



Stoke's Hiring & Managing Great Freelancers Bootcamp



There are over 57 million freelancers in today's US workforce.¹ And that number is only growing.

But it's not just about the sheer number of freelancers out there. It's also about the type of talent that is favoring the freelance lifestyle more than others - and these are the top talents. Having expertise and skills ensures that they will always be in demand, while they have a higher earning potential and greater control over their careers as independent contractors.

Therefore, the question is not whether you should hire freelancers or not.

By not working with freelancers you're reducing your company's relevant talent pool to almost 50% of the available talent in the market. By 2025, you'll be reducing it to 40% of the available workforce.

Can your company handle that talent squeeze?

But here's the challenge. Finding, onboarding and managing freelancers compliantly and smoothly is really hard.

¹ <https://www.fastcompany.com/40481505/freelancers-are-planning-for-the-future-of-work-faster-than-anyone-else>

You know the kind of freelancers we mean. The kind of freelancers that move the needle for your business and bring valuable knowledge and talent to your company. The freelancers who are hard to find and highly skilled. The freelancers most suited to the job at hand.

The reason why it's so hard is because, unlike employees, in most companies no-one owns freelance management.

This leaves you and your team manually keeping track of dozens of freelancers in a messy spreadsheet "system", archiving important legal documents in Google drive folders and then wondering where they're located when tax season rolls around, and spending hours each month approving and paying multiple freelance invoices, with a wide variety of formats, currencies, and payment methods.

This e-book will teach you everything you need to know to find, hire and manage great freelancers — while avoiding these common pitfalls.

This e-book is designed to help you identify the inefficiencies in the way you manage your freelancers and build a scalable process that will allow you to work effectively with freelancers as an extension of your team.

Defining proper processes for hiring, onboarding, and managing freelancers will allow you and your team to save valuable time, gain access to top freelancers, and avoid compliance risk.

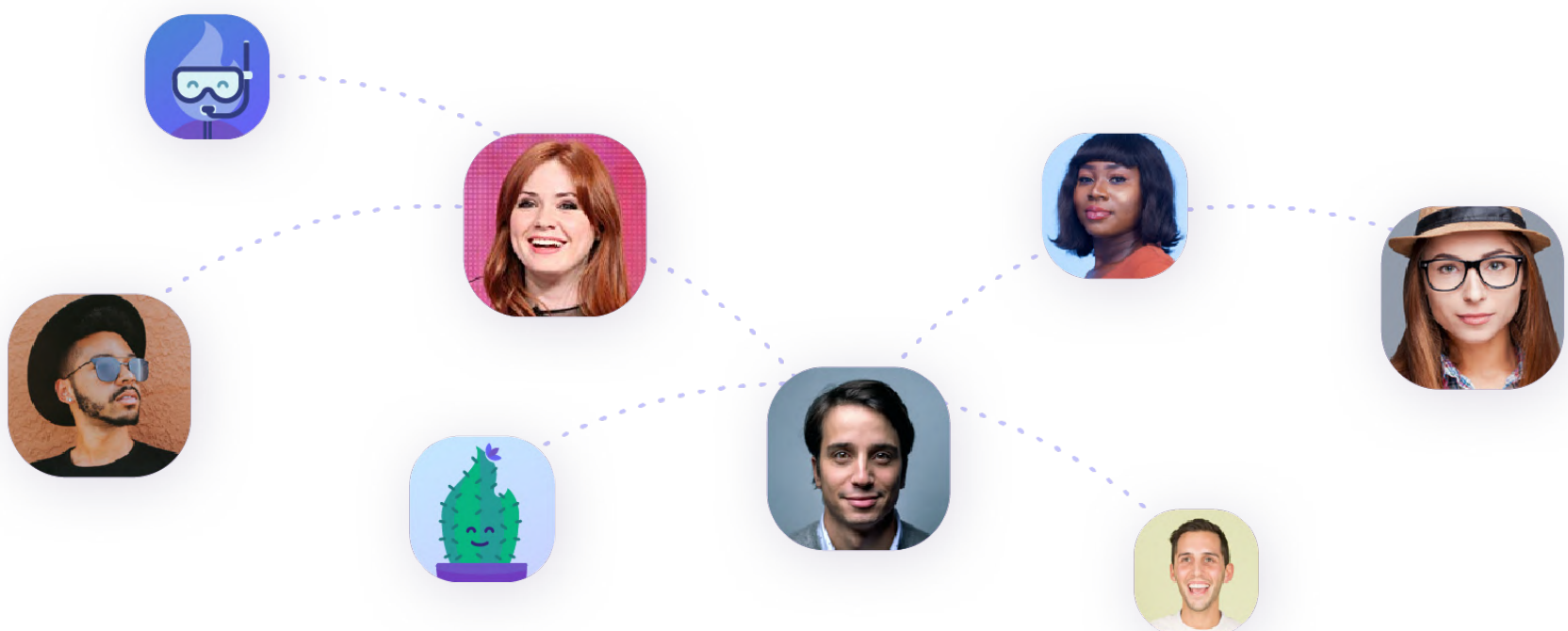


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1. Employee or Freelancer? Making the Choice



There are massive benefits to taking advantage of the freelance revolution. But there are also a lot of great reasons to choose full-time employees, and sometimes a freelancer just won't be the right fit.

1.1 When should I hire a freelancer?

a. I need to quickly hire someone for a job.

According to Harvard Business Review, you can increase viable candidate availability by 430% when you open the job search to remote candidates.² That's especially important these days. A labor shortage has made it tough to find good help.

Opening your search to remote candidates is one good step. But opening it to freelancers provides even more possibilities. The more options you consider, the more likely you'll be able to find someone quickly.

Plus, the hunt for a full-time employee can sometimes take months. You could potentially hire a freelancer tomorrow.

b. I want to test out new activities

When you hire, onboard, and fund the health and retirement benefits of a full-time worker, you've made a hefty commitment. With a permanent hire, what happens if it doesn't work out? You have to go through the process of firing someone. It means involving HR to make sure everything is done the right way. Legally, it's a big hassle.

In contrast, hiring freelancers comes with its own self-correcting system. If one doesn't work out, it's easy to cut your losses and move on.

With freelancers, you also have other options. You can simply end the business relationship when the contract expires. You can move on after a project is finished and move the freelancer to your "talent bench" if you think they might be suitable for other types of projects down the line.

This means that you can easily test new ideas and projects without committing long term.

² <https://hbr.org/2021/09/how-freelance-developers-can-help-your-midsize-business>

c. My team's workload regularly scales up and down.

Freelancers allow you to scale to fit your current demand. Have a really busy quarter? Bring on a few freelancers. Have a slow month? Keep doing what you're doing. No need to hire.

To make this easier, build a "talent bench" of freelance candidates as you go. If you do it right, you can have a list of potential experts at the ready to pull into the game as soon as you need them. Don't need them? Just hit pause.

d. I want to access to niche, top talents

Freelancers allow you to hire someone who has spent years mastering their skills, and are deeply talented at their specific area of expertise. That means you can deliver an amazing project for a relatively small investment, factoring in that they can complete the project faster without devoting any of your internal resources to the task.

For example, if you need to refresh your messaging, generate a new reporting dashboard or prepare a new email marketing strategy for the upcoming year, why not reach out to the people that specialize in that specific skill?

1.2 When should I hire a full-time or part-time employee?

a. I have a large or long-term need for ongoing tasks and projects.

This is a scenario where you need everyday tasks of a similar nature, or you aren't sure exactly what you're going to need.

For example, let's say you need someone to create social media and blog graphics everyday, and you know you'll need this for years to come. Due to the scope and longevity of the work, a full-time employee is likely to be a better fit.

b. I often have a need for last-minute tasks.

Freelancers have other clients. They may not be available for last-minute work. And while a little planning can eliminate many last-minute projects, at times and in certain scenarios, they're unavoidable.

If you regularly have projects which are very difficult to plan in advance for, you may want to hire a full-time employee who can always be on hand and prepared for last-minute work.

c. I need someone with deep knowledge of our product

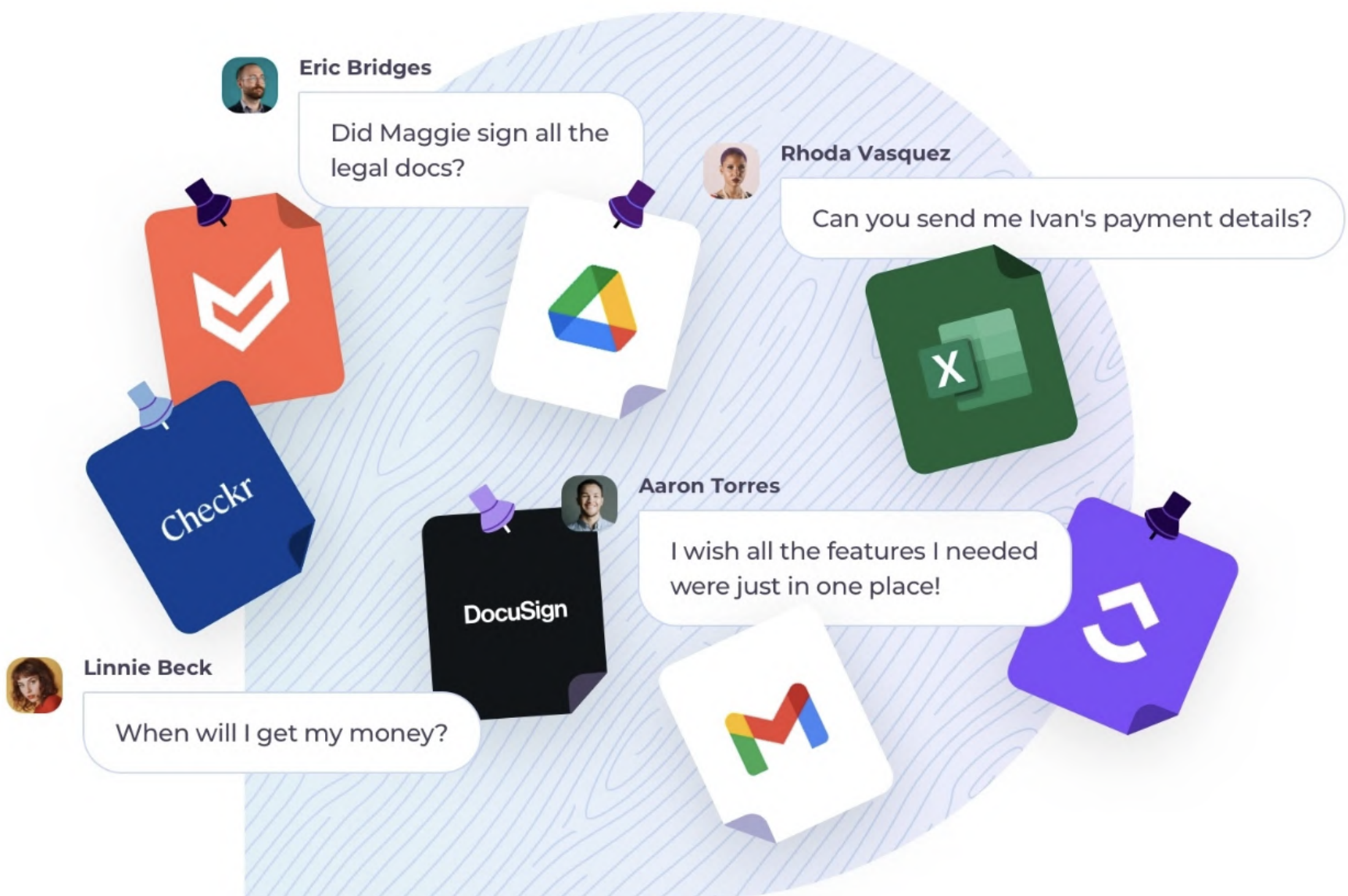
This applies more frequently to complex products and services — like tech platforms. A freelancer likely won't be able to develop the level of expertise that a full-time employee can over the course of years.

One qualifying statement here though ... If you can develop long-term relationships with freelancers, this becomes less of a factor. On top of that, many freelancers in the tech space have processes in place to learn your product.

d. I want someone committed to my company culture and mission.

A freelancer has their own business to run. And other clients to focus on. Which means they may not be as invested in your company's mission and culture as a full-time employee would be.

This often doesn't matter. But it might matter a lot for certain roles — like HR or customer service.



2. Where Do I Find Freelance Talent That I Can Rely On?



Now that you know what you need, it's time to put your recruitment hat on. Anyone who's ever hired someone knows that exceptional talent is — well, exceptional.

And if you choose the wrong freelancer, those exceptions might prove rare.

Fortunately, it's not quite the needle-in-a-haystack proposition you might imagine. If you're going to capitalize on all of the benefits of hiring a freelancer — reduced costs and the flexibility of a pool of talent — you simply need to know where to find them.

2.1 Referrals and Networking

There's nothing that beats word-of-mouth marketing. Ask someone who's hired freelancers before and you'll hear which freelancers really deliver the goods.

What if you don't have a point of contact? We asked pro freelancer Ryan Robinson's thoughts on finding connections through referrals and networking. Here's what he had to say:

“ *Almost all of the best writers I've worked with and have had long-standing relationships with are people who either read my blog, worked with me on a project somewhere, listened to a podcast episode, watched a video or otherwise interacted with me at some point in time. **Having some sort of point of contact with a potential freelancer before talking to them specifically in a hiring context has proven to be really helpful for me in the long run.*** ”

If you don't already have a network where you can get referrals, you might be able to build one by interacting with the people who are already interacting with your company.

Here are a few simple ideas to source freelancers via networking and referrals:

- **Post a job need on your personal and company LinkedIn page.** Ask for recommendations from your network.
- **Build relationships with freelancers before you need them.** Start building relationships with people to increase your network. Comment on and interact with freelancer's content. Message them to see what kind of work they do and keep a record of their contact details and their skills.
- **Interact with freelancers who interact with you.** This is low-hanging fruit. Notice a freelancer commenting on your company's social media posts, blog posts, or other content? Reply and start forging a relationship.

2.2 Identify the Top Freelance Marketplaces

You've probably heard of freelance marketplaces like Fiverr and UpWork. With massive followings, these sites create reliable pools of talent you can draw from, especially for short-term Gigs.

But did you know there are more than 800 freelance marketplaces? Some are mega freelance talent platforms who specialize in thousands of different skills like Fiverr.

While others are focused on very specific talent — like PR, web-development, AI crowd-sourcing, event management and more. There are even geo-based talent marketplaces!

The advantage with these smaller marketplaces is that you have a better chance of finding the specific skills you want without drowning in an endless ocean of options. In addition, some of these marketplaces provide pre-vetting, customized vetting, or the ability to hire a full team and not just a single freelancer, or narrow down the search for you by offering 3-4 top options based on your filters.

You can search for the right freelance marketplace on our freelance platform page:

freelancer-platform.stoketalent.com

When searching for the right freelancer on these platforms just remember that the old adage "you get what you pay for" applies here. Don't just go for the cheapest option. Look for freelancers who have already done this kind of work before and who are truly experienced.

However, you should remember that freelance marketplaces charge anywhere from 5% to 20% from freelancers, as well as taking a fee from your company. This is why top talent usually isn't found on these kinds of platforms.

Once a freelancer builds up a strong customer base, they leave the platform to avoid the fees and to work directly with customers they have an existing relationship with, or who have been referred through word of mouth.

2.3 Post on Job Boards

Job boards can also be a good place to find freelance talent. The main advantage is that they do not charge a fee from freelancers, so you have a chance to find talent who are avoiding freelance talent marketplaces.

However, on a job board, you need to post a description of a job you'd like to be done, and you cannot find and review profiles of freelancers actively looking for jobs.

On more traditional job boards like Indeed and ZipRecruiter, you may also have trouble sorting those looking for full-time work from true freelancers. While you can find all sorts of talent on these boards, they're not as easy to use as dedicated freelance platforms, and they are likely to charge a fee for posting a job.

Similar to freelance marketplaces, there are many large job boards that cover various topics, like:

- **Indeed:** Indeed is the largest job board in the world. So it's a great place to find a wide range of talent.
- **Monster:** Monster is another very popular and large job board.
- **LinkedIn:** You can post a job for free on LinkedIn, and it's a great place to find talent across many industries and areas of expertise.
- **ZipRecruiter:** Rated the #1 job site in the U.S., ZipRecruiter is yet another large job board.

As well as these, there are also niche job boards where you can find amazing, talented freelancers. Here are a few examples:

- [Demand Curve](#) - Growth & marketing jobs at leading SaaS companies, mainly focused on NA opportunities
- [Arc](#) - A job board for software developers where companies apply for freelancers & employees.
- [Angle list](#) - 130k remote & local jobs at the worlds most innovative startups - from seed stage to post-IPO.
- [Swipe files](#) - Sales, marketing and strategy jobs in leading tech companies.
- [WorkingNotWorking](#) - Exclusively for content creatives from copy writers to art directors.

2.4 Build an Internal Talent Directory

Whatever strategy you choose, start forming an internal talent directory for your company. Most companies and agencies fiercely guard and keep their great talent a secret, making it harder to benefit from their referrals. Having an internal talent directory makes it easier to benefit from feedback from other colleagues internally, and ensures you never forget about a great potential resource you have to hand.

This is why you should build a talent pool. Like a basketball team with a "deep bench," you might need someone to shoot the three-pointers and someone else to play defense. You can keep a record of their unique skills and pull them into the game whenever you need them. In fact, Stoke was designed for this very purpose.

You can even use Stoke's free tool to build your talent bench. It will convert your current spreadsheet to an online talent directory in a matter of seconds: <https://www.stoketalent.com/signup/>

3. How to Find the Right Freelancers?



Dig around Leonardo da Vinci's journals, and you'll find something interesting: a project proposal. Da Vinci was trying to win design work from a wealthy patron who needed design work—fortifications, not paintings.

Along with his ideas, da Vinci included in his journal what's essentially a bullet point list of his best characteristics. You might call it a resume. Da Vinci was trying to earn a freelance project like he lived in a 21st-century gig economy.

That makes da Vinci one of the most famous freelancers of all time.

That still leaves one problem, however.

We've described where to look for freelance talent, but once you're looking... How do you sort out the potential da Vincis from the average freelancer?

3.1 Remember, it's not a race to the bottom

Remember the bargain bin for movies at the store? How often did you find a movie you really wanted to see?

That's how it often works in the world of freelancing. If a freelancer can't charge more, it may be because they can't deliver when it counts.

This isn't just a notion of ours, either. There are stats to back it up. One study found a discernible difference in the quality of work from the highest-paid freelancers. Higher pay did correlate with better-quality results.

But before you assume that freelancers won't be affordable, consider they're often less expensive than if you were to hire someone full-time — not to mention it will be quicker to get the ball rolling.

Note: Freelancers you find on job marketplaces are more likely to charge lower rates and potentially provide a lower level of service and have less experience. Freelancers who do their own marketing and stay off marketplaces tend to charge more and sometimes bring more experience and expertise to the table.

3.2 Hire a Specialist

Remember, you're hiring someone for a specific job and not looking for an employee that should be able to support a wide range of tasks and projects. This means you should look for someone with specific skills and experience relevant to the task at hand.

To know whether or not someone is a true specialist and expert for the job, you can request testimonials, case studies, ask them about their experience and...

3.3 Request Work Samples

In the world of freelancing, it's bad form to ask for unpaid work. It essentially asks every freelancer to be a sort of short-term intern before getting paid for their time.

But how do you preview a freelancer's quality before working with them? A paid trial is one way. Another way is to look at relevant work samples.

An experienced freelancer should have a work history or portfolio that demonstrates two things:

- **Skills in their chosen field**
- **Specific, relevant experience in your niche**

For example, if you're hiring someone to write an "About Us" page and a freelancer only has blog posts to show, it reflects a lack of experience. But a wealth of "About Us" pages — in different niches and different styles — shows niche focus along with real-world results. That's what you should be looking for.



4. How to Guarantee You Get the Right Freelancer



It can be hard to separate good freelancers from bad ones. Luckily, one part of working with freelancers is that there's no need for a great commitment when you're starting out. Unlike an employee where you have to dive right in to the deep end of a full-time, long-term relationship, with freelancers you can start differently.

Our recommendation will always be to start small with one simple project. As soon as you realize the freelancer is a good fit, increase the work volume. You will save precious time when you hire this way, since you don't need to spend as much time finding an ideal candidate. All you have to do is review their previous work and get to work. If it's not a good fit - it's not a big issue since it is a small, simple project.

When you hire a freelancer for a big project however, you'll need to include some extra steps to your hiring process to ensure you're making the right choice.

Here are 3 additional steps to go through before making your decision.

4.1 Interviewing your candidate

It can be helpful to interview your freelancer, so here are three top tips:

- **Look for “Show, Don’t Tell” Questions:** Don't ask a candidate “are you committed to us?” You'll just get a yes, because they know that's what you want to hear. Instead, ask about whether the freelancer has long-term clients. Their answer shows their ability to commit and generate long-term business relationships.
- **Throw the Occasional Curveball:** Career expert Penelope Trunk once said there are only three types of interview questions, classic, brainteasers, and behavioral questions. Your job as an interviewer is to find the right mix of these to diagnose a pattern in your freelancer. Ask them about their favorite experience as a freelancer and you've got something to talk about. Ask them about results they are particularly proud of.
- **Be specific:** “Tell us about a challenge you overcame” is general. Instead, ask “If you had a deadline on Friday and weren't close to being done on Thursday, what is your approach?” In a similar way, “What is your greatest weakness?” is a cliché question. Ask what feedback they received from past clients and things they can do better.

4.2 Talking to references

This is likely the easiest method to more deeply evaluate your freelancer. Ask if you can speak to past customers about what it's like to work with them. Here are some questions you could ask:

- What project did you work with the freelancer on?
- Did their work meet your expectations?
- Was it easy to communicate with them?
- What are their greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
- Did you have any issues while working with them?
- Would you work with them again?

There is a potential downside or two here. First, your freelancer can hand pick their referrals. And that means they can avoid clients who had a bad experience with them.

Two, newer freelancers might not have someone who will agree to be a referral for them.

That's where the next two methods come in handy ...

4.3 Home assignment

Consider giving your freelancer "homework," a small project that can show off their skills. For example, let's say you're considering hiring a freelancer to write white papers for you.

Your homework test could be asking them to:

- Outline one post.
- Write the intro and first section of the post.

Then, you can evaluate their homework to see if it matches your company's needs.

Keep in mind two things here.

One, you should always pay freelancers for their work, even if it's just homework. An easy solution? Offer them an hourly rate for doing the homework assignment.

Two, experienced freelancers might be insulted by this request, as they'll likely have a large portfolio of previous work and references. So this might be a better option for newbie or inexperienced gig workers.

5. Onboarding: Legal, Taxes and System Access (oh my!)

You finally found the perfect freelancer - congratulations! You probably want to jump right in and start working. However, if you're part of a company, you need to check some housekeeping items off your to-do list so that you limit the risk to the business.

In most companies, there is little to no structured process for onboarding freelancers, which can be a real bottleneck.

If you want to work efficiently with freelancers, then you can speed up your onboarding by pre-aligning with your Legal, Finance, IT, and HR teams and properly define a clear onboarding process.

Here are the essential steps for almost any onboarding processes:

5.1 Collecting Legal Documentation

We all hope legal issues never arise. That relationships with freelancers are always friendly, beneficial, and clear. That small issues can be solved through candid conversations and rational solutions.

But this isn't always the case. And in those cases, **a freelance contract will protect both you and your freelancer**, outlining the terms and agreements of your work arrangement.

It protects you and your company from future legal claims, miscommunication, changes in scope or compensation, and getting ghosted by your freelancer. It protects your freelancers too. It ensures they get paid an agreed upon amount within an agreed upon timeframe for agreed upon work.

 **It's a win-win.**

And often, it's illegal to work without one.

That's true in many U.S states and countries. Countries created these laws, like New York's Freelancing isn't Free Act of 2016⁴ or the Philippines's freelance protection law, to protect freelancers from exploitation and withheld payment.⁵

⁴ <https://hbr.org/2021/09/how-freelance-developers-can-help-your-midsize-business>

⁵ <https://hrmasia.com/bill-to-protect-freelancers-in-the-philippines-fast-tracked-for-approval/#:~:text=The%20proposed%20...>

Include in your contract all contact details, pricing and rates, timelines for deliverables, ownership and copyright agreements, data protection clauses, and early termination or kill fees. Make sure that both your freelancer and a company representative sign on the dotted line.

In some cases, you may also want to sign additional legal documents like an Intellectual Property agreement, a Non-disclosure Agreement, or a Data Processing Agreement (DPA). You may also want to run background checks, or ensure that your freelancer has the right insurance for your industry. You should consult with your legal teams to see exactly what they feel is needed.

5.2 Handling freelancers' Taxes

Unlike with a full-time employee, your company doesn't need to withhold taxes for freelancers.

Freelancers are solely responsible for paying their income, social security, and medicare taxes. This simplifies things for you. And also saves you money. It's one of the reasons that freelancers cost 30% less than full-time employees.⁶

So zero responsibility on your end, right? Not quite.

In order to know whether your freelancers are required to pay taxes to the IRS, you are obligated by law to collect a W9 (for US-based) or W-8BEN (for foreign citizens). This should be collected during onboarding, and will contain all of the tax identification details you'll need to report each year.

When filing season rolls around, if you have paid a freelancer \$600 or more during that year, you need to report what you paid them to the IRS using Form 1099-NEC.

Penalties can be steep if you miss filing deadlines or fail to collect and file this information.

5.3 Handling IT Systems Access

In order to comply with data privacy and compliance regulations, it is essential for companies to document all systems that freelancers are granted access to, including internal systems and tools provided by third-party vendors.

Additionally, if properly documented, then it will be able to easily off-board freelancers when their projects, or longer-term relationship, is completed.

The same should go for equipment and resources, whether that's an expensive design tool, or a simple office stapler. It's important to keep track of what you've given your freelancers in detail.

⁶ <https://www.stoketalent.com/blog/what-is-a-1099-employee/>

6. Gain A Competitive Edge by Becoming Your Freelancer's Favorite Client



If you've found yourself a great freelancer, and onboarded them comfortably to work with your company - you don't want to lose them. We're not talking about being your freelancer's best friend, but we are talking about becoming their bestie client.

The client they'll work with over and over again. The client they'll refer to other freelancers. The client they'll clear their schedule or go the extra mile for.

Here are 7 ways to make it happen:

› Tip #1: Create a smooth onboarding process

Just like with a customer, those first 90 days are essential.

Start as you mean to go on, with a smooth and straightforward onboarding for your freelancer. Collect their contact information, sign and save all the right legal documents, share payment information with finance so they can get their ducks in a row, and make sure the freelancer has access to all the IT systems they will need to do their job, whether that's the Figma account or the Asana board.

Don't forget to align clearly on payment terms and expectations for communication and availability, and make a few introductions to strategic or key members of the team who can act as Subject Matter Experts or points of contact when you aren't around.

› Tip #2: Respect their work and knowledge

According to Forbes, *"Employees want to feel that their opinions matter and that their leaders value their input. It doesn't make sense to hire someone unless they will add value to your business. Make them feel that every day by giving them responsibility and respecting them enough to step back and do what you hired them to do. When they feel respected, they will respect you in return."*⁷

This is no less true of freelancers, many of whom likely left full-time employment, in part, to escape disrespectful, controlling bosses.

⁷ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2018/09/25/12-traits-bad-bosses-have-in-common/?sh=695375556266>

› Tip #3: Give and take constructive feedback

While respecting your freelancer is key to building a good relationship with them, that doesn't mean avoiding constructive feedback when it's needed. Constructive feedback, on both sides, is a great way to build a long-term relationship.

If you don't communicate constructive feedback, the relationship is unlikely to last long, as you'll continue to be unhappy with elements of your freelancer's work.

When sharing your feedback, be honest and open. But kind and respectful.

Next, ask for your own feedback! This can improve your onboarding processes, communication, and entire freelance management program. Consider asking for feedback at regular intervals — like the end of a project or at the end of every quarter.

› Tip #4: Pay freelancers on time

Freelancers often earn inconsistent income. Some months are great. Others might be tight. In tight months, your late payment could be the reason they can't pay their mortgage.

Paying late is simply not what a bestie client does. End of.

› Tip #5: Respect Their Wish for Flexibility

46% of freelancers choose their job because of the flexibility.⁸ A good way to lose a freelancer? Limit their flexibility.

Think about nixing daily or weekly meetings at rigid times that don't fit their schedule. And don't ask them to hop on "a quick call" whenever you have a question. And definitely don't expect them to immediately answer your Slack messages or emails.

These aren't even good practices for your full-time employees. So they certainly aren't good practices for freedom-loving freelancers.

› Tip #6: Be appreciative of their hard work

If you love your freelancer, let them know! You could do this by sending a small thank you gift, or offering some company swag, or by writing a testimonial on LinkedIn or their preferred freelancer platform. Freelancers may feel awkward asking for testimonials, so it's great to be proactive with this one.

Take things a step further by offering to refer them to your friends or colleagues. After you do, shoot them an email saying something along these lines, "I recommended you to my colleague, Sarah. She may get in touch soon about a freelance project."

Simple for you. Very meaningful to them.

⁸ <https://ddiy.co/freelance-statistics/>

Still worried about freelancer onboarding, management and compliance?

Why not consider a freelance management platform like [Stoke](#) to reduce the time you and your team spend chasing after — and worrying over — sourcing, legal docs, tax forms, payment terms, budget approvals, granting system access and much more.

If you're committed to beginning your journey to leverage the amazing pool of freelance talent out there, Stoke can help you get rid of all the administrative, financial, and legal headaches that come with it.

**Book a demo with Stoke Talent
to begin your journey**

[Book a Demo](#)