

Why working mothers go freelance in corporate world

August 23 2016, by David Cross



Credit: Sora Shimazaki from Pexels

The original "freelancers" were historic knights and mercenaries, selling their fighting skills to whoever paid the right price. Today's freelancers include a [growing army of people](#) who decide to leave highly paid and

secure jobs in large organisations to strike out on their own and become independent consultants. An [increasing proportion](#) of them are mothers with young children, who have decided they simply don't want to choose between the demands of a company workplace and the needs of a family.

According to the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed, there are around 1.6m freelancers in the UK and [one in seven of these is a working mother](#), the fastest growing freelance demographic. Some command fees of up to £1,000 a day (others an eye-watering £450 an hour) to do their specialised corporate [work](#) for clients including accounting firm PwC, telecoms giant BT and the Ministry of Defence.

Becoming an independent consultant is relatively easy. Start-up costs are low, and there is no specific qualification requirement or exam to pass. You just need wifi, a professional profile online and, crucially, experience and an impressive CV. Accumulated skills and knowledge is what counts if your advice is going to be valued. This isn't a sector for fresh-faced graduates.

Many female consultants [I spoke to](#) in my research on employee commitment described "taking back control" as a major motivating factor in their decision to go freelance. It's also a way of maintaining a professional identity they feared they might lose by becoming a stay at home parent.

In practical terms, the flexibility of working as a freelance consultant can mean childcare costs are dramatically reduced (if the job can be done outside normal office hours, for example, or while children are at school). Work can be done from home or negotiated around the needs of clients. The high rates of pay earned by some also mean the cost of childcare doesn't swallow up a significant proportion of the money earned. As independent consultants, some mothers often feel they can

earn more while working less.

Vanessa, a freelance management consultant who lives in the south-west of England, used to work for one of the top American consultancies before having children. Afterwards, she explained: "My brain was ready to go back to work but I didn't have a job to go back to. So I started up my own business." For Vanessa, the difficulties of juggling family and work were balanced by the freedom to choose the work she took on. Invoicing at up to £600 a day, what motivates her is the interesting work she does with her clients. If it's not interesting, she won't do it.

Lucy, an HR consultant with 25 years' experience, now works as an independent consultant with eight different clients within ten miles of her home. After having children she switched from being an HR director for a firm to a working as a freelance consultant offering advice and a troubleshooting service for three to four days a week. The consulting is a way for her to maintain a senior professional position. "Without it I would have had to take a job that was significantly lower-skilled and lower paid," she said.

Technology has also played a major role in the rise of these workers. [Skype](#), [WebEx](#) and a host of other software and apps have made it easier to establish and run your own company. [LinkedIn](#) makes staying in touch with past clients and contacts easier.

But being an independent consultant isn't all plain sailing. These individuals still have to juggle family and work life which increasingly becomes blurred. [It's also lonely](#). Escaping the controlled environment of an organisation and boss also means losing the professional and social support of co-workers and a structured workplace.

Independent consultants have to take on every office task necessary. There is no admin assistant to total your hours, no finance department to

invoice and chase clients for payment, and no sales team to keep the pipeline of work going.

A risky business

Psychologically, it's also a precarious way of working. There is no guarantee of a stable income. Some clients don't pay and August can be a month when the phone rarely rings. There is no sick pay, no paid holiday, hours of work are not set, and [employment rights are not as clearly defined](#).

But despite these downsides, the decision to go it alone [is a common one](#), for men as well as women. Independent consultancy is also a handy way for those approaching retirement to gently parachute into it, reducing their hours but still using the accumulated skills and knowledge to offer senior and highly effective consultancy.

The rise of independent consultancy means that a huge source of knowledge and skills previously temporarily excluded from the economy is now there. And parents don't have to choose between family and career. They can do both, either continuing as a consultant or using it as a way of keeping their skills, knowledge and intellectual capital current – in case they ever want to go back to the office.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Source: The Conversation

Citation: Why working mothers go freelance in corporate world (2016, August 23) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-08-mothers-freelance-corporate-world.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.