

BEGINNING FRACTIONAL

featuring

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sergio pereira

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angela salud-chua

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frances to



Are you feeling uncertain about the ever-changing world of tech?

Do you want to forge a career that withstands massive layoffs and economic uncertainty?

Have you always yearned for a career that aligns with your passions and values?

The last few years have unraveled many systems of work that we used to take for granted as the only way to do things.

When we pivoted to remote work, we unlocked a way of living and working where we could be productive while living as best we could in the midst of global health and economic crises.

The world is different now, and so are you.

This guide affirms that you can design a mode of work that empowers you and reflects your entire self.

Gain insights from industry leaders and members of Swarm, the community for fractional professionals.

Learn how they got started, how to set yourself up for success, and why being part of a professional community is a growth multiplier.

This guide comes with worksheets that will guide you step-by-step to seize control of your professional life, so you can design a future that reflects your entire self.

Reframe your professional career and personal brand, identify what kind of work aligns with your values and goals, and define what success looks like for you.

Welcome to fractional.

Why Fractional Work is the Future

There is a lot of negative baggage around the word “freelancer”. Anyone from consultants to gig economy workers co-opt the term.

The earliest recorded use of the term, in Thomas N. Brown’s “The Life and Times of Hugh Miller” (1809), referred to mercenary medieval warriors not sworn to any lord’s services.

From the conception of the word to its contemporary use, there is always a connotation that choosing flexibility and freedom from traditional full-time employment signifies low skills, low pay, and in its worst context, low level of commitment to the work.



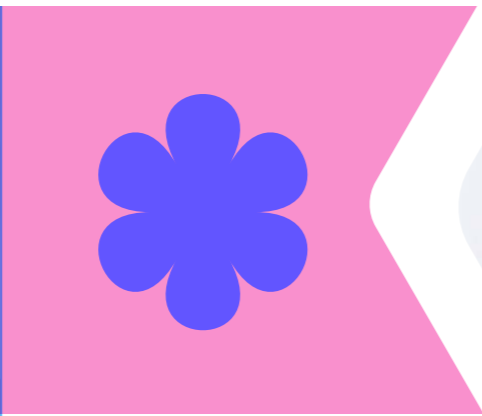
Enter, fractional leadership.

If you look up fractional work, you get positions for C-level executives. Fractional executives, while still relatively new, perform the full role of an executive in a particular domain but not full time.

Fractional leadership shows us that high skill, high commitment, and high compensation roles can be fulfilled so that one can serve multiple organizations and companies at the same time.

Fractional work is the mode of taking on multiple full roles for more than one tech company, engaging like a founder while protecting your flexibility like a freelancer.

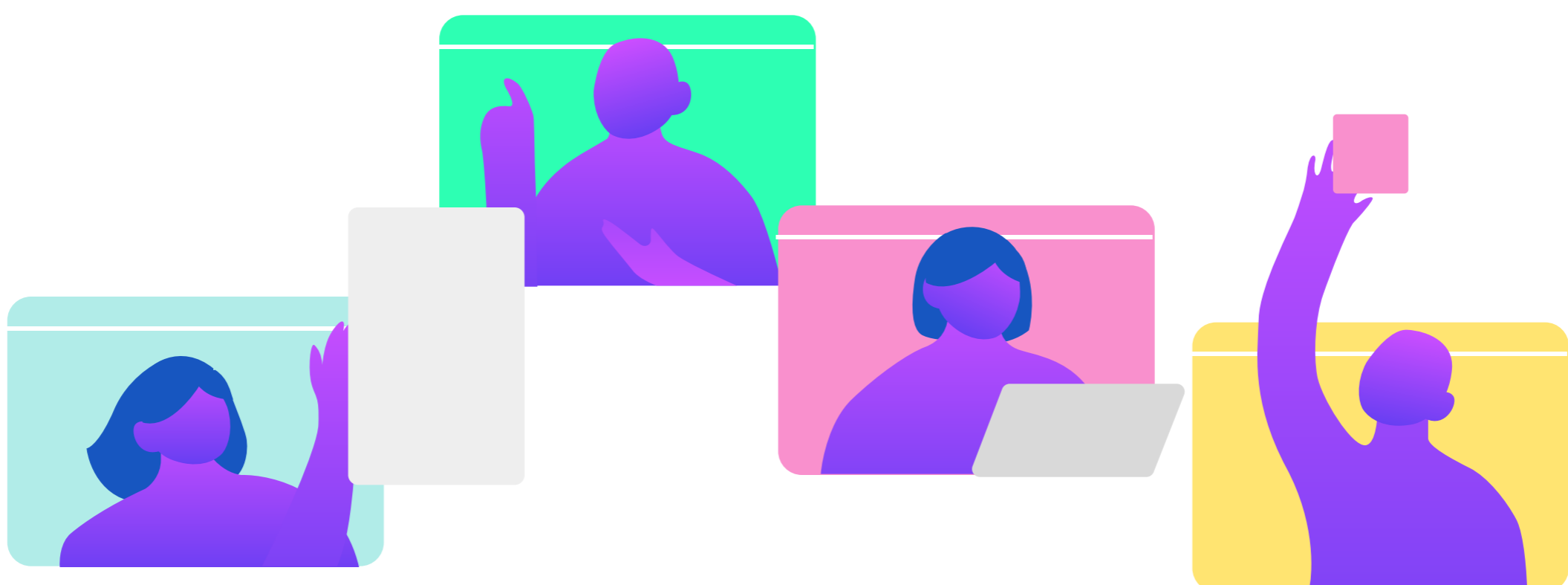
The future of work is fractional. Are you ready for it?

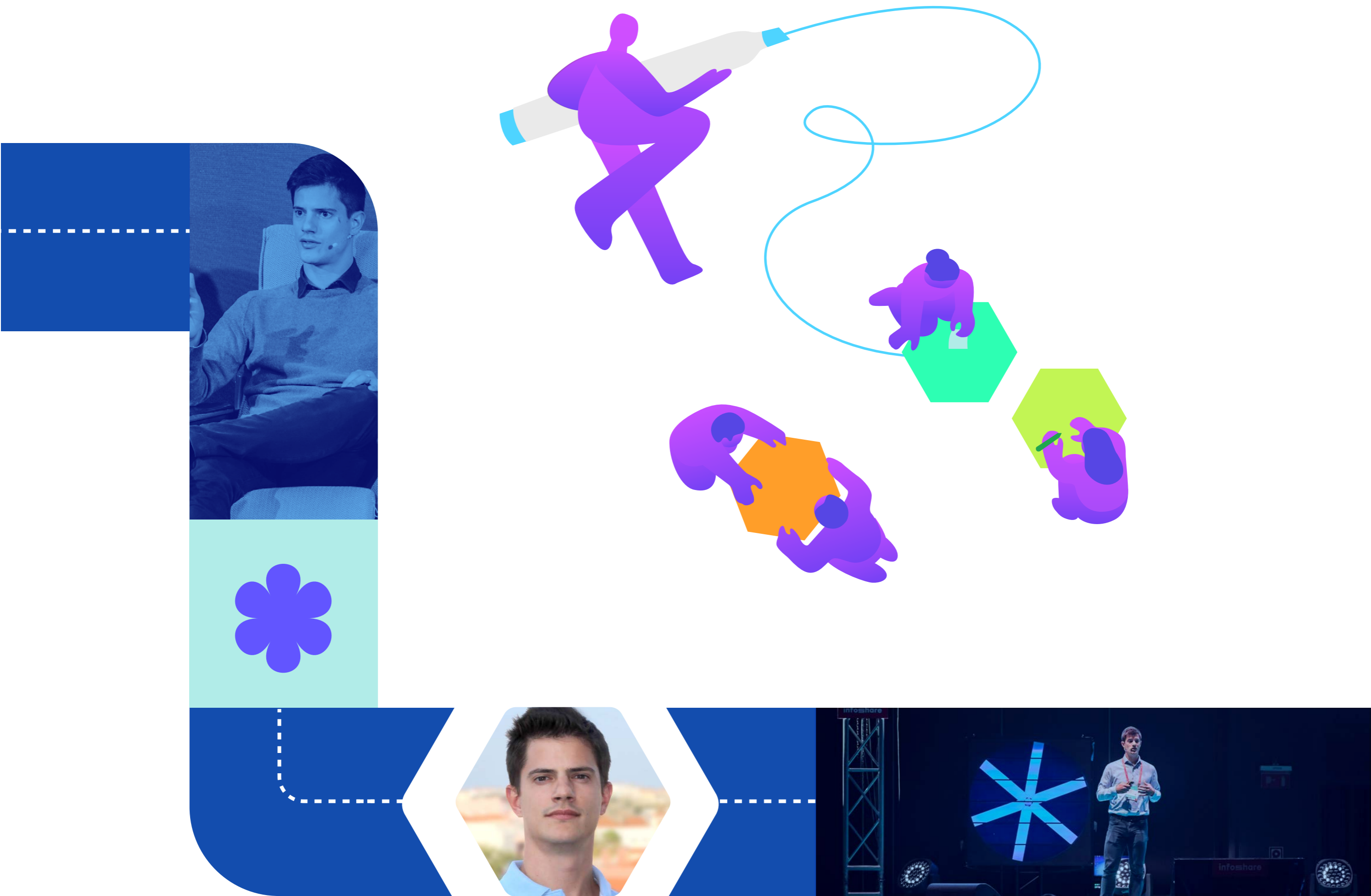


Dexter Ligot-Gordon believes that the future of work is fractional clients and builders

“Increasingly, professionals and companies need flexibility for working arrangements. For professionals, it’s a matter of aligning how they spend their time with their desire for independence,” Dexter says.

“On the other hand, companies need different skills at different times. So fractional careers and workforces create enough flexibility for both sides to work how and when they want, aligned with their personal and business goals.”





Sergio Pereira went from helping people build their startup ideas to becoming Fractional CTO

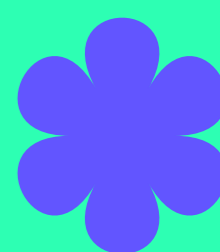
“I never actually woke up one day and said, ‘You know what? I will work in a fractional capacity, I will work part-time for companies. It happened organically,” Sergio recounts dreaming of high-paying jobs from foreign companies because wages in Portugal were low.

“I was going through a startup accelerator program and as a technical guy, I sort of became a go-to person for non-technical founders to help with interviewing engineers, doing some integration, fixing a bug, and all sorts of things. I started helping them for free, kind of helping out my buddies, and then I started charging for it.”

Sabrina Dermody forecasts that fractional is inevitable

Sabrina eyes three critical shifts which reflect both the mindset of top talent and the market-forces at play in a post-COVID world: flexibility in focus, cost is king, and agility is no longer a nice to have.

“Tapping into a diverse pool of talent without committing to full-time positions allows organizations to scale up or down more efficiently. On the flip side, top talent increasingly demands the freedom to work on multiple projects simultaneously.”



Gone are the days of excessive spending for talent as a marker of growth. “Leveraging the expertise of fractional talent who work remotely and are compensated for the specific deliverables limits hiring risk. Likewise, fractional employees can make considerably more than they’d make full-time with the option to spend extra on benefits that move the needle for them.”

“In today’s rapidly changing business landscape, adaptability and agility are crucial for success,” says Sabrina. “Fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and best practices from various industries are required for sustained success through what will continue to be turbulent times.”



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How have you been? An exercise in catching up

1. Take a moment to process your professional choices in the last three years.

Did you take more or less risks? Why?

Do you have fears or anxieties about your next steps as a professional? Write them down. When you are in a hopeful headspace, read them aloud and respond in affirmations.

Ex. I am worried that I don't possess the right skills to navigate no-/low code website design and development and I won't have any clients.

Affirmation: I have the capacity to learn new skills and I have prior skills and knowledge that will carry me forward in this new direction.

Are you in a good place to take side projects or make career moves?

2. Are you in a good place to take side projects or make career moves?

Talk to a friend who is a founder or a business owner and ask the following questions:

Did they take more or less risks? Did they take time to learn and experiment?

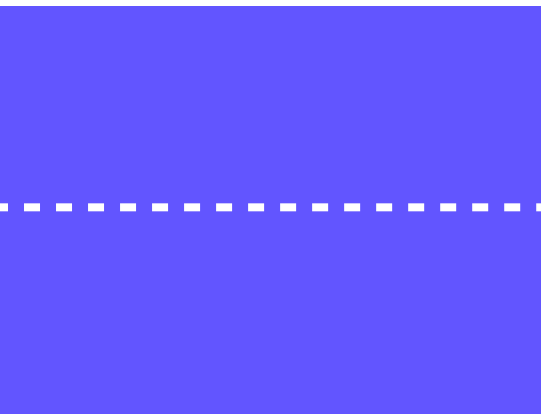
What do they look for when hiring collaborators? Ask for pointers on how you can market your services to their peers.

How could you pitch your services in a way that is cognizant with the challenges they and their peers face?



Scan the QR code to make your own copy of this worksheet on Figma





PART 2

How to Get Started with Fractional Work

Starting your journey of becoming a fractional professional is an exciting endeavor, particularly because there is no single definitive path to doing fractional work.

Here are some of our most esteemed community members and how they got their start in the tech industry, took on fractional work, and found work they love doing:



Angela Salud-Chua pivoted from corporate

“Right out of college, it wasn’t really common to do independent work,” Angela says. “UX, product, and mobile app design was in its infancy so it almost behooves you to go into corporate.”

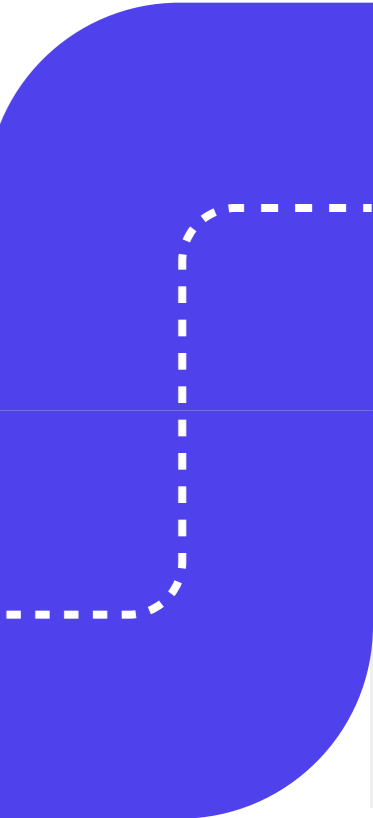
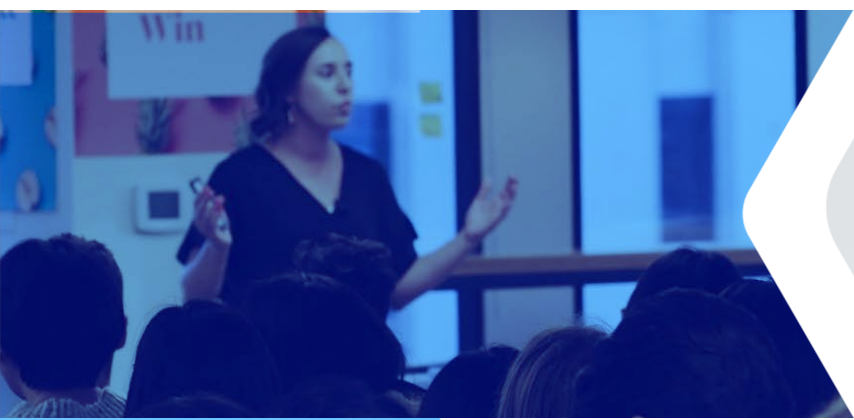
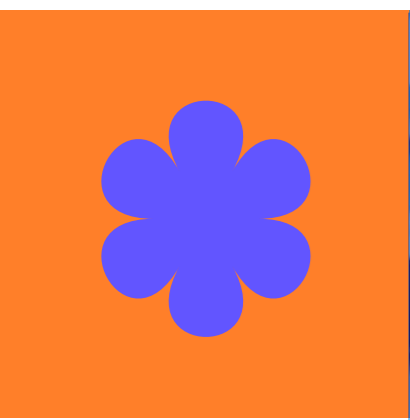
As time went on, Angela couldn’t shake the feeling that she was neglecting a crucial part of herself—the creative side that yearned for expression and fulfillment.

One of her friends commissioned her to do design work, and she realized there was a difference when she’s working on something she loves.

“Eventually there comes a point where you just think to yourself, okay what do I actually like doing better between [full-time corporate work] that actually consumes more time and yet the other one is the one that’s making you happy. So I jumped the gun and just went fully independent.”

This leap of faith led to an unconventional path, opening doors for Angela to build Toffeenut Design, her own design agency, and forge a career perfectly aligned with her values and aspirations.





Lex Roman founded her own growth design consultancy agency

“I started my first company in 2019 as a growth design consulting business, and I worked with tech companies on contract full time. I had done a lot of freelancing, but that was my first time making the leap into [working] for myself full time,” says Lex.

Lex has worked in and with companies in Silicon Valley, supporting companies with growing their user base, converting their user base into customers, retaining them and addressing things like churn.

After acquiring years of experience and several skills in Silicon Valley, Lex decided to apply her expertise to help small businesses build and grow their online presence through her company Super Easy Digital.

“I love being in the community. It was a really important part of me starting Super Easy. And I’m always looking not just at where I can reach my audience, but also how I can do lead generating activities that I enjoy. We don’t often focus on, ‘what do you like doing?’”

Lex’ path is that of a seasoned and accomplished freelancer who honed her skills over years of dedication and hard work.

Driven by a desire to combine her deep knowledge of the industry and help emerging small businesses, she made a life-altering decision to take the plunge and embark on a new venture as a full-time entrepreneur.



Matthias Cordes plunged into full-time fractional work after university

“I started freelancing directly after university. I’ve been doing it on the side, not full time, while I was a student. But then after graduating, I pursued my career full-time as a freelancer,” Matthias recounts how he got his start.

Unlike previous generations, Matthias and his peers have more career pathways available to them. With freelance jobs available online, he was able to identify which industries are in high demand and showcase his skills and expertise even before he graduated from university.

“I was basically searching for answers myself, like to have a framework or anything that could help me make the right decisions or find a direction for my career. And that in the end, I think it was more simple than one would suspect.”

Matthias tried different types of design work during his studies, figuring out and doubling down on the types of work that he enjoyed most.

“I made sure to not only follow the passion that I have, but also make sure that this is actually something that can sustain me. And I noticed that design is something there's always a demand for. There are so many different types of businesses that need or want a website for their business. So that was what I ultimately chose.”

Equipped with a keen eye for trends and armed with a proactive mindset, Matthias tapped into a niche that has a lot of demand.

Straight out of university, he was able to create a steady flow of projects that he can do professional design work independently full time.

You can take small steps towards a more fractional mode of work, take time to figure out what you like doing and what makes you happy that sustains the kind of life you’ve always wanted.

Where you are vs. where you want to be

If you want to change something about your current situation professionally, you have to understand where you are so you can make marginal yet effective changes towards your ideal mode of work.

Fill out this diagram with your current circumstances (i.e. full time, student, in a different career) and write the opposite or alternative option for each (e.g. fractional, with a few side projects, learning a new domain, etc).



Scan the QR code to make your own copy of this worksheet on Figma



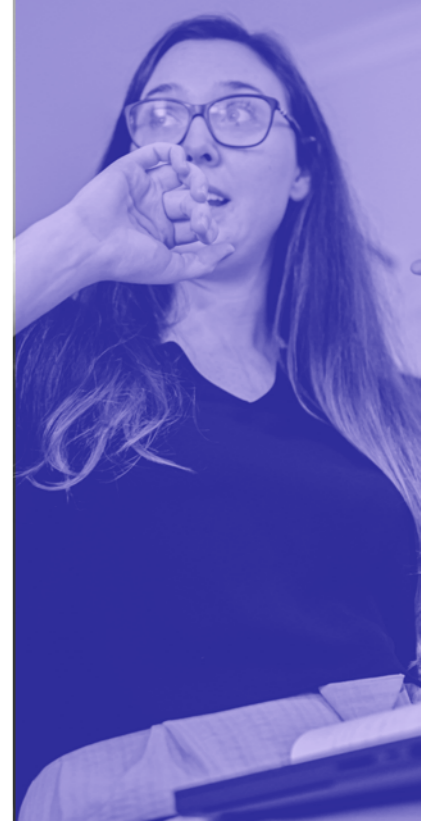


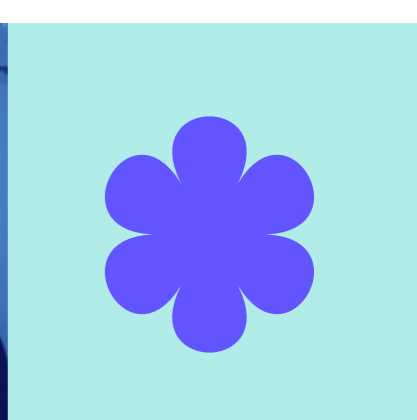
PART 3

Setting up for Success with Fractional Work

As with all endeavors, the simple yet overrated key to success in fractional work is preparation.

Here are some insights from community members on how they got their start, paving a path for success for themselves.





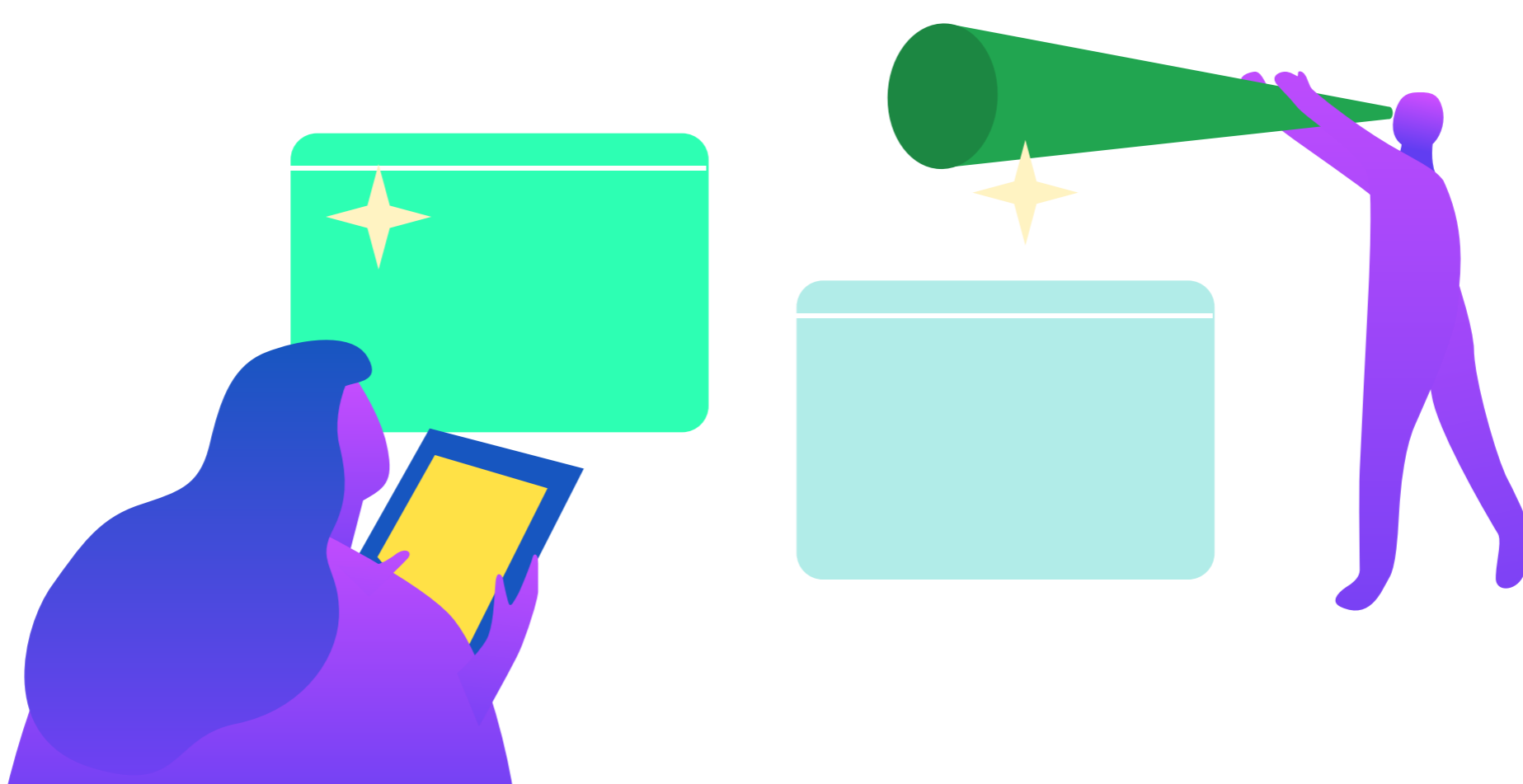
Dan Mall built his runway to de-risk pivoting to fractional work

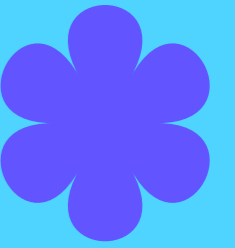
“A lot of people go, ‘All right, I’m gonna make the leap,’ and they have no safety net. Then the pressure becomes really high,” Dan points out.

Preparing a set amount of money for your safety net is sound financial advice, but it is more than that. It de-risks the pivot to working independently because there’s no pressure to sustain a living at the onset.

Your runway can also look different from other people, says Dan. “The alternative is I have to get a full time job somewhere, do some consulting or video production, and other ways to subsidize the thing that I really want to do.”

Dan’s prudent advice ensures a sense of security to learn and experiment with fractional work, and also helps take away the pressure of grinding to generate a sustainable income immediately.





Frances To tried out multiple disciplines before specializing in web design

Frances took time to figure out what she loves doing by delving into different creative streams.

“Before I was a web designer I did many things: I was an illustrator, I did some fine art, graphic design, some photography. I learned how to write a bit and I guess all those different skills mixed together and when you apply it, it has a better outcome.” Being multidisciplinary turned Frances into a holistic designer. Having mastery over your craft will show in the detail, storytelling, and quality of your work.

As Frances exemplifies in her design practice and career, good work speaks volumes for itself.

Set yourself up for success by taking steps to prepare for your pivot to a new mode of work.

Remove unnecessary pressure to sustain your entire life right away. Try different things and make time to figure out what you really want to do.

Share your story with other people early on, so you can bring them along your journey of discovery and learning.

Checklist for building a winning portfolio

Here are some of the things you can do to create and cultivate an attractive and compelling profile and bring you closer to your next favorite project:

Showcase the best of your past work.

Present a curated collection of your previous work that filled you with immense pride and made an impact on your former clients.

This is one of the first and most significant signals of capacity you can share that people who want to work with you will look for.

Declare your services and rates.

Knowing how to price your services reflects that you keep up to date with industry trends and are aware of your competition.

Seek guidance from mentors and more experienced builders in your domain expertise on determining a fair rate for your skill level.

You should also factor in a living wage, essentially what you need to earn to stay on top of your personal expenses and professional tools. These will inform you of the skills and domains you need to learn to command higher rates, and how many projects you can take on at a given time to avoid burnout.

Express your openness and availability for work.

The biggest reason why negotiations fail is the lack of clarity in terms of time a builder can commit to a certain project.

You can increase your chances of landing a project simply by declaring how much of your time per week or month you have set aside for fractional work.

Keep your relationships warm with people whom you have worked with, shared opportunities with you, or shown support to your work—they should keep you top of mind for the types of projects you have taken on before.

Seek social proof by asking people to vouch for you.

Aside from your work history, potential clients want to know what it is like to work with you.

Ask your biggest supporters with whom you have built authentic and lasting relationships, for testimonials that speak to your character, soft skills, and work ethic.

These people—your mentors, former co-workers, even people you have mentored—can provide a different perspective for your potential clients as to how you work, which they take into consideration for team and culture fit.



Key Takeaways

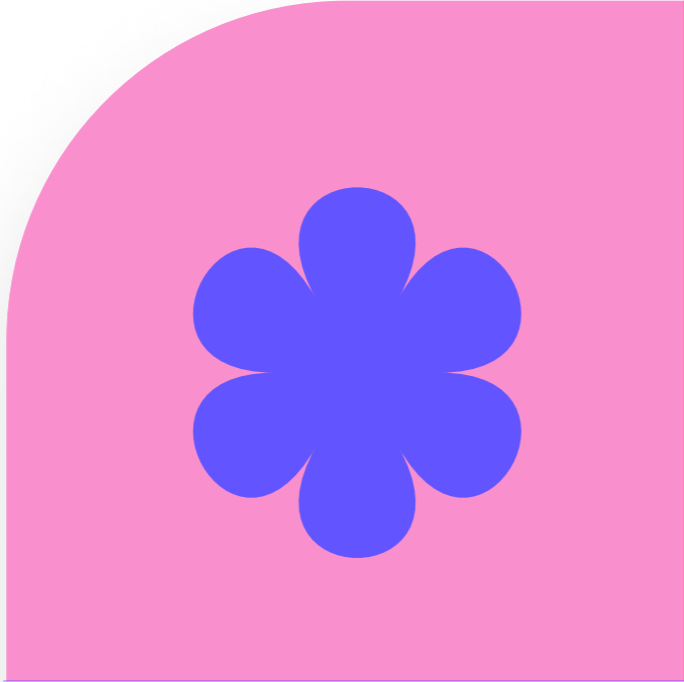
You are more than capable of building a robust, creative, and fulfilling professional life through fractional work.

You now have all the tools you need to get started living that life, now.

Here's the best part: you don't have to go through it alone.

You can be part of Swarm, a community of product experts, designers, and developers who have taken the leap before and are more than eager to help set you up for success.

We can't wait to be part of your journey.



The Swarm Guide to Fractional Work is your resource for navigating uncertainties in the tech industry through advice and best practices from our community of product experts who have gained growth and fulfillment through fractional work.

This guide will equip you with tried and tested strategies and frameworks to design a fractional career roadmap aligned with your values and life goals.

Written by the Growth team at Swarm,
inspired by our community.

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