

The Modern Editor Podcast – Episode 11: The Best (And Worst) Things About Freelance Editing

Tara Whitaker: [0:03] Welcome to *The Modern Editor Podcast*, where we talk about all things editing and what it's like to run an editorial business in today's world. I'm your host, Tara Whitaker. Let's get to it.

Tara Whitaker: [0:18] Hello, and welcome to today's episode. So, we are kicking off a month of celebration today. So, at the time of this recording, it is October 2022, which means that I have officially been in business this month for a decade, which is wild and has not sunken in all the way. But here we are. So, this month—so, today's episode and the next three episodes are going to be all about sort of pulling back the curtain on the freelance editing industry and sharing all the things—the good, the bad, everything in between. And today, we're going to specifically talk about what I think are the best and worst things about freelance editing. Now, this is a real honest look from my perspective, from my business. There's obviously going to be different opinions out there. And not everyone is going to agree with the things I say because everybody has a different business journey, right? But this is going to be just my honest take on the things that I have experienced over the last ten years that I feel are either a pro or a con, or maybe even a little bit of both. I think that in the industry, there's the stuff that I see is a lot of either super negative things, or it's really overly positive, moving into that toxic positivity and not actually real life. So today, we're going to keep it transparent and keep it real.

Tara Whitaker: [1:57] So we're going to start off with the positive or what I view as the positive. Number one: I could never have imagined how incredibly rewarding it is to own your own business. That doesn't mean it's easy or sunshine and rainbows all the time. But it is so rewarding. From the editing perspective, to see someone's work take shape, to take their story, to elevate it, to help them share that story in the best way possible—uhh! There's just—there's no greater feeling as an editor; it's just so rewarding. And then from a coaching perspective, to see someone have one of those lightbulb moments or to make a connection that they hadn't made before on their own, because coaching is not, you know, telling someone what to do or what to think, it's just asking questions to help them come to that conclusion. It's such a special moment, and I never could have predicted how rewarding it was on both ends of the spectrum. So, from that alone, I mean, that just makes everything worth it. And as an editor, there's, there are few greater things than seeing your name in the acknowledgments of a book. Like, I get a kick out of that still. And I don't know if I ever won't. I mean, I hope I don't. That makes, that would make me sad. But I always love seeing that. And it's just such a joy and a proud moment. And I think it will always be like that. So that's number one.

Tara Whitaker: [3:38] Number two: (You're going to see a theme here.) I very much like to be in control of lots of things that I'm working on. But I 100% get to control who I decide to work with. You know, when you're in a corporate job, you oftentimes don't get that option. And for freelance editors, we get to pick. We get to decide the clients we work with, the types of projects we do, the types of editing, the genres, I mean,

everything. We have full choice in the matter. And that is such a benefit. We're not wasting time on things that don't matter to us, that don't align with our values or any of that. We get to choose, and having that choice is amazing. And to go along with that, because you get to choose who you work with, you work with some pretty amazing people. Of course, there are, you know, the not-so-great clients. Let's be real here. There's always those. But hopefully, the great clients far outweigh the not-so-great. And when you get to decide who you work with, those people never cease to amaze me. They're so talented. Whether they're writers or editors or business owners—whoever—they are so passionate about what they do—what they get to do, not what they have to do. You can tell when you speak to them how passionate they are about their craft, whatever that may be. And especially writers, of course. I mean, they're pouring their hearts out onto the page, quite literally. And you get to see firsthand that talent come through, and you get to help shape that and make it as best as it can be. That's a real honor. And it's so cool to work with truly talented people like that. I just, yeah, I can't get over it.

Tara Whitaker: [5:39] Now, this kind of goes on a different topic here. But also with the control, is that you get to control how much money you make. Now, it can be scary to take the leap from (let's assume) a steady paycheck at a 9-5 job—or some sort of job that has, you know, a weekly or bi-weekly or monthly paycheck—into freelancing when you don't have that. That leap is real. And it's incredible, though, to think about how you set your rates, which, again, I know can be scary, and we're totally gonna have that conversation here—stay tuned in a future episode. But you get to charge what you want, obviously with some parameters. You can add services whenever you want. You can add courses or coaching or events or webinars or workbooks. I mean, you can do anything, you can sell anything, and you can make money doing anything. I mean, anything. I'm talking more along the lines of, you know, editing or writing stuff, but you really can make money doing anything. Just take a look at any social media page to see how people are making money. And I love having that control that if I want to make more money, I can just take on another client, or I can try and add a new service or—I'm simplifying it a little bit here. But it's much easier sometimes to do that than it would be at a “full-time job,” where you have to ask for a raise, and if they say no, then that's that. I mean, there's no workaround. You're going to continue to make the amount of money you make unless you start a side hustle or find a new job. But with freelance editing, you can control how much money you make, and having that control is amazing.

Tara Whitaker: [7:29] And to go along with that, you can pick your schedule. You don't have to work 9-5; you can work 5 pm to 3 am. I mean, you can take breaks during the day. That flexibility, I never knew how much I craved it until I got a taste of it after I quit my full-time job. And I loved it. I mean, for the most part, I still work typical business hours, usually. But it's so nice to be able to go to a doctor's appointment in the middle of the day. Or maybe I need to grab some groceries, or I just feel like getting something like ice cream in the middle of the day. I can go do that, and I don't have to report to a boss or clock in or clock out. Or if I need to travel somewhere for family or friends, I can take my work with me. That flexibility, that alone, would make me seriously, seriously consider ever going back to some sort of structured job. If I had to, I would. But that flexibility would really be a kicker for me.

Tara Whitaker: [8:34] And to go along with that, too—being my own boss—it's pretty great. And I'm putting it in the middle here. So, this is kind of like the last pro and the first con because it can be great and not-so-great. Obviously, you don't have to listen to a boss. You don't have to follow rules that you think are stupid. You don't have to deal with someone else. But on the flip side, you have to hold yourself accountable. There's no one else there to, you know, be over your shoulder making sure you do your work unless you turn to others for that accountability, which is where this is going to lead me into the con section. So, for me, when I was first starting out, I had no idea who to ask for help. I, you know, when you had a grammar question or any question at all about business, I had no clue who to ask. And then, if I ended up finding someone, I was too scared to ask because I didn't want to look like I didn't know what I was talking about. So, that—having that support was really detrimental for me in those first years of business and something that I really wish I had looking back.

Tara Whitaker: [9:48] And that's one of the huge reasons why I started the Freelance Editors Club is to have that supportive, nonjudgmental group of editors who all had each other's backs and who we can all ask questions to without feeling like we don't know what we're talking about. Because we all have silly questions sometimes, let's be honest. And there's no judgment in here at all. And I just wish I had found that back then. Maybe it did exist back then, but I just didn't find it; I didn't know where it existed. And freelance editing can be lonely, or owning your own business can be lonely. The last two years—again, it's October 2022—have really driven home the fact that while working from home is amazing and there are certainly perks when you're able to work from home (if you are), it can be very isolating. And we're still human beings. And we still need connection in whatever form is comfortable to us. Whether it's in-person or virtual, via text, via phone, you know, through video games. Whatever the avenue, we still crave that human connection. But when you're working from home and are so buried in editing, you forget that you need that human connection. So again, that's where the Club comes into play.

Tara Whitaker: [11:08] Another con: I wish I had known how much work can ebb and flow. And this gets better with time the longer you're in business. But I never realized how some months you could be absolutely swamped with work. You know, you're living large, making all the money, you're super busy, and then the next month you're completely twiddling your thumbs with nothing to do, and there's no money coming in. And then you're like, *uhh, what do I do now?* I had no idea it ebbed and flowed that much because when you're in a full-time job with a steady paycheck, it doesn't matter if you have a busy or slow week. That paycheck at the same amount comes at the same time every—whatever—week or every other week. It didn't matter how busy you were. And now that I'm adjusted to it, it's fine. But if you're just starting out, know that it can be very, very rollercoaster-y. And to combat that, if you can, I would try and have some savings set aside for those slow months so that you're not completely panicking. And you can still work on, you know, marketing or updating social media or doing anything you can to drum up some business without having to worry about the financial aspect. Now, I know that's not completely possible, and it's honestly something I wish I had done more of when I quit my job. I wish I had padded my savings way more. It would have alleviated a lot of stress. But I didn't. So, I made it work. And you know, you can do

the same thing. But if I could go back, I would change having a little bit more savings. And I would also be sure that when I did have those busy months, that I made sure to have money in the account and not, you know, blow it all on “business expenses.” Like, “Oh, I need a new computer!” “Oh, I totally need a new office chair!” You know, having that cushion is going to be a big, big help.

Tara Whitaker: [13:08] And then the last thing that goes along with the money, too, is that things like taxes and budgeting and bookkeeping—that's all your responsibility as a business owner. You know, when you're in a W2 job (in the US, at least), you know, your employer takes out your taxes for you and pays your taxes for you. That's not a thing when you're a freelancer. You have to do that. You have to make those tax payments, and you have to figure out how much to do. How—you know, as a freelancer, it's every quarter here in the US. You know, IRS things in the US are just... So, my suggestion is what I do is, I have an accountant. And I've had an accountant since college. Because I've been very upfront on previous episodes—I don't do well with numbers. And I would rather hire and pay someone to do that for me who is an expert in their field. Just like people pay editors as experts in their field. But having all of that money responsibility can be a little overwhelming, especially if your relationship with money is not as healthy as it could be. Which mine was not either, which is a whole 'nother episode, but also something to keep an eye on if you are thinking about freelance editing.

Tara Whitaker: [14:30] So that's it. Those are my opinions, my thoughts on the best and worst things about freelance editing. That's certainly not an exhaustive list. There are plenty more in each category, but I didn't want to keep this episode—you know—I didn't want to record for ten hours. But it gives you something to think about if you're thinking about getting into business and just gives a more realistic view of what it's like. It is all sorts of things. It's fantastic. It's rewarding. It's something to be proud of. But it's also hard and stressful at times. And you know, it's a lot different than having an employee job. But for me, at the end of the day, right now, the pros far outweigh the cons. And I'll stay in business until that becomes untrue. Hopefully, it doesn't, but you never know what will happen. It's all individual to you and your business and your life. And it's been challenging, and I've had all the emotions multiple times. But I wouldn't change my decision ten years ago for anything. So that says something right there, I guess. Ten years. Wahoo!! Goodness.

Tara Whitaker: [15:41] So, if you're an editor, I do want to hear your pros and cons because I know that they're going to be different from mine. I'd love to hear them. So, send me an email hello@tarawhitaker.com or DM me on Instagram. And if you're listening to this and you're not an editor but you're thinking about becoming one, and if you have some questions about all of this, let's chat. Grab a free call with me on my website tarawhitaker.com, and I will continue to keep it real for you. So, this is the first in the series, I guess, of lessons learned and things—the tea in the editing industry. So, stay tuned over the next episodes, and I'm going to have a fun giveaway here coming soon. So, keep your ear out for that. But until next time, keep learning, keep growing and know that you've got this!

Tara Whitaker: [16:34] Thank you so much for tuning into today's episode. If you enjoy *The Modern Editor Podcast*, I would be so grateful if you left us a review over on iTunes. And as always, you can head to tarawhitaker.com to connect with me and stay in touch. We'll chat again soon.