

G Thomas Hedlund



4 MOVES THAT  
TURNED ME  
INTO A MILLION  
DOLLAR  
FREELANCER

## The 4 Moves That Catapulted Me ~~from Struggling~~ to a Million Dollar Freelancer

Every couple of years, the freelancing world changes. Like, massive, tectonic shift changes.

Yet, few people even notice. They're too caught up in social media, bidding on jobs, or just 'going with the flow' to recognize the earth shaking beneath them. By the time the rattling's over, you have a new influx of people freelancing.

In other words, the competition has increased. Dramatically so at times.

That means, if you're new to this thing, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. It's easy to feel like you're never going to get things working the way you want. Or hope. It's easy to feel like you're just never going to get that first (or second or third) job.

It's not scientific, but I'd estimate that about 95% of *all* new freelancers out there bid and bid and bid and get *maybe* one to two jobs a month. At best. These days, that estimation may be generous.

I've watched and talked to newbies and heard their struggles. I know all about them; I was there once, too. And I'll tell ya ... compared to when I started, this is a different beast. If it was a fire-breathing dragon when I got started, today it's a seven-headed beast with 10 horns, eyes everywhere, talons as sharp as Samuri swords, and flames that wrap around its entire frame.

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On the platform I've been using for years, you get a new freelancer 'badge,' an indicator to prospective clients that you're new and perhaps they might find value and quality if they look more closely. Four years ago, about half of all bidders on projects had this new moniker. Today, even though the number of bids per project has quadrupled, you might find just one or two per 40 or 50 bidders with the 'rising talent' badge.

Click on the profiles of all these other 'non-new' bidders and you'll be amazed at how many have *not a single project to their name*. They've been bidding and striving for work for *at least* six months (the time you get those new freelancer badges). At least. That means, even though they've been bidding, they're not getting work.

Why is that?

Could be a number of reasons, to be honest. Everyone is different, which means everyone makes different choices. However, I've tested myself as a 'new' freelancer multiple times throughout my career, to see how I'd fare now, just starting out with no experience, no portfolio, knowing what I know now.

Every single time, I start getting work almost immediately.

Why is that? Is it my experience? No. I don't take my portfolio of work with me. Just a few basic samples I did years and years ago. Is it my skills? Perhaps, but without a solid portfolio, how are clients supposed to know that? Is it my charm, wits, or wonderful personality?

Come on, stop laughing.

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But no, it's not those things, either. I figured out the solution. It's a lot of things, to be honest, but four stand out. Head and shoulders above all others. That's what this short book is all about.

The four moves I made that catapulted me from meh to a million-dollar freelancer. Ready to start making that kind of money freelancing, too? Good.

Let's go.

### Move 1: I Got Serious

I know. You're 'serious' about freelancing. You might be working a full-time job but you want to take charge of your future. You'd like to quit your job someday. Or you need some extra money for bills right now. Or you may have a child with special needs and would love to be home more for them. Or you have a dream vacation you'd love to take and can't possibly get there unless you find a way to bring in extra cash now. Or you're going through a tough breakup or divorce and now you're the sole breadwinner and have to figure something out.

Whatever your motivations, it's possible. And yes, you might very well be 'serious' about freelancing, but *how* serious are you?

### I didn't take it seriously enough at first.

It was easy. Freelancing was cheap. A nominal membership fee monthly and that was it. I didn't need a website. I didn't need a new resume. I didn't need a suit and tie.

Just a membership.

Unfortunately, when things are 'cheap,' they're not always viewed as valuable. It's too easy to take things for granted.

I certainly didn't, unfortunately. Not at first. Here are 5 ways I *didn't* take this freelancing gig seriously (and how it left me struggling).

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1. **My proposals were 'mailed in.'** I'd read the job description ... barely. I skimmed 'em. I saw the headline or subject, thought, 'Yeah, I can do that' and just copied some basic proposal and pasted it in.

Waste. Of. Time.

Sure, it *can* work, but not always. Not often. In fact, rarely does it work. Someone who's willing to spend their hard-earned money on a freelancer doesn't want to deal with copied and pasted proposals.

My grandmother could do that and she's been gone for over a decade.

I realized I needed to take this seriously. That meant paying close (careful) attention to each and every project I considered. I had to understand not just what the client said, but what they didn't say as well. Did you know you can learn a lot about someone by the things they *don't* say?

All you have to do is listen.

Once I stopped 'mailing it on' with my proposals, I began them by speaking directly *to* the client. If they mentioned their name or I could figure it out somehow, I opened with a 'Dear so-and-so' or more informally, 'Name'.

Then I spoke to their need. Pain or pleasure. What did they *want* out of this project? I stopped mailing it in.

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2. **I did it 'when I felt like it.'** Freelancing is liberating. You can work whenever you want, however long (or short) that you want. It's great.

But it also sucks. It sucks because you need to be disciplined. If you're not bidding and working on a consistent schedule, you'll fail. You'll lose.

3. **I didn't respond to inquiries right away.** Sometimes I was away, at the park, playing tennis, or watching TV when a message came in from a prospective client on a proposal I put out there.

Not gonna cut it in this age.

I realized I needed to respond *as quickly as possible* to inquiries. That **immediately** made a world of difference. Clients appreciated the rapid response, the attention to detail I showed by answering *all* their questions, and I started winning more projects.

4. **I assumed there was 'always tomorrow.'** When you're freelancing, there's always tomorrow to bid or find new work. Tomorrow then turns into next week, which turns into next month. Before I knew it, I didn't have any bids being considered.

When you don't 'keep the funnel full' (even if you're not winning *anything*), you fall behind. Quickly.

I had to turn that around and once I got **consistent** with the bids (like, doing it every day), the work came in steadily.

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Understand this: you can find work, even if you're scattered with your bids, proposals, and processes, but it won't be consistent. Not until you get serious about this.

### **Think of Freelancing as a Job**

No, you don't want to work for someone else anymore. I get that. I do. That's one of the reasons I jumped into freelancing. But I did it starting back in 2006, when most online bidding platforms were relatively new. Untested. Long before Fiverr and Upwork.

Today, competition is off the charts tough, and that's why you need to treat freelancing like it's a business. *Your* business.

When you can do that, you'll be ready to tackle my next move.



### Move 2: I Invested in My Profile

A lot of people will likely *immediately* think **financial** when they hear (or read) the word 'invest,' but that's not what I mean here. You can invest in something with your time, effort, concentration, or even friendship and loyalty. Those (typically) don't cost you anything.

Your profile is one of the first things *anyone* will see of you when considering hiring you. Depending on the platform you choose or your method of seeking freelance work (or you could go business to business with your proposals), that profile is gold.

It's the light that shines in the darkness.

That's why your profile **must** be solid, in every way possible. There are plenty of 'freelancers' out there who don't fully understand the difference between their cover letter (proposal copy) and their profile.

Your proposal is your *introduction* to the prospective client. It needs to grab their attention. Your **profile** is your resume. When you apply for a job, usually you put together what? A cover letter *and* a resume, right?

It's the same thing here.

And guess what? Professionals will tell you to spend enough time and effort getting your resume polished, even if that means hiring someone else to do it (or to refine the copy so that it impresses at every level).

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While not designed or set up the same as a traditional resume, your profile should do the same thing: highlight your experience, what you're good at, and any accolades or direct accomplishments you've achieved to date (that amplify why *you* are the perfect candidate for a project).

### So, How Do You 'Invest' in Your Profile?

You can do this in one of two ways. First, you can spend ample time writing, editing, rewriting, editing, rewriting again, editing your profile until it's perfect.

*"But I'm not a writer,"* you may say.

Fine. No problem. You know the basics of writing, correct? This is all about refining your professional experience and skills down into a concise paragraph or two so people can immediately understand your essence, who you are.

If you don't trust your skills, hire someone. I would advise that you not hire a newbie, young, inexperienced writer, though. Don't hire someone for whom English (or your primary language) is not their first language. Yes, many people who speak something other than English as their first language can write incredibly well, but they may miss some key details or cultural contexts that can be costly.

Avoid the high schoolers or college students. They may be good, but knowing grammar and shaping words to hit the right emotional triggers are two completely different beasts and the latter comes with time and maturity.

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Don't expect a filet mignon if you're only willing to spend for chuck round. In other words, if you think you're going to get an exceptional profile written for you for \$10, good luck.

Make the right investment. Aren't you worth it? \$50, \$100, or even \$200 is reasonable, so long as you select properly. I've seen plenty of writers out there charge \$200 and more for a simple one-page profile who were absolutely horrible. The client didn't seem to know the difference, but we experienced professionals can immediately tell, and often, so can your prospective clients.

Your profile is crucial, so invest in it, whether with your time and effort or financially. Make sure it's solid and stands head and shoulders above the rest of those freelancers competing with you in your chosen industry and niche.

### Move 3: I Built a Better Portfolio

Your portfolio is your **body** of work. It's the samples you provide. Most freelancing platforms out there give you space to store your portfolio there, but I find having it as part of your cover letter or gig offer, as attachments, to be just as effective, if not more so.

The less work your prospective client has to go through to find more about you, the better. They're getting bombarded by proposals these days, and most of them have *no clue* what they want or need, so you must be able to show them in a matter of seconds.

Make your portfolio samples small files, professionally appealing (looking good), and quick loading. Also be certain that if you produced this work for another client that you have permission from them (preferably in writing) to use it as a sample.

### What Should You Use as Samples?

Your best work. The *best* of the best. I have completed over 50,000 individual projects (articles, blogs, press releases, web pages, copy, etc.) through the years and have about 200 potent samples as part of my portfolio arsenal. I refer to it as an arsenal, because your portfolio *is* your weapons cache.

It's what you'll use to go after your competition. They'll be charging against you with swords and shields and spears, so be sure to have the right armor and weapons to counter them.

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Some of my samples are old, like ... 10 years old or older. If they stand the test of time, great, but I'll modernize the cover or format or layout to be pleasing to the eye. Remember, people naturally **judge a book by its cover**, and they'll judge your work by how it *looks* first.

Whether you're a writer, programmer, data entry specialist, paralegal, medical professional, or whatever your chosen path, every sample should appear polished and professional.

### What About Protecting Those Samples?

I recommend converting your samples -computer code, articles, art, graphic design, etc.- into a PDF format. That way you can include a watermark and lock the page. When you lock a PDF, it means it can't be copied and pasted. Sure, someone could manually copy it, but the way I see it... if they really want to go through that effort, more power to 'em.

The watermark should be your name or business name. That way no one can simply download, rename the file, and then pass it off as their own (you find those people out there, believe it or not). Kind of hard to explain to a prospective client why you're claiming the portfolio of work is yours when the watermarks have someone else's name on it.

### Never Settle

When it comes to your portfolio, never settle for 'good enough.' Always strive to keep improving your work, your samples, and their presentation (how they look). That means you may have produced an awesome article five years ago, but could it be even better with the skills and experience you've gained since then?

Of course it can, so spend some time polishing your samples every couple of years. You might be surprised at how much you improved.

You may also discover that more recent work is simply better than what you had in the past, as it should.

### How Many Samples Should You Have?

As many as you need. I say three is the bare minimum. If you don't have *anything*, you do. I won't get into that here, but in my freelancer training course (quick course), *The Master Freelancer*, I go into this in more detail, walking you through the process of 'finding' the samples you probably already have.

As you build your portfolio, have enough samples that you can pick and choose best based on the project description and details. And just keep building up your portfolio over time.

### Move 4: I Went to War

Ever gone to war? I haven't. Not real war. I know plenty of people who have though, and from everything I've gathered, read about, and watched on TV and in documentaries, it's brutal. It's ugly. It's frightening. And it's life-changing. Not just for you, but your enemy.

When I talk about going to war as a freelancer, I'm not trying to disparage the realities of actual war, but rather using a euphemism that makes sense.

Scouring job posts, reading descriptions, learning what you can about the clients, putting together a cover letter, selecting the **best** samples to share, waiting, waiting, and waiting for a response or inquiry that -more often than not- never comes, and then responding to a host of questions when they finally do come in ... it's exhausting.

Most people I've witnessed and spoken to about freelancing put a couple of bids out one day, get disheartened and don't do it again for a few days, then try again with one or two. That's like going to battle, burying yourself in a hole or hiding in a concrete bunker, holding your rifle up over the edge of the wall, firing a couple shots, and then hoping the enemy surrenders.

No, you've got to be all in with this, or why bother starting?

Winning a battle isn't about dropping bombs on your enemy from a great distance. It's about getting on the field, pressing forth even when the bullets or arrows or bombs are flying at you. It's about gaining ground one day, losing it the next, then regaining it once again.

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It's about taking a pause to evaluate what's working, what's not, and what you can try tomorrow. It's about standing firm in the face of long odds and believing this is possible, for if you don't believe, if there's an escape (and for freelancing, there is), you'll forever fail.

### Do What You've Never Done

To obtain something you've never had or achieve something you've never accomplished, you need to do something you've never done.

What I mean by this is, for example, I've been notoriously one of the most financially irresponsible people you could ever meet. While I have no problem doing physical tasks until I can't stand anymore, when it comes to the sedentary work, like freelancing, writing, bidding, etc., I've been lazy.

There was a time when I couldn't recall having put four or five solid days of work in. Not once. And, for a long time, I struggled. My wife and I struggled. Our family struggled. But here's the thing: at some point you need to make a decision. A choice.

Either step up or step off.

Either step up onto the stage, into the spotlight, and *do*, or get off and let someone else up there. Either get doing the uncomfortable things, the tedious things, the things that very well may not give you a reward, or just pack it in right now.

I'm telling you, freelancing today is **tough**. It's not for the faint of heart and it's not for the lazy. It's not for the self-entitled and it's not for the arrogant. This freelancing world will chew you up and spit you out without a second thought.



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That's why *over* 95% of people who *try* freelancing quit within a year. Every year millions more are diving in, so it certainly *seems* like there are more and more seasoned veterans out there, but not really. There are just swarms of locusts invading the fields, stripping the grain bare and moving on, still hungry because they couldn't get enough.

You've got to push forward, press on, try new things, do things you've never done before, be more disciplined, be willing to experiment with your cover letters, with your profiles, with your portfolio and take note of what *gets* attention, and then refine, refine, refine.

This is a war. War's are not won or lost based on one battle. It's about attrition. Who will outlast? Who will hold on to the end? Who will push forward when all hope seems lost.

Now, warrior, go out there into battle. Go to war. And win.

### Conclusion

You *can* be successful -

No ...

... you can be *incredibly* successful freelancing, no matter your trade, passions, or experience. It's competitive. No doubt. It can be frustrating, without question. You *will* face times when you question your sanity or why you even tried.

The rewards aren't for those who give up easily, who call it quits. They're reserved for those who strive, sweat, struggle, strain, and learn. That's the key here: *learn*.

Being a freelancer is made possible *because* we learn. If you're just starting out (or haven't committed just yet), you've got a lot to learn. Be willing to learn. Remember, you can't fill a cup that's already full (meaning, if you come into this thinking it's easy and you already know everything there is to know, you're going to have a long, tough road ahead).

If you tried in the past and just couldn't get work (or enough work), it may feel even more daunting the second time around. I want to assure you that it's not just possible ... it's *probable*. ***If you are willing to get serious, invest in yourself, build up your portfolio and continually aim to improve it, and go to war.***

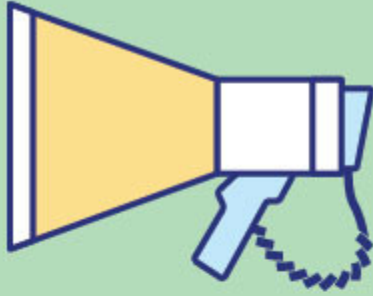
If you want (or need) a bit more direct assistance, some hand holding to help you get things set up, get those initial bids out, and start winning work, I put together a course on all this.

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**The Master Freelancer**, because I want *you* to become ***THE*** master freelancer you were born to be.

Check it out: [www.downwritefree.expert](http://www.downwritefree.expert).

If you're ready to go, though, I wish you the best. And who knows ... I might just see you out there on the battlefield. Now, let's win this thing ... *together!*



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