day.

Tip 2: Define a strict schedule

Work out how many hours you need to work in a week in order to deliver the work you need to and create a schedule for yourself. Because nobody is keeping track, it is easy to start working late and take too many breaks, but this must be avoided. Start work at 8:30 a.m. like you would in a normal office, stop working around 5 or 6 p.m. and take breaks every two hours.

Tip 3: Eat healthy

It is very tempting to snack on chocolate all day when working from home – after all, no-one is watching! However, stocking the cupboard with healthy food for your lunch and snacks will keep you much more awake and productive.

Tip 4: Get some fresh air

Make sure to leave the house at least once a day, whether it’s for a quick run in the morning or to run an errand at lunchtime. This will help clear your mind and give more structure to your day.

Tip 5: Be social

Working from home prevents you from building workplace relationships. Attend company meetings if you can, or find some space in a co-working office near you. Humans are social creatures, so make sure to plan some time with friends and family throughout the week.

Read more about the expectations vs. realities of working from home [here](#).
It’s a good time to be a creative professional – 1 in 11 UK jobs are now considered to be ‘creative occupations’, according to a recent survey by The Department for Culture, Media & Sport.

On top of this, freelancing is experiencing exponential growth – Kingston University, which has been tracking freelance workforce trends since 1992, estimates that the number of freelancers in the UK increased by a third between 2011 and 2015.

The above might reasonably compel you to consider freelancing as a viable long-term professional opportunity. With that in mind, let’s take a closer look at what it takes to be a freelancer, and if you feel that the opportunity is right for you, how to take your first steps to becoming a successful freelancer.

What it takes to be a freelancer

It’s easy to rush headlong into freelancing, assuming that it will resolve all your professional problems. However, you would be wise to consider whether freelancing is right for you before dedicating a major chunk of your time and efforts to the endeavour.

Social aspects are key. By working from home – probably alone – you will miss out on ‘office water cooler’ moments that combine to provide a sense of social belonging. And if you like being part of a team and thrive on the structure and interactions that it provides, solitary work may not work for you.

There are, to be fair, some antidotes – for example, working from co-working spaces to get the buzz of an office and the framework of a working day, and tools such as organiser apps to help focus your efforts.

Risk is another issue. As a freelancer, job security becomes an alien concept, and work becomes something you must find, rather than something you’re assigned. There’s no sick pay, no paid holiday and no perks.

Freelancing also inevitably impacts on your personal life. It can be very difficult to separate work from play when your office is in your home. Unsocial hours aren’t inevitable (you are, after all, ultimately in control), but successfully delineating your personal and professional lives requires discipline.

However, there are plenty of positives. You are in control of your destiny, you can raise your rates, and choose obtain client work that is more valuable or enjoyable. Speaking generally, freelancing provides a level of personal fulfilment that is rare in employment. childcare can be made, as well as savings on travel expenses.
How to start freelancing

There are three key things you'll need:

**Skills and experience:** Beside your key skill set, other ‘secondary’ skills may represent great freelancing opportunities. Think about all aspects of your work and hobbies – for example, do you have organisational skills, writing skills or project management skills? Compatible skills and experience can be combined to offer a unique service.

**A portfolio:** Prospective clients often value proof of quality work more than qualifications and experience, so collecting examples of your work is important. This may mean initially working gratis, ideally with relatively high-profile clients. While unpaid work may seemingly defeat the object of freelancing, its value in terms of boosting your portfolio aside, it can lead to referrals or even paid work from the same client.

**Leads:** Take time to identify a very specific client ‘type’ that harmonises with your skills and experience. Being a specialist makes you much more attractive to potential clients. Then, approach them with an offer they can’t refuse. If you target viable prospects and effectively communicate the specific benefits of working with you, obtaining work can be easier than you may think.

The attributes of a successful freelancer

Being a talented creative is only part of the formula for success. In reality, what will set you apart as a freelancer may not have as much to do with your creative talents as you might assume.

Key attributes for success include professionalism, reliability, the ability to communicate effectively, conscientiousness, honesty and likeability.

Successful freelancers must dedicate time to improving their skill set and keeping up with emerging trends in their industry. Complacency, stagnation and being out of touch are all completely unacceptable.

Now then – if all the above has fired your enthusiasm rather than dampened it, how do you get started in the world of freelancing?

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**Conclusion**

Lucrative opportunities undoubtedly await good freelancers. If you feel the benefits outweigh the risks, it could be your perfect next step.

Freelancing isn’t without its challenges, but the rewards can be great and it can be a launch pad to even greater opportunities. The essentials are covered above – are you ready for the leap?

Complement what you’ve learned with further research if needed, but more importantly, take action. There’s no magic wand – identify your skill set, target prospective clients, communicate the benefits of working with you clearly, and deliver on your promises.

Good luck!
How to be a Successful Freelancer

Freelancing – it’s easy... sort of

You are reading this because you have finally asked yourself the question, how can I become a freelancer? To some extent it is easy. Take creativity, passion and determination to the forefront of your thoughts, and I see success written all over you. So I am here to fill in the nitty-gritty bits of freelancing with my experience from becoming a freelance filmmaker.

Be patient but ready to leap

So where do we begin? Firstly, do not just jump in the deep end. Do not quit your job and have your fingers crossed for success because it is very unlikely to happen. I recommend taking a few months of researching and planning your idea. Researching online is a great start to help you get a feel of what it is like to freelance and what options are out there for you. Learn from others’ mistakes before you make your own by reading blogs and watching YouTube videos.

You need to get a real taste for what freelancing is. You require self-motivation 24/7 and it is always hard to switch off. Freelancing, I feel, never truly establishes a strong routine especially with creative jobs as you work when the client needs you. Make sure you want your lifestyle to work like that; you can to some aspect tailor it around you to give you job satisfaction and flexibility. However, freelancing does mean you are the boss of everything (at the beginning anyway). You are all aspects of the company, the head of every department, and thus the official worrier of your freelancing business, and that doesn’t suit everyone.

Create your super team

Although I stress that you are in control, that does not mean you cannot branch out. Do not be afraid to work with others who you trust. LinkedIn is a great networking service to help build your connections. Do not be afraid to change whom you work with on a regular basis as well, until you find a good team that can collaborate well and enjoy the work it creates.

Home is where the work is

Once you have decided to take the leap and freelance, you need to remember the number one tip to working well as a freelancer: be organised, all the time. Do not fall behind on logging your hours of work, filing invoices and so on. All your documents should be kept in an organised manner as if you were working in an office everyday as this helps to keep your head in gear and makes referring back to work easier. Its simple advice, but one you must not avoid.
The bit you want to know – money

Freelancing is a business and although most things you read will glorify that you are working for yourself – more freedom, more happiness in your life – you have to remember it is still a business and business means money. Before you start freelancing, make sure you have savings to fall back on so you are comfortable enough to financially support yourself with the step you are taking.

My business needed filming equipment in order to go forward and so I had to make investments, but found my most important investment was promotion as this brought in clients and an audience for the videos. Social media is free, but is an investment of your time. You can also open a separate bank account for your freelancing earnings, so investments you need to make come from the company and to some extent ‘not your own pocket’. You have to spend money to make money, just be careful it does not eat up your wallet!

Feedback is your motivation

Once those jobs are rolling in do not be afraid to ask clients for feedback, this can help you in a number of ways such as using a quote for promotion or just learning ways to improve your services. Personally, at the beginning I spoke to clients afterwards about what they thought of my prices and from this I was able to adjust my pricing guide, which is currently proving popular and competitive with other freelance filmmakers.

Love what you do

Most importantly, enjoy it. Every job and every client is different. Freelancing is a working world of its own and I dare you to not enjoy it, because freelancers I know seem to be thriving off it!

Alice Stansfield

Alice Stansfield is a freelance creative who specialises in making promotional videos for small businesses and event coverage through her own company ‘Chameleon Films’.

http://www.chameleonfilms.co.uk/
@aliceoolivia
A year ago I quit my job to become a remote worker. I joined the growing community of ‘digital nomads’ who take their laptops around the world and work online from Internet cafés in all corners of the globe. Although working from home is not a new idea, the growth of the online community has recently ballooned into being accessible for all walks of life. In this chapter I'll be giving you tips about options for making money while you travel and an honest glimpse into the digital nomad lifestyle (warts and all!).

How can you make money?

There are three main options – working for a company, working for yourself or freelancing, all of which you can do around the world.

**Working for a company:** It's not an impossible dream to persuade your current employer to let you work remotely, so it might be worth asking the question. Similarly, some people apply to a remote company such as Buffer and Wordpress, whose entire teams work remotely. Working Nomads, Jobbatical, and RemoteOK are all packed with options.

**Working for yourself:** The options are pretty endless for being self-employed, but some popular ones are drop shipping, affiliate marketing, teaching online, selling products via Amazon/Etsy/Shopify, blogging, and life/technology coaching. I personally have an online shop and teach online. If you’d like to learn more about earning online, check out my recommended Courses page where I break down what I’ve learnt and which tools make up my income.

**Freelancing:** Social media management, web development, translation and graphic design all lend themselves to freelancing. Check out the “How to be a Successful Freelancer” chapter for more tips.

How can you travel easily?

We’ve seen many services spring out from the digital nomad trend such as Nomad List, Nomad House and many more and it will continue to grow in all directions.

**Accommodation:** In Europe and Western countries, AirBnB is without a doubt the cheapest and best way to travel. I still use it for convenience in Asia, but generally asking around at hotels when you arrive will be cheaper. If you can, try to travel in chunks of at least a month as then accommodation, phones, bike hire and co-working will all be bulk discounted.

**Making friends:** Facebook groups have been a lifesaver. I join the local nomad group (e.g. Berlin Digital Nomads) before I arrive and use them to find out about where to stay, meet-ups and making friends. There’s always plenty going on and everyone is keen to share knowledge, ideas, and dinner! I also love NomadList for choosing which cities will be nomad friendly.
**Getting WiFi:** As a nomad, WiFi is almost more important than food and a roof over your head. It pays the bills and it fuels your lifestyle. I always track down the nearest co-working space on Day 1. Many people prefer to work from cafés, and Wifi Map is a great app for finding passwords to coffee shop WiFi if you need a quick boost. Buying a local sim card is also a smart thing to do – it’s often absurdly cheap and if it saves you a couple of unwanted cups of coffee that you trade for café WiFi it’ll pay for itself.

**What it’s really like**

**Have a financial buffer:** For peace of mind, it’s important you have a few thousand in the bank to tie you over while you build up a client base and revenues.

**Uncertainty:** Uncertainty and fluidity is a fact of life – friends come and go, as do clients and countries when you’re a digital nomad. I don’t normally know what country I’ll be living in two months from now, and I am in a constant state of meeting new friends and saying goodbye to old ones. It’s a blessing and a curse, and something you should be prepared for.

**Useful tools:** Some of my favourite Chrome plug-ins are Yesware (for tracking whether an email has been opened), Rapportive (for checking if you’ve guessed an email address right), Full Page Screen Capture (for screen-shotting a web page in high res), and Email Hunter (for tracking down email addresses at companies).

**Keeping motivated:** I work a full eight-hour day in a co-working space, but many people work just a couple of hours. It can be tricky to stay motivated when no-one is looking over your shoulder, but if you choose something you’re passionate about you’ll soon find yourself working until two in the morning by choice! My favourite procrastination avoidance app is the News Feed Eradicator plug-in for Chrome to stop me trawling Facebook absent-mindedly.

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**Louise Croft**

Louise Croft is a digital nomad, female entrepreneur and blogger. This year she’s been to eight countries and launched a gift shopping site Impossible To Buy For.

[www.paupertoprincess.com](http://www.paupertoprincess.com)

@paupertoprinces
How to Achieve Your Professional Potential as a Woman

60% of European graduates are women and we make up 50% of the workplace. Although the number of women on boards in the U.K. is increasing, the gender wage gap stays at 20%.

Here are my top 10 tips that I highly recommend after coaching thousands of women to reach their professional potential.

1. **Know yourself**
   Spending time identifying your strengths, development needs, success stories and transferable skills is really important to creating a solid strategy to manage and develop your career.

2. **Have goals**
   A study released last year by Citi Group and LinkedIn indicated that women and men measure success in different ways. My own more anecdotal methodologies agree with that. However, it is important for women to have an idea of their goals, write them down and communicate them to the people who need to know, particularly their boss and partner. Many women don’t have clarity on their ambitions and get passed over. If you do not know where you are headed every path is potentially right (or wrong). Many women find they are indeed ambitious but they do not put a price tag on their ambition in the way that men do.

3. **Create a strategy**
   “A goal without a plan is just a wish.” – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

   It is important to create a plan to achieve your short-term goals, which are a stepping stone to your longer term vision. It might be to extend your network, learn a new skill or take on a new project. Some things do just fall into our laps, but mainly it all comes down to planning and preparation.

4. **Have a strong online professional presence**
   All women should have a strong online professional profile, to showcase your skills and achievements and to establish professional visibility and credibility. Make sure you have a good business photo (head and shoulders, no partners, children or animals) and check that your social media accounts have no inappropriate content or images.
5 Strengthen your network
Women tend to be multiplex networkers who network with people they know and trust. Try moving out of your comfort zone to extend your network to people that you may not know but who will be helpful career connections. You can also support these efforts via online contacts if you are a little bit nervous.

6 Put your hand up
You will get left behind if you do not put your hand up and ask, whether it is for a new project or a pay rise. Women step up to negotiations six times less than men during their careers to their long term disadvantage. With the gender pay gap sticking at 20%, it is necessary to understand your market value and position yourself accordingly. Maybe you need to ask for a mentor, professional training, a promotion or a stretch assignment. Do not wait for opportunities to come to you, but be proactive instead.

7 Watch your language
By that I do not mean stop swearing – which I would recommend anyway, but rather not to fall into the sand traps that many women find themselves in. Use power words ('led', 'achieved', 'delivered'), stop apologising and asking permission. We do it all the time without even noticing. Watch this great video from Procter & Gamble's Pantene brand to see for yourself!

8 Body language and professional image brand
You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. Women are also judged more harshly in the recruitment and selection process by men on appearance. It is important to have good posture and eye contact as well as a strong professional image. Make sure you have a capsule professional wardrobe to project the right image for your dream job.

9 Invest in yourself
Many women prefer to spend money on a great looking handbag than invest in their professional development. Life-long learning is now a buzz workplace phrase but it is important to stay current in your field. There are many free or cheap online resources for continued learning. You can also ask your company to sponsor you.

10 Become self-sufficient
Make sure that you are financially prepared for the unexpected or a crisis. We live in uncertain times and we never know what lies around the corner. Do not rely on your boss and your company to take care of your career.

You are now the CEO of you!

Dorothy Dalton
Dorothy is the co-founder and CEO of 3Plus International and a certified career coach and trainer, keynote speaker and blogger on HR trends.
www.3plusinternational.com
@3PlusInt
How to Achieve Work-Life Balance

It is often said that we spend more time at work than at home, and that work gives us many benefits – from a sense of belonging and a purpose to a clear structure for each day. And of course, it pays the bills! However, working or looking for work can sometimes feel overwhelming and if we are not careful, overtake our ability to cope. This chapter will outline how an effective work-life balance can be achieved when in full-time or part-time employment as well as when searching for a job.

I have worked with many people who suffer burn-out at work and noticed a number of common problems that can lead to this situation. Below I have described the four most common causes of burn-out as well as possible solutions.

Lack of physical exercise?
Physical exercise is a fantastic stress-buster. It not only helps to keep up our fitness levels, but also releases endorphins or ‘feel good’ hormones that give us all a lift following the mental pressures of working or looking for work. I have noticed that those heading towards burn-out often stop exercising, saying that they are “too busy”. The challenge to this way of thinking is that we should all make time for what is important, and the question is, to what extent do we value our physical and mental health?

Blurred work/home boundaries
Setting clear boundaries between work and home life is increasingly becoming a challenge given the prevalence of home working. Advances in technology have enabled us to work anywhere and at any time. This gives us great flexibility but, at the same time, can erode the boundary between work and home. How much work is enough? Are we now so addicted to the smartphone that any conversation taking place at home with family members is a distracted affair? How are we able to sleep when trying to switch off from work pressures? The challenges are endless, but setting clear boundaries is important. For example, switching off your smartphone while on holiday and not looking at work emails late at night can help you set aside some downtime.

Using a separate room when working at home or clearing away work objects after finishing for the day can help with boundary management. Explaining to family and friends that you are working at home can also help as everyone will be clear about your expectations and this can help to minimise interruptions.

Lack of hobbies and pastimes
When individuals are heading towards burn-out, this can have a significant impact on non-work pastimes as individuals begin to lose enjoyment or feel that they are now meaningless. Part of the issue here relates to control and individuals experiencing burn-out can increasingly feel resentment as work or time spent looking for work seems to invade every part of their life. Regaining control is therefore key and allows us to prioritise enjoyable pastimes. Scheduling your pastimes in the diary is a good step in the right direction and before long they will be considered just as important as a work meeting.

Low self-belief
Self-belief is sometimes referred to as “personal resilience”, or an ability to bounce back from setbacks. Having a clear sense of purpose while also knowing that it won’t be easy along the way can better prepare us for setbacks. Talking to others about how you are feeling can also help as well as challenging negative thinking.

In conclusion, while working or looking for work is crucial, it needs to be kept in proportion to other aspects of our daily lives. Striking the right balance can be a real challenge, but is an important life skill if we are to survive in an increasingly competitive and fast-moving environment.

It’s also worth remembering that work is probably best seen as a marathon rather than a 100-metre sprint. Setting a reasonable pace, looking after ourselves and challenging negative thinking are much better strategies for winning than simply managing to race around the track!
Lack of hobbies and pastimes

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Andrew Kinder

Andrew is a Chartered Counselling & Chartered Occupational Psychologist, is the Chief Psychologist for OH Assist and Chair of the UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association.

www.andrewkinder.co.uk.
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