

7 Ways to Get the Most Out of Your Freelance Talent

Checklist for Success:

- ✓ Project Brief
- Goals
- Theme
- Creative Direction
- Milestone & Deadlines
- Contact List

Great! You've found a freelancer that comes highly-recommended, well-referenced, with lots of demonstrable experience solving the challenge at hand – and they fit you brand and culture to boot! But that's just the start of a successful freelancer/employer relationship. Now the real work begins.

Here are 7 tips for getting the most out of your freelance investment:

1. The Project Brief Is Priceless

We hate to break it to you, but a lot of the successful outcome starts with you. No matter the talent you're hiring – writer, designer, programmer, editor, social media strategist – crafting a detailed, specific project brief is an absolute requirement. And we don't mean a vague, skimpy, one paragraph description of what you hope to achieve. An effective brief is a touchstone throughout the project – chock full of clear deadlines, milestones, budgets, creative or technical considerations and mandates, goals and deliverables. Plan a dedicated meeting to walk through the brief with your freelancer so that everyone's in agreement on the what, when, how and why of your initiative. Now's not the time to be vague or to leave things up for interpretation. This is especially important if the freelancer will be working independently or remotely. Your freelancer will love you for this because, to them, time is money – the less that's wasted on misunderstandings that result in do-overs, the more profitable the project.

2. Your Pre-work Is Their Homework

Along with the project brief, successful project delivery also hinges on the effort you put into the discovery phase. Curate all possible background material that will help your freelancer understand the context and content of your project. For a marketing consultant, this may include other strategy documents, branding documents, past project samples, competitive materials or a list of relevant web links. For a writer, it could be that, plus established corporate copy guidelines, examples of copy you like and don't like, and bios and contact details of internal content experts with whom they might be working. Similarly for a designer, provide established branding guidelines along with design samples you think are "on brand" or not. Require your freelancer to study the materials prior to arriving at the office or kicking off the project. And, by the way, a good freelancer would proactively ask you for these materials. If you're working with one who hasn't expressed interest in clarifying background resources, you may want to rethink your talent choice.

3. All Systems Go

Once the project kicks off, the meter's running. Have everything ready for your freelancer ahead of time – especially if they are working onsite for you. Don't frantically race around the morning they arrive organizing their workspace, supplies and materials, or scheduling meetings for them. The freelancer is just as anxious to get to work and stay on schedule, because chances are their calendar is a delicate balance of multiple consulting gigs.

4. Be Available & Communicative

Always be accessible to your freelancer should they have questions or hit a roadblock. Establish regular check-in times to review progress and provide an opportunity for feedback. Identify who is the backup go-to-person should you be unavailable. While most freelancers are self-directed, independent workers, they do appreciate communication, collaboration and assurance that the project is meeting expectations along the way.

5. Deadlines Apply to You Too

Established deadlines help the freelancer balance your project with other ones they are working on. Yes, that's right – most freelancers have more than one client. That means both of you are committing equally to established deadlines at the project's outset. If, however, an unavoidable deadline change occurs on your end, be courteous and warn your freelancer as soon as possible so they have time to adjust their schedule. Managing expectations on both sides of the relationship is key to a harmonious, respectful collaboration.

6. Stay focused

When you work with an effective, talented freelancer, it is tempting to get them working or thinking about other initiatives. But keep them (and yourself) focused on one project at a time. Trust us – they will be thrilled to schedule additional work if they know that you reliably stick to deadlines, timetables, and deliverables.

7. Respect The Talent

Remember that you hired the freelancer for their specialized expertise. While what they are working on is ultimately your responsibility, the expertise is uniquely theirs. If you hired a designer, don't design for them. Don't write for the writer. You've given them all the context and foundation they need to deliver the project on brand, on time, and on strategy. Let them bring it!

We've shared seven of our pointers on making the most of your freelance talent.

What's been your experience?

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