

## **I quit my full-time job and climbed my way to a six-figure salary working for myself.**

There's nothing wrong with a 9-5 job. I tried that path for many years and it turned out the conditions weren't right for me. Here's why.

- **Lack of flexibility** – Despite having a handful of full-time jobs since graduating college, none of them had fixed hard-set hours. I accepted that the nature of my job was nights and weekends as events permitted. What bothered me was the 9am Monday morning mentality. After late-night events throughout the week/weekend, being required to be at my desk early on a regular Monday, and discouraged from leaving before 5 pm on non-event days, felt inefficient. I spent excessive time at my desk merely to fulfill the obligation of being present during standard business hours.

I can't count the number of times that I sat in the office twiddling my thumbs because we were "too busy to take on more work." I put that in quotes because my boss regularly told me to say no to requests because we didn't want to make it seem like we had free time. So, I found myself sitting there, tired, bored, and frustrated that I wasn't even allowed to fulfill my job responsibilities.

- **Limited Work-Life Balance** – Entering my professional life, I quickly became the flaky friend because I was the "yes man" employee. I was frequently called in for last-minute events or assigned grunt work due to my junior status. Communication lapses and impromptu 5pm meetings disrupted personal plans, including freelance work, often canceled with short notice. Balancing the demands of two jobs while managing unexpected schedule changes became a persistent challenge.
- **Office Environment** – One day I was asked to run a high-profile event. I thought, "No problem, I know what I'm doing, I got this." Fast forward to the event, I am running the show, my boss is sitting next to me and says, "I asked you to do this because if something goes wrong, I need to blame it on you. I don't want it to be my fault." I did not react out loud. Internally, I sat there infuriated by the type of leader I was working under, but also self-empowered because I was confident that I wouldn't miss a beat, and I didn't. Over the course of the next year, I faced many comments like this from him. I just swallowed it because I knew I was better than that. He didn't get to win; he didn't get to take my confidence from me.
- **Work-Life Balance Expectations** - It was time for my first-year review. At this point, I was tired and frustrated because this place that I loved, the place I could make meaningful change, the place I wanted to be proud of, became a place that I hated. I was sick to my stomach daily. I wasn't nervous for my review; I did everything right, I never caused a fuss, I got projects in early, I got glowing feedback from the teams I was working with. What bad could he have to say?

*“You need to contribute more; you need to offer more ideas, you need to spend your time outside of work, working more.” He went on, “I have kids and a family, I can’t work outside of working hours; I can’t always be in the office; you don’t, you should be taking the camera out at night in your free time and capturing content that we can use later.”* I once again sat there and just took the feedback, all the while a storm was brewing in my head.

So, with no voice, with no pride I could take in my work, no basic appreciation or faith in my abilities, it was time to hang up my hat with this one. I was done. I was offered a position still at the same place but with a different boss, and I had creative control of the program. It was a breath of fresh air from day one. I was treated kindly; I was treated with respect; people stood up for me; I felt my work was impactful again. So, what is the downfall now?

- **Stagnation** – This new position was great for many years. I loved who I was working for, and I loved what I got to do. But, after three years, I reached a sense of stagnation. I craved new challenges and varied experiences. I couldn’t do much more where I was at.
- **Return on investment** - Stepping into finances, what I found in my full-time work, even in this new position, was that if I divided my excessive hours spent at the job, I was barely making minimum wage. Yes, I could pay my bills, I lived in a nice place, and even built a savings on that salary, but statistically, my earnings were under \$8 per hour. In addition to working full-time, I spent at least another 10-20 hours a week or more freelancing. I didn’t do this just to make extra money, but to also progress my skills in the video production business and build a solid network of connections. I used my vacation time to take bigger week-long side jobs that put me in front of more people. I saw a way to a greater future if I put in extra work at the sacrifice of a real vacation.

I have always been a hustler; I have always worked multiple jobs and strived to be the best at everything I do. But there comes a point when you need to ask yourself, “Is it worth it?” Financially, the answer was no. Emotionally, the answer was no. Mentally, the answer was no. I have been working full-time since I graduated college. Sure I was making ends meet, but I didn’t have the time or money to do the things I really loved, like travel. I also felt like I wasn’t growing anymore. I was at a standstill in my career because I was pouring all of my creative energy into someone else’s dream.

In my third year on the job, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, highlighting the stability of my full-time position amid uncertainty in the freelance world. Despite being comfortable, a unique opportunity emerged—the chance to work on the postponed 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Originally aspiring to break into television and movies, my unexpected success in sports led me to set a goal in 2016: work the Olympics, then transition back to Hollywood. As 2020 unfolded and the Olympics were delayed, the idea took a backseat. Out of the blue, a friend alerted me to a sudden demand for personnel for the postponed Olympics due to travel concerns. Without hesitation, I submitted my resume, had an interview, and accepted the job immediately,

disregarding potential repercussions from my current position. This unexpected opportunity marked the realization of a long-held ambition.

I approached my boss with a proposal, I have 30 vacation days, can I use them all next month to go do this? I was met with grace, and they worked with me to make this dream happen. I was and still am so grateful. Look at me, I get to live a dream of mine and come back to a stable job. How lucky am I? I hopped on a plane to Tokyo and was met with welcoming arms onto an amazing crew of people. That was the moment, the I made it moment, it was what I always knew I could do, it was an incredible high.

I came home and hit the ground running at my full time job. I didn't really have time to relish in the feat of the Olympic experience. That was over I had to lock in on real life. Only I couldn't. My real life wasn't enough anymore. I needed bigger. I felt stuck. I didn't like who I was as an employee anymore. I felt like I couldn't do a good job at work because I had so much withdraw from the experience I just had. I needed to chase that high, but where could I possibly go next. I shut down. I was angry, I felt stuck. I was angry because I gave up my personal life to chase my dreams. I was angry because I couldn't move up any higher in the place I once loved. All this sacrifice and what am I left with? I felt friendless, alone, burnt out, scared, and frustrated. I reached my dreams, it's over and I don't know what's next. I muddled through the next few months at work. I didn't like my job anymore. Not because I worked with bad people, I worked with great people. I felt like a drug addict, I wasn't me anymore because I needed something bigger. It felt like my life depended on it.

Exactly 4 months after my temporary employment in Tokyo, I received an email with an invite back to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. Again, without question my answer was yes. Only this time, when I went to my boss, I knew I couldn't ask for the time off. This time I knew I had to turn in my resignation. I looked at the past 4 months. I looked at who I had become. I knew it was time for me to leave. In fact, it would have been selfish for me to stay because I could no longer give them my best. I closed the door on the place that I loved, it was time.

I stepped into the unknown with no guaranteed income, no health insurance, and no safety net. It was scary, but it was also exciting. It was a risk, but it was also an opportunity. At the Winter Olympics I was met with advice from people who had been in the industry far longer than me. They were excited for what I was doing. I have lived the past two years on this one piece of advice. "The work will always come, don't worry about it. If it's quiet, enjoy the quiet, it won't last long." I found peace in that comment. I landed stateside with one gig lined up. Boom, if that's all I do this month, February is covered, I haven't lost anything yet. I have not once had to look for my own work, it's always just come knocking. In the background of full time employment, I built a network that set me up to succeed on my own. Now the question became, how big can I grow this thing?

I don't want to make this all seem like sunshine and rainbows; I have certainly had hiccups along the way. I have had to learn how to run my own business, advocate for myself, work with difficult clients, and accept that sometimes I'll have to take losses. The challenge of keeping this going fueled my fire. So, what are the hardships?

- **Being Ghosted** - I started dipping out of sports and into the corporate world, it was neat working with them because it felt more cinematic. I could learn more with these people and get closer to my Hollywood dreams. I worked with them on and off for months. I thought I was doing a good job, then one day they just stopped calling. I don't know why and probably never will. I dwelled on it for a little while. I thought, If I don't have them as a client, am I going to be as successful next year? Corporate paid good money. Spoiler alert, I was just fine.
- **Chasing Invoices** - That first year I also faced some issues with being paid by clients. I was hired for a 4-day event. I submitted an invoice to them and got the response, "We decided not to pay anybody for one of the days, we have taken it off your invoice." What? You can decide to just not pay me? I didn't know what to do, I didn't know how to fight it. After a week of being infuriated, I just had to swallow my pride and take the loss. I've had two or three instances of clients just refusing to pay. As frustrating as it was in the moment, none of them were worth my time or reputation to really fight back. Running your own business is not always easy. The quicker you accept that sometimes you will take a loss, the better off your mindset will be. Karma always comes back around.

In year one there were many ups and downs. By the end of it, I saw a 25% Increase in my financial earnings when compared to the full time job I left. I was satisfied with that. When you calculated the value of an employer funded 401k and health insurance, I still came out slightly ahead. Plus, I worked a third less. It was good, but it wasn't enough.

Now year two was in front of me, I knew I needed to grow bigger. It wasn't an Olympic year so I didn't have that boost to depend on. Not only did I need to grow, but I had to figure out how to supplement that chunk of income from the previous year. Honestly, I didn't do much different. I was just offered more frequent and regular work from the clients I had the year prior. I earned their trust, I communicated well, and I always delivered, in return they fed me more work.

I have learned a lot working for myself, both as an entrepreneur and as a human being. When I first started as a full time independent contractor, I didn't know how to say no. I took every job that came my way. If I didn't know how to do something, I learned how. If I didn't have time, I made time. If I knew I wouldn't enjoy it, I did it anyways. My philosophy was, if I can just get through it, if I can just figure it out, it will pay off one day. I built a reputation with many of my clients as being someone that was always available. For that, they kept calling. In my head, the minute you say no, you risk losing a client forever. They need the work done whether you do it or they call someone else. If you aren't available, they move down the list. Now they have a new go to person. I think that is what happened with my corporate gig. I had to say no twice, so I assumed they just moved on. That being said, it's not a perfect formula but a balancing act.

I have had a number of full-time job offers over the course of the last 2 years. It's flattering to be asked and some of them are even appealing. Despite my success on my own, I am certainly not against going back to a fulltime arrangement. If a job gets me closer to my dreams, allows for room to grow, has a good culture, then heck yeah I'll consider it. In this line of work, I think it is important to be fluid and open to ideas, something great can come from it.

Leaving the security of a full-time job was a leap of faith, but it was the leap that set me free. I learned that I am capable of more than I thought, and I discovered the true value of my skills and expertise. If you're feeling stuck in a job that doesn't fulfill you, don't be afraid to explore the possibilities beyond the 9-5 grind. Your passion and determination can lead you to a fulfilling and prosperous career on your own terms.