

# FOREWORD



By Sophie Cross



When Tom asked me if I'd consider writing the foreword for *The Freelancer's Business Brain*, not only was I extremely flattered, but in hearing the title and knowing Tom as an accomplished freelance business owner, I could not wait to get my hands on the book to read it.

If you're a freelancer, seeing yourself as a business is the most powerful thing you can learn to do – for yourself, your family, your clients and the wider industry. It's a drum I won't stop beating, and it's one of the main reasons I launched the quarterly print publication *Freelancer Magazine* – to connect the freelance community so they could share knowledge of how to do this and rise together.

Tom is among the most well-respected people who we are lucky enough to have in our industry. He has an enormously impressive career as a freelance writer, editor and author, and he co-founded ProCopywriters, the alliance for commercial writers in the UK. Every single one of his other

four books is in my bookcase, and we were very fortunate to have him talk live about his book *The Freelance Introvert* in our *Freelancer Magazine* Book Club (for Issue 9).

I have picked up so many knowledge nuggets from him and had more than a few light-bulb moments from the way he generously shares how he got to where he is today. I have huge admiration for the way he encourages freelancers to be intentional about their businesses and goals and not just ‘float down the river’. Tom will tell you that if you don’t have a business background or are an introvert (like he is, as are many freelancers), then it’s even more essential to work on your business brain.

But even for me — a marketer, 51% extrovert (or so the test told me), with a commercial background, the ability to treat freelancing as a business still didn’t always come naturally. The personal attachment, the unhelpful and untrue narratives ingrained in us about freelancing, our past experiences with work and money, and the temptation to always be busy working *in* the business instead of *on* it can make it hard to create the separation we require to make the best business decisions and achieve our dreams.





*The Freelancer's Business Brain* answers all of the major questions I hear freelancers, new and old, ask again and again – where do I start with pricing and calculating what I need to earn? How do I set goals and come up with a strategy? How do I market myself? How do I manage clients and projects?

Tom has a brilliant way of covering everything you need and breaking it down in a way that will not only give you the know-how but also the mindset shift. His books are always hugely enjoyable to read – easy to digest, full of practical examples and, crucially, clearly written by someone who has been there, done it and succeeded.

This book will challenge you (in the best way) to become active instead of passive in creating the wealth, business and lifestyle that you want, and it walks you through how to take the actions you need to do so as you enter the next phase of running your freelance business. *The Freelancer's Business Brain* will probably be the most important business book you read as a freelancer.

Sophie Cross

Editor, *Freelancer Magazine*



# **1 INTRODUCTION**

Introducing your business brain  
and why you need it.





So, you've gone freelance,  
and you're making a living.  
But have you made yourself a life?

There's no doubt about it. Freelancing can be a wonderful way to work.

You can break free of the nine-to-five. You can get out from under the thumb of a controlling boss. You can choose what you do, who you do it for and when you do it.

It should be liberating. But for some freelancers, it's more like a prison sentence.

They've got the skills, they've got the work, and they've got the clients. But their freelance life still doesn't add up. For them, there isn't much 'free' in freelancing after all.

The problem is they work *in* their business, but they never work *on* it. They never think about what their freelance business could be and how to make it happen. In fact, they don't really think of their freelancing as a business at all.

As a result, their freelance career never fulfils its potential, and they don't achieve the working life, wealth or lifestyle they really want.

## Introducing your business brain

When you go freelance, you set up your stall and begin selling your skills on the open market. So whatever abilities you have – and I'm sure you have plenty – you must also know how to market those abilities and turn them into cash. Otherwise, it doesn't matter how good you are; your talent will wither on the vine.

Every business exists to create and capture value. Firms create value for their customers in the form of products and services. In return, they capture value for themselves, mainly financial. As long as a firm can continue to create and capture value, it's a going concern.

Freelancing is just the same. You need to create value for your clients with your skills, and you need to capture value in return. As long as you can maintain both sides of the equation, you've got yourself a viable freelance business.

However, unlike a large corporation, you don't have a production department or a sales team. You don't even have an operations director and a marketing director. You're just one person, making every decision on your own. And yet, you must still ensure that your freelance business can create and capture value, no matter what the future brings.

That's why you need a *business brain* to sit alongside your work brain. In other words, you need a part of yourself – call it a mindset, an attitude or whatever – that's completely focused on the commercial, financial and strategic aspects of your freelance business.

While your work brain is serving customers out front, your business brain is in the back office, balancing books and drawing up plans. Together, your two brains make sure your freelance business is giving you everything you want.

Business brain is active rather than passive; conscious rather than unconscious. With your business brain, you take full responsibility for your freelance business and make purposeful choices to develop it in new and fruitful ways.

Business brain is the missing link from your work to your wealth. And when I say ‘wealth’, I mean much more than just money. I mean all the good things that freelancing success can bring you: a fulfilling lifestyle, personal and professional growth, a sense of security and the time and opportunity to do the things you enjoy with the people you love.

Building a business brain often means dropping habits, ideas or beliefs that you picked up in the past and continue to follow without being aware of them. You may even have come to see them as immutable character traits, although you’re actually free to change them any time you want. Business brain gets in between events and your habitual reactions so you can choose a different path.

As you break old habits, so you create new ones – and the more you practise them, the more natural they feel. Business brain isn’t a one-off effort, but something you cultivate over time. It’s about making many small decisions so you can take every opportunity to develop your business.

If you’re doing great work for great clients but your freelance life still isn’t quite coming together, business brain is the missing piece of the puzzle. It will bring you the freelance life you’ve always wanted, and knew was out there somewhere, but still could never quite reach.

## **Work is not enough**

For many freelancers, it’s all about the work. They just want to spend as much time as possible doing the thing they most

enjoy. They didn't go freelance so they could cold-call prospects, ponder business plans or tinker with spreadsheets. In fact, they may well have started freelancing precisely so they could get away from the smarmy suits in sales or those blasted bean-counters from accounting.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple.

Yes, it would be wonderful if you could focus on doing the work you love, and success just magically appeared. Perhaps, for a few lucky freelancers, it really does work out that way. But for the rest of us, success is not like sunshine, which will surely appear if you wait long enough. It's something you must create for yourself.

That's why merely being good at what you do is not enough. It is necessary but not sufficient. It will get you on the road, but it won't take you to your destination.

'Just do the work' is the motto of an employee – and a naïve one at that. It's what people tell themselves when they're hoping that their boss will notice all their good work and reward them with a pay rise. This attitude, which employers obviously love, is essentially passive and reactive, allowing other people to direct the course of your life. It's not the mindset of someone who creates, owns and manages a business for themselves.

In his classic book *The E-Myth Revisited*,<sup>1</sup> Michael E. Gerber explains how many people start businesses because they love the work, only to discover – to their cost – that they need commercial skills too. He tells the story of Sarah, a keen baker who starts a company tellingly named All About Pies. Since Sarah prioritises buns over business, her craft ends up being subsumed by mundane tasks, admin snarl-ups and commercial crises. As her business flirts with failure, her joy

at baking turns to despair, undermining the inspiration that gave her enterprise its life force in the first place.

Baking and business don't have much in common, so Sarah's struggles are probably no surprise. But if you work in another area, you may have some skills that you *can* use to develop your business. For example, if you're a designer, you can craft a beautiful website. If you're an accountant, you can balance the books. However, it's not enough to do the things you *can*. You also have to do the things you *should* – no matter how unfamiliar or challenging they may be.

## **Two brains, one purpose**

The important thing to remember is that your business brain and work brain aren't enemies. Cultivating your business brain doesn't take anything away from your work brain. In fact, they reinforce each other.

Consider what happens if you neglect business brain and focus purely on the work. Instead of imagining your ideal client, you work for whoever walks through the door. Instead of deciding what you want your freelance business to become, you allow it to be pushed around by whatever happens to happen, and to grow in whatever direction it can.

Financially speaking, if you set your prices too low, the only way to earn more is to work more. You may feel you have to accept every job, or spend all your time working, or cut corners on one job so you can squeeze in another. Those compromises lead you to deliver lower-quality work, and probably burn yourself out into the bargain.

Now consider how everything changes once business brain enters the picture. You create a business plan to guide your decisions. You make a conscious effort to bring in ideal

clients and generate higher fees. You start exploring new ways to develop your business. You're still working hard *in* your business, but you're working hard *on* your business too.

As your earnings grow, you can be more selective about which jobs you take on. Then you can take your time to deliver high-quality work on every job and for every client. And you can make sure you stay physically and mentally healthy, so you can sustain your success into the future.

So while doing great work does bring you business success, that success also enables you to do more great work. Your business and work brains combine to improve your freelancing life in every respect: the work you do, the clients you work for, the money you make and the lifestyle you enjoy. It's a positive – and profitable – feedback loop.

## **You can still be you**

Maybe that all sounds great. But equally, you might already be thinking that you don't much like the sound of business brain. Maybe it sounds like someone you wouldn't particularly warm to if you met them. And it's certainly not someone you aspire to become.

Some freelancers feel that business brain is 'just not them'. They might feel that it clashes with their character, or that their work is so closely intertwined with their identity that almost any deviation represents a betrayal of themselves. They may have known people who were 'all business' and found that they never really got along.

Other freelancers might recoil from business brain because they feel it clashes with their values. They see a commercial mindset as acquisitive, materialistic or exploitative, and they're just not that kind of person.

They'd rather someone else took care of all that stuff, or that it would somehow just take care of itself. They might also fear that others who share their values will judge them for being too businesslike.

Cultivating a business brain doesn't mean becoming a different person. Whatever you choose to do in your freelance career, you will always be yourself. You don't have to transform your personality overnight or force yourself to think and act in some weird, alien way. You don't have to toss your principles overboard or torch your values. You just have to think certain thoughts and take certain actions at certain times so you can get the results you want.

Think of business brain as a pair of glasses that you put on to do a certain job, then take off again when you're done. While you need to switch into your business perspective at certain times or situations, you don't have to permanently change the way you see the world.

That goes for me too! I'm not a pushy or aggressive person. I've even written a whole book about freelancing as an introvert. Actually, it was my quiet personality that prompted me to think about freelancing in a new way. Since I couldn't rely on my natural character to guide me, I knew I had to cultivate my own business brain.

Just as your business brain stands guard over the quality of your work, so it also protects the core of your character. You step into your business mindset to sort out commercial stuff, and you come out again to do everything else. By doing the right things at the right time, you can make sure your freelance work stays in its box and doesn't spread out into every area of your life.



## About this book

This book looks the business side of freelancing from every angle, from setting your strategy to gaining clients, making deals and increasing prices. First and foremost, I want to give you the knowledge and confidence to put your freelance business on a firm footing, so you can build a solid foundation to start working for yourself. Beyond that, I hope to share some ideas that will help you develop your freelance business in ways that you may not have thought of.

My own business is freelance writing and editing, but this book is for freelancers of every kind. No matter whether you're a party planner or a plasterer, a photographer or a physiotherapist, I hope you'll find ideas within these pages that will work for you.

As the title of this book suggests, I'm here to talk business. But I'm not pretending to be a 'serial entrepreneur' or anything like that. The only business I've really succeeded in is freelancing: starting from nothing when I lost my job and



finally reaching the point where I made six figures in the good years. And that's the experience I'd like to share with you in this book.

As you read, always keep in mind that your mileage may vary. Most of the ideas in this book have worked for me, as evidenced by my personal anecdotes, while a few have been passed on by other freelancers I respect. But everyone has a different freelancing journey to make. So use this book as a starting point for your own, and always remember you can use, adapt or reject my advice as you see fit.

Now, let's get down to business.



## **2 YOUR STRATEGY**

How to plan your freelancing journey before you set off.



Going freelance can feel like a leap in the dark. By creating a strategy, you can give yourself the best chance of success.

### **Why strategy matters**

Why do some people do well in life, and others badly? Why do some find prosperity, fulfilment and happiness, others frustration and failure?

One big factor is our starting point, and the things we are given by those around us. Then there's the knowledge we gain as we grow. Other people's actions have an impact on us, and luck and timing both play their part too.

More than anything else, though, the results we obtain depend on the *choices* we make. Those who do well decide what they want, work out how to get it and put their plans into action. In other words, they have a strategy.

Strategy focuses our energies towards a future goal, giving purpose, context and meaning to what we do. Without strategy, our actions are scattered, disordered and impulsive. While we might achieve a few wins here and there, they never come together to form a bigger picture.

We end up trying to move in different directions at once or taking one step forward and two steps back.

Strategy is positive rather than negative. It's about moving towards what we *do* want, not merely avoiding what we don't. 'Anywhere but here' is not a useful destination. But when we consciously choose a goal and keep it in mind, we can make sure we're always moving towards it.

Strategy makes every decision crystal clear. It gives you a yardstick to evaluate the options and opportunities that come your way. If it helps your strategy, you pursue it; if it doesn't, you let it go. Instead of endlessly pondering what you could or should do, you can focus your time and energy on actually getting it done.

### **You are the boss**

When you go freelance, your fate is in your hands, and yours alone. You must take the big decisions and make things happen for yourself. No-one else is coming to the rescue, and no-one else can tell you what to do. While you may seek advice from others, in the end the buck will always stop with you. So while freelancing does offer you freedom, that freedom is not free: you pay for it in self-responsibility.

This is one of the main differences between freelancing and employment. A paid job is a predefined package of responsibilities and rewards that you either accept or decline. But as a freelancer, you are both employer *and* employee. You create your own job role and offer it to yourself. The rewards you receive depend on your own actions and decisions, not your boss's say-so. If you don't like some aspect of your work, you're the only one who can make a change.

## Your goals

*Many men go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after.*

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Your first step is to answer one simple but supremely important question: *What do you want?*

It's a question we all have to answer at every level of our lives, from browsing a restaurant menu to major life decisions about our partner, family, home and work. And freelancing is just the same. Before you can develop a strategy for your freelance business, you have to know *why* you're making the journey. In other words, you have to choose your goals.

Freelancing can be a scary world, particularly when you first venture into it. You can feel like Little Red Riding Hood, all alone in the forest, and it's easy to dwell on the things you *don't* want to happen. You may find that other people make unhelpful remarks about freelance life being a



hardscrabble, hand-to-mouth struggle to keep the wolf from the door. But your goals are an amulet to ward off the monsters. They remind you what lies on the other side; what you're doing all of this *for*. When you keep your goals in mind, you're not recoiling from your fears, but reaching for your dreams.

The table shows some goals you might want to achieve in your freelancing, the motivation behind them and the big questions involved in each one. Some of these questions are practical and objective, looking outwards at your concrete achievements, while others are personal and subjective, looking inwards at your own values and emotions.

Goal	Motivation	Big questions
<i>What</i> do you want to achieve?	<i>Why</i> do you want to achieve it?	
Make a living from freelancing	Work the way you want	How can I find clients? How much can I earn doing the work I want to do? Can I support myself?
Support dependents	Look after family members or others who depend on you Reduce burden on other earners	Am I earning enough to support everyone?
Self-determination	Work independently, not as an employee Define your own work role	Am I doing the work I want to do? Am I in control?
Financial security or independence	Build up savings Improve your lifestyle Work-part time or retire Become financially independent	How much do I want to earn? How can I build up a financial cushion? How much should I spend, save or invest back into my business?