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How the coronavirus took my job: 8 tips for freelance workers in the same boat

People who have built their careers in industries as varied as hospitality to travel to restaurants have seen their work dry up overnight.

By Kaye Holland

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THE CORONAVIRUS has arrived to destroy your freelance career. It seems no self-employed person – small business owners, restaurant workers, beauty therapists, barbers, actors, Uber drivers, designers etc – is safe. And I'm no exception. As a travel journalist, tour guide, tutor and Airbnb host, I'm one of many freelancers around the UK who has been thrown into a hugely unsettling state of limbo.

My work began to dwindle as tourists stayed away and students' exams were cancelled due to COVID-19, before the plug was pulled completely earlier this week.

The irony is that having spent the last decade of my career watching the industry I trained in (magazine journalism) become moribund, I'd embarked on a portfolio career – when an individual has multiple strands of income – so as not to not rely solely on one employer. But the coronavirus had other ideas.

Now, in the time of COVID-19, we freelancers are jobless, hopefully temporarily, but for how long? Weeks? Months? Nobody knows – and in the meantime many of us are applying for unemployment benefits, raiding our savings and desperately searching for whatever work we can find; casual workers and independent contractors can't get redundancy.

Freelance script editor and theatre usher Vanessa Quinney, 40, is another of the millions of freelancers across the country feeling the impacts of the coronavirus on the economy. She was laid off indefinitely when theatres were forced to close.

Work for tour guides like Kaye Holland has dried up amid the pandemic | CREDIT: Dylan Martinez/Reuters

“I’ve lost jobs before but I’ve never been through anything like this,” says Quinney. “I’m frantically looking for work but no one is hiring.”

Quinney, who suffers from depression, isn’t just worried about where her next pay cheque will come from – we all still have bills – she’s concerned about the potentially damaging effects to her mental health: “I’m sitting here, social distancing, asking myself: ‘What can I do?’” Natalie Durkin, 30, who is originally from Durham but lives in London, is also among those struggling for work. She makes her living as an actress and singing teacher but has had cancellation after cancellation.

“I spent two days grieving but it’s time to get practical,” she says. Durkin is now moving back in with her parents up north where she has managed to secure a job as a cleaner. It’s work ... just not as she knows it. When your work is suddenly gone and the immediate future of the country looks bleak it’s hard to stay optimistic but we have to try.

Having watched myself and fellow freelancers stumble and fall over the past few days, I’ve assembled some tips on how to cope when the coronavirus takes your job.

Tips for coping with financial stress amid the coronavirus

Call for help

HMRC has set up a phone helpline to support freelancers and the self-employed financially affected by the coronavirus. Up-to 2,000 experienced call handlers are available to offer practical help and advice. The helpline number is 0800 0159 559 and opening hours are 8am-8pm (Monday to Friday) and 8am-4pm (Saturday).

Accommodation matters

Worried about the roof over your head? Mortgage lenders are offering three-month holidays. The first step is to speak to your lender and explain your financial situation. If you qualify, lenders will grant you a “break” but you’ll still pay interest and will have to make up the repayments in the future. Elsewhere renters can rest assured that they won’t be evicted should they fall behind on rent payments, thanks to new emergency laws.

Transfer your work online

Can you deliver your work virtually? The likes of private tutors and music teachers and personal trainers might be able to deliver their services via Skype. Of course plenty of freelancers – massage therapists, event speakers etc – simply won’t be able to win in the short term. In which case...

Don’t try to hang on in your industry

If it’s simply impossible to continue working in your industry it’s time to “think outside the box,” says HR specialist Sital Ladva. I doubt that I’ll be leading tourists around London attractions any time soon but it’s likely there will be an increased need for delivery drivers, factory and supermarket staff and so on. “I normally advise clients to resist taking ‘survival’ jobs – it slows your search for a better job – but these are extraordinary times,” says Ladva. “We don’t know when life will return to normal so consider your own circumstances and don’t worry about what people think during a pandemic.”

Lean on your community

If you have a community to lean on, now is the time to do so says [Puja McClymont](#), a wellbeing coach helping people reach their career, health and relationship goals while supporting their mental wellbeing. “Join social networks like [Nextdoor](#) and see what you can give,” urges McClymont. “You’ll be doing something good for your neighbours, which will help keep positivity alive.”

Shout your situation from the rooftop

This is no time to adopt a British stiff upper lip. Both Ladka and McClymont advise

telling as many people as possible that you need work – you never know who might be able to help. Ladka suggests “communicating with contacts and signing up to every recruiter” while McClymont recommends using social media to get the conversation started. She says: “Be active on social media sites, especially LinkedIn, to connect with prospective employers. Engage with their posts and expand your network. Do this as often as possible so you train yourself to be proactive and help keep the panic at bay.”

The gift of time

Amid all the stress, you’ll realise you’ve been given the gift of time – as precious and rare as gold in today’s world – so don’t fritter it away. “If you reframe your thinking in this way, you might then be able to improve your skills with an online course, enjoy time with loved ones that you don’t normally get, spring clean your life and perhaps decide if you want to change the way you work when things settle,” says McClymont.

Consume what you can handle

If you’re struggling to cope don’t watch live news all the time which can become overwhelming. “The less unnecessary content you consume, the better this will be on your mental wellbeing,” says McClymont. Take a break, call a friend or professional, get some exercise, engage in self care and don’t blame yourself: you are just a statistic crushed beneath the wheels of history.

Puja K McClymont is offering Telegraph readers struggling with loss of work due to COVID-19, a free 30-minute call to help with direction which can be booked via her website [franklycoaching.com](https://www.franklycoaching.com).

Do you have more tips to add? Please share in the comments below.