

This is an edited transcript of the May 13, 2015 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled: [Free Agent — Katy Tynan Shares Her Roadmap to Successful Self-Employment.](#)

Announcer: Are you a hard-working, self-employed professional striving for small business success? There is help. Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast featuring candid conversations about successful self-employment.

Stephen Lahey: Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast. I'm Stephen Lahey, and I'll be your host.

My guest on the podcast today, [Katy Tynan](#), is a consultant, speaker, and author. As the world of work and self-employment continues to change, Katy is committed to helping independent professionals like us to adapt to this ever-evolving landscape and thrive long term.

Today, we'll be discussing Katy's exciting new book: [Free Agent: The Independent Professional's Roadmap to Self-Employment Success.](#) Whether you're an experienced solopreneur or a freelancer with a side business, you'll find Katy's guidance on successful self-employment useful and inspiring.

The bottom line? If you're looking for practical strategies to help you become an in-demand resource, then you don't want to miss Katy's wise advice. I hope you enjoy the interview.

Welcome to the podcast, Katy.

Katy Tynan: Thanks so much, Stephen. Great to be here.

Stephen Lahey: As a quick introduction, can you tell us a bit about your professional background and what made you want to become an entrepreneur?

Katy Tynan: Well, that's a great question. And I know that my background is a little checkered. It's kind of funny. I think I had about ten years where I had a really logical progression of a career path where I was in tech and I was doing IT strategy and support and I was sort of moving up the chain, and then I really reached a point in my career where I wanted to do a lot of different things and it's hard to

do that within the construct of a job. It's really hard to say, yeah, I want to do the things you want me to do, Mr. Employer, but I also want to write books, and I want to start companies, and I want to try new things. So, I found that I almost always felt stifled when I was holding a full-time job. I felt like there was more that I could be doing.

So with a background in tech, with the technology work and the operations work that I did, I really started to find that business problems, and business itself, and people involved in business, were really interesting to me. That's when I would say the second half of my career started, which is that I began to really actively pursue entrepreneurship and different projects and projects for the sake of working with people that I really like.

So for the second half of my career, you can sort of see if you look at what I've done, that it's been about opportunities to do more creative things and to get involved with a variety of different projects, and that's what led me down the path of freelancing and working for myself. It's because I just find that that's a really hard thing to do if you put yourself in the box of a 40-hour a week employee.

Stephen Lahey:

Oh, you're so right. I think a lot of people listening can really relate to this—I know I can—because there really is something missing when you can't do things on your own terms. At least, for those of us who become entrepreneurs, I think we can say that. There are a lot of things we want to do and we just feel like, ugh, if I didn't feel like I was in prison in this job, I would stay because the pay is great and the people are great, but I feel like I need to break out and do some things on my own terms. Maybe I'm overstating the feeling, but I think feeling limited is what you're saying, and wanting to break through those limitations basically.

Katy Tynan:

Right. That's right, and I wish actually that companies were able to or willing to—and I'm not sure why they're really not able to or willing to, allow that kind of flexibility for people. I come from a family of teachers. My dad was a teacher, my mom was a librarian, my brother is a teacher. In the teaching profession, you're really encouraged to go out and pursue these things that make you a better teacher and allow you to bring interesting things back to the classroom, so I had grown up with that. My dad had this wonderful benefit with the school he was working at where every

ten years that you worked there, you got a year off at half-pay to go out and pursue whatever you wanted. It's a fantastic benefit. I've never seen it anywhere in the corporate world, but it's that sense that going outside the classroom, going outside and doing different things, was good for you as a teacher and made you better at your job. And so I grew up feeling like that was right, that was true, that you should have interests outside of your work.

But when I took jobs, especially in the IT world, there's really this expectation that you're going to devote every waking moment to your job and, further, that if you build products or you think up ideas, those products and ideas become the property of the company you work for, so you have to be super careful that you're doing things in such a way that you don't lose them to the company that you work for, and that just creates, to me, a really unfortunate dynamic. It stifles people that I think could otherwise do really great work because they feel limited and because the companies don't give them the flexibility to pursue some of those things.

And we have certainly seen a few exceptions, you know, Google is famous for letting people spend 20% of their time on projects of their choice, and you've seen some of the creativity that comes out of that, but I'm not sure what it is about the mechanics of normal companies, for want of a better word, that has prevented them from taking advantage of some of those ways of doing business.

Stephen Lahey:

In March of this year, you launched your book, [\*Free Agent: The Independent Professional's Roadmap to Self-Employment Success\*](#). So, just briefly, what motivated you to write it?

Katy Tynan:

Well, I think the same things motivated me to write it as motivated me to do the work. I chose the title *Free Agent* specifically because I think there's a lot of conversation in this space when you work for yourself about what you call yourself. I've heard the term freelancer. I actually just wrote an article and did a podcast about the please don't call me a freelancer. Freelance is not really what I call myself. But would I call myself a consultant? Well, maybe. There's some baggage that comes with that label too. And so I think it's hard for those of us who work for ourselves to explain what we do in a meaningful way because there isn't a word really for it that has a positive sense to it. So, for me, free agent really describes the best aspects of what I love to do and why I love to do this work. And even the association with the sports world, to me a

free agent is someone who knows their value, who's out looking for the right opportunity, and who's going to find a chance to do their best work, so that, to me, was what I wanted to do.

What motivated to write the book was it's harder than it looks to be a free agent, and I think we've all, those of us who've gone through this, had that sensation of, gosh, I wish there was a better path to do this thing that I really like to do, because we're not teaching kids in school how to run their own businesses, we're not taught that this is a career path that sort of normal people pursue. And so I think once you make the decision that you like doing this kind of work, then there's a real struggle to say, okay, well, how do I choose to do the work I want to do, and how do I get paid for that, and how do I pay my taxes and not get in trouble and make sure that I'm doing the right thing? That was what inspired me to write the book, was this idea that I don't feel like there are enough resources out there to help people who want to pursue this path do it in a way that they feel is structured, is organized, and gets them where they want to go in an efficient way.

So, I felt like I could help people with that, and I put together a lot of the resources and the things that I had learned over the course of making that transition, and I just wanted to offer that out to people and say, look, this is something you can do. It's absolutely achievable, but you do need a guidebook. You do need help getting from Point A to Point B. Nobody gets anywhere without some kind of help and so if I can assemble all of this into one place, maybe it can make somebody else's path a little easier.

Stephen Lahey: In the beginning of your book, you talk about the emerging trend of the "free agent" labor force. Tell us a little bit more about this. What's really happening today?

Katy Tynan: It's an interesting concept, right, because I think we hear an awful lot about how freelancing is booming, and all these people are working for themselves, and it's a big trend. The Freelancers Union and oDesk released a survey in the beginning of this year, I think, maybe end of last year, and counted 53 million people who are working for themselves, so there's a couple of things that are going on there.

First of all, if you look at the actual numbers—and you have a couple of different government agencies which are responsible for

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counting people who work for themselves, and those are the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the IRS, and you also have the US Census, but the IRS and the BLS are really the two big benchmarks where you can go and see who's working independently and in what fields and what are they doing, and it is super complicated. And, believe me, I spent hours and days staring at these massive tables of numbers when I was writing the book.

And one of the things that shocked me when I was doing the research was I had come into it with an expectation that I was going to write a chapter about how freelancing and working for yourself was booming, that there was an influx, that there was a change. But I'll tell you what I found is that the numbers have been remarkably consistent for over 40 years, depending on which source of information you look at, and because they count people a little differently. The IRS counts anybody who gets paid any income on a 1099 as somebody who is working independently, but the Bureau of Labor Statistics only counts people who say they're doing it as a full-time job, so that's their primary source of income. So if you look at BLS, they will say about 10 to 15% of the working public is working for themselves at any given time, and that's been consistent for 40 plus years. And same thing with IRS, if you look, they think about 30% of the workforce gets some of their income from working independently, and that's been consistent for years and years.

So I looked at those numbers and thought, wow, there's no story here. There's no trend. But, actually there is a trend and there is a story. It's just not the story I think that people are talking about and the story that people expect. It turns out that work is disaggregating across the board. Companies are creating and are being pushed to create more flexible work environments and they're becoming, some of them, more interested in having flexible work programs and having remote work programs and leveraging technology to let people work from anywhere—and that's a talent issue—but you're also seeing a lot of specific professions growing rapidly in terms of how many people are out there working independently.

So if you want to see a profession that has double digit growth in the number of people who are freelancing. You can look at photography. You can look at web design. You can look at coders and software developers. You can look at a whole bunch of

specific professions and see that the number of people who are working independently in those specific professions are rising super rapidly.

I just read an article last week that was very interesting talking about investigative journalism and the fact that a lot of in-depth journalism and writing is now being done by freelancers, and it's hard to do. It takes years sometimes to get into a story, and so the idea of sinking a year and thousands of dollars into writing a story that you might never get paid for, and you're certainly not going to get paid for until it's done and delivered and sold to some sort of a media outlet, that's actually a really tough way to live. And so they're concerned, and the journalism industry is very concerned that you're seeing a drop in the number of people doing that work, and therefore we're having less meaningful investigative journalism going on and that that's a problem for society.

So there's pros and cons to how the landscape is shifting, but I think to just sort of broad brush and say many more people are working independently, well, I don't think that's true. But I do think that different groups of people are working independently today, and groups of people who used to work independently are now either not working or having their jobs outsourced to other countries, and so there's a lot of shifting that's going on.

I think it just comes back around to the idea that, as individuals, we really have to be accountable for and understand what that landscape looks like. If we want to create great careers for ourselves, and we want to do great work that we love to do, we have to look at that landscape and see where we fit and not assume that where we thought we would fit when we were coming out of college and coming out of school is necessarily going to be the norm because those things have changed. So, yes, there's a lot of change, there's a lot of stuff going on, but I think it's a little more complicated than most people are thinking about right now.

Stephen Lahey:

I know my listeners are very much concerned day-in, day-out with finding the right clients for their professional services practice. But networking and getting more clients is challenging for most self-employed people. How can solo professionals better network and develop new business?

Katy Tynan:

What I have found is there's this myth, this idea that there is only so much work for certain types of professions. There are lots of management consultants out there, there are all kinds of social media consultants out there, there are lots of technology consultants out there. You can look at that and say, oh my goodness, I'm competing against all these people. And I think that's something that causes people who are coming out of the gate trying to work for themselves, it causes them worry, but it also causes them to do something incorrect, which is to assume that because there are other people out there doing what they do that they're in competition with all those people. It's a little counterintuitive because what I've found over the years, and what most of the people that I work with and work side-by-side with have found, is there's plenty of work. It's just a matter of finding the clients who are the best fit for you.

And, in a lot of cases, because of the sort of serendipitous way that work comes to freelancers, a lot of times it's word of mouth, a lot of times it's referrals or it's conversations passing by in the hallway with people or networking events, I probably get 20 to 30 people a week that ask me, you know, I need someone to help me with this, and it's not what I do. So I spend a lot of time referring people to other people, even if it's in my field because I know people who are a better fit for a particular client or a particular opportunity than I am myself. And if I make those referrals and I help people find work, they do the same for me.

So I feel like what people need to do more of is not worry about the competition factor, but worry more about defining really, really well what you do best and exactly what that thing is. And then when you're networking, you need to be networking with purpose. It's not enough to just go out and meet 100 people or a 1000 people. You need to be able to articulate what you do, articulate why that particular thing is what you do best and bring your best value to, and then you need to go out and network with the people who are closest to your potential clients.

Just as an example of that, I do IT and operations strategy consulting and business operations strategy consulting. So I help primarily small to mid-size companies figure out how to leverage technology, and that's hard. And I know lots and lots of business and management consultants who have clients who have technology challenges and they know that I'm the person they

should call. But I've spend a lot of time networking with and getting to know all the business and management consultants that are around, even though they do things that are similar to what I do, because I don't feel like that's a competitive situation. I feel like that's an opportunity for me to refer work to them and, in return, have them refer work to me, which ultimately makes the world go round. So I think it's not just about volume when you're networking, it's about knowing what your goal is and your purpose is and then actively seeking out the right people in order to do that.

And then the second point that I make in that chapter is again related to quality over quantity. Meet one person. When you go to an event, don't collect 50 business cards and say, wow, I have a big stack. Go meet one person and really dig into what do they do, what are they struggling with, how are they making their business work, what is it that that particular person has that's interesting that makes you drawn to them, and then build a relationship with them, because referrals don't come from people you don't know, they come from people you know and people who feel a connection to you and a connection to your business. So if you're really networking right, what you're doing is building relationships, not just building stacks of business cards.

Stephen Lahey: So I think what you're saying is specialize, know what you do best, and then get to know what other people do best, help them, they'll help you, and stay focused. Stay focused on individuals, stay focused on what your goals are for networking, and it's not collecting business cards. Have I basically summed it up?

Katy Tynan: That's exactly right, and it's a good summary. And I think it's hard. It sounds pretty easy when you and I talk about it, having done it for years, but it took me a really long time to understand the nuances of what was a good use of networking time and what really was just keeping myself busy for the sake of feeling like I was doing something. I had a lot of coffees and lunches before I really started to understand what's productive networking and what's not.

Stephen Lahey: Well, we really didn't plan on it, but let's just talk that just for a moment. What are some ways that we can start to understand how effective it is to do one thing over another, besides just doing it and waiting for results?

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Katy Tynan:

This is a tough one. And I will say this is one of the biggest struggles that I've had and that I think people that I know who are breaking into this business have, which is to understand how to use your time. So the really great thing about working for yourself is that you are suddenly freed of all of the useless time you used to spend in meetings when you were an employee because you don't have to have meetings to make decisions. You don't have to sit around with the rest of your colleagues and go through agendas and have weekly conversations that are a waste of time. But what it does mean is the only structure around your time is structure that you put on your time.

And so I think there's a sense initially when you first start working for yourself of, wow, I have so much time, and then you immediately fill it up by going out and doing networking activities. You go out and talk to a lot of people and you tell them what you do, and they're all really nice and they're all really interested, and a month down the road you still don't have a dime of business and you start to feel frustrated because, wow, a lot of people that you talked to said you were on to something and you still don't have any business. So in that period, which most of us go through, and somewhere in that period you have this light bulb of you know who I need to be talking to, the people who would hire me. Not the people who like me, but the people who might be interested in buying my services.

So that's when you get more narrow, hopefully, you get more specific about who you need to talk to, but you also then need to do something which I personally am terrible at, which is building out marketing collateral. You need to have pieces, whether they're on paper, or whether they're on your website, or they're eBlasts that you're going to send out an email, whatever it is that you're going to do, you need to have this thing that you can send people who would buy from you that describes what you do, because otherwise they forget. Everybody is talking to a million people. Everybody is really busy. And so if you don't have something you can send to someone that allows them to say, yes, I need that and I need that right now. There's a compelling business reason why I need to close this deal with Katy Tynan and have her come in and do this work for me. But if I don't have that process going, I don't have business.

So what you start to do in time management, when you work for yourself, is to realize what activities lead you closer and closer to being able to send out proposals and close business and do work, and then you have to deal with the balance of time of how much work time are you going to allocate versus how are you going to continue to turn that business development wheel even when you have work. So that becomes sort of the second tier challenge, which is now that you have work, you can't work a full schedule or you're not going out and doing business development and you're not doing the paperwork and the management things you need to do to run your business, and then you get behind on those things and that becomes a problem.

So there are a bunch of different time allocation balances involved in doing this work, and for a lot of us it's trial and error before we get it right; but those are some of the things that when I think about how people got started and how I got started, that was the cycle that I found took place. And I think it's helpful if you know that. If you're getting into doing this and you find yourself a month down the road frustrated and beating your head against the wall, and then you go oh, this happens to everybody, and then this is what changes and then this is how you get business, that's a little more positive and you feel a little less stuck. But I really wish I'd known some of those things right out of the gate, and I didn't.

Stephen Lahey:

Yes, and it's so important—figuring out what's working and what's not—because it really is, it's all an experiment, and, yes, there are certain sales and marketing principles that we need to apply. But exactly how they apply to us and the nuances of that, well, I hate to say it, but what works for me may not work for you. As a recruiter, in my first business, I can tell you how I got my first clients. I picked up the phone, 100% cold-calling. There was no social media. My first year in business, I had over \$150,000 in profit. And you may say, well, wow, that sounds really great, I wish I could do that. But do you want to spend nine hours a day on the phone? Do you want to cold call 100 people a week? That approach just wouldn't work for everybody.

And today, the networking and sales tools that are available are just incredible. For example, LinkedIn provides the opportunity for even those of us who are introverts to make quality networking connections, to get our content in front of people on the LinkedIn

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on the publishing platform, to connect with people through InMail, to start a phone conversation, then to meet someone for coffee.

Networking and prospecting today can be a far more efficient process than it's ever been. The opportunities now to reach out and connect with and communicate directly with the right people are just endless now. I'll leave the audience with that thought.

I wish we had more time to talk about this, and I hope that people get your book because they'll get a lot out of it. As we wrap up, I know that a lot of listeners would like to connect with you online and buy [Free Agent](#). How can they do that, Katy?

Katy Tynan: Well, there are a couple ways you can get in touch with me, and I really encourage anybody who's interested in this to get in touch with me. I'm happy to talk, and I'd love to help everybody I can. So my LinkedIn is, if you go searching for me on LinkedIn, I'm [linkedin.com/in/katytynan](https://www.linkedin.com/in/katytynan). But the best place to connect with me is my website, which is [IndieWorking.com](http://IndieWorking.com). You can find all kinds of information there and links to the book and other resources, because really what I feel like is most important is to start to gather together those resources and find ways to make this process more efficient.

I would love to have more people working independently. I think it's a great thing to have more people in this space. It helps us all.

Stephen Lahey: I agree. And thanks again for joining us, Katy.

Katy Tynan: Thanks so much, Steve. It's been great talking to you and great learning more about what you do, too.

Stephen Lahey: And to our listeners, thank you so much for spending some time with us today. If you like what you heard, I encourage you to visit SmallBusinessTalent.com now and subscribe to the podcast by email. When you do, you'll be alerted whenever I post fresh podcast content, of course, but you'll also receive special resources for email subscribers only, including my LinkedIn Guide to Social Selling, and much more. Thanks again for listening today and best wishes for your success.

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