

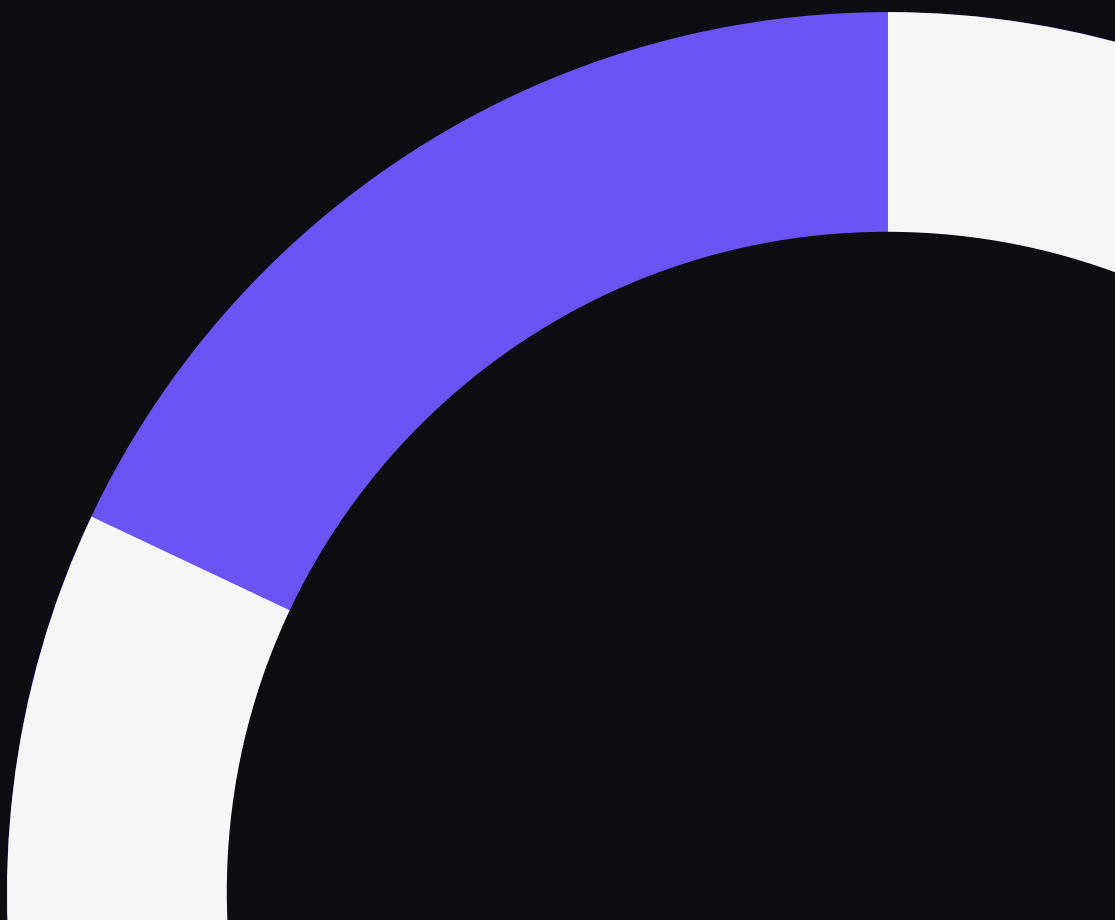
worksome

2025

Freelance Survey Report

Strategies for engaging and retaining top
freelance talent and independent contractors

 Survey Report



“People should see freelancers as creative assets and an added bonus in terms of specialization.”

- Survey respondent

INTRODUCTION

The way we work is changing. More people want the freedom and flexibility of independent work, and companies want the same—on-demand access to specialized skills without the hassle of full-time hires. That’s why external talent isn’t just a nice-to-have—it’s a business essential.

Companies that tap into freelance talent move faster, save money, and get access to top-tier expertise without long-term commitments. No wonder 91% of high-performing businesses plan to hire more freelancers this year (thanks, Upwork, for the stat).

But let’s be real—hiring, managing, and keeping great freelancers isn’t always easy. So, what do freelancers actually want? And how can you build a talent strategy that works?



To find out, we went straight to the source. We surveyed 150+ of freelancers across industries to understand what matters most to them—how they choose projects, what keeps them engaged, and what makes them walk away.

The results? Actionable insights to help your business attract and retain top external talent.

Get the inside scoop and start building a more agile, high-performing workforce in 2025 and beyond.



About the survey

Survey respondents included freelancers from around the globe, representing a range of ages, work locations, and years of freelancing experience.

Respondents performed work across several professional categories, including Sales, Marketing and Advertising, Graphic Design, Journalism/Copywriting, and Website Design.



5 Survey Insights for Effective Freelance Talent Management

Companies put a lot of effort into keeping employees happy—but what about freelancers? To attract and retain top external talent, you need to make working with your business just as smooth. That means clear communication, hassle-free onboarding, and fast, reliable payments. Nail those, and you'll build a go-to network of freelancers who actually want to work with you.

Just as organizations strive to meet employee needs and create an engaging work environment, a similar effort is essential to attract and retain freelancers. Ultimately, success hinges on effective collaboration with freelancers, understanding their work preferences, and ensuring that contracting, onboarding, and payment processes are seamless and efficient.

Here's what our global survey of freelancers uncovered about what it really takes to hit these goals:



Insight 1

More than half of freelancers say brands and agencies don't give them enough autonomy

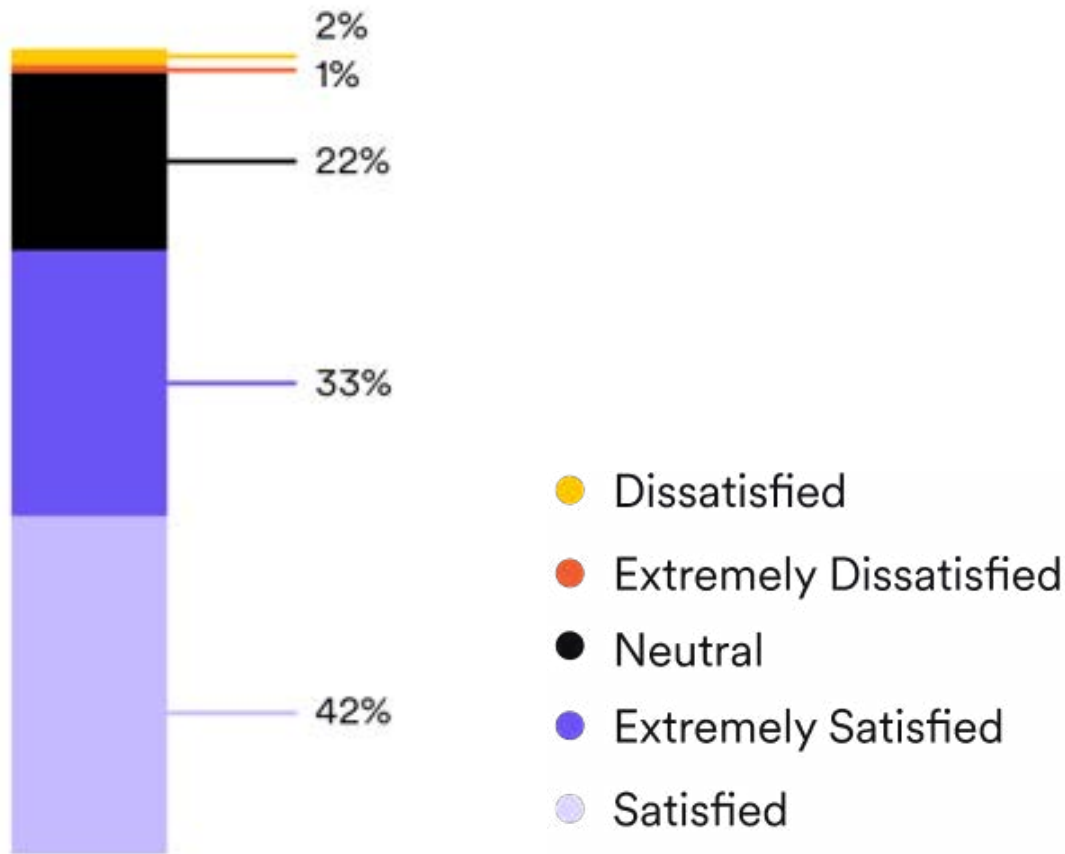
Freelancing isn't just a job—it's a way of working that puts freedom front and center. Most freelancers (75%) say they're satisfied or even extremely satisfied with freelancing over traditional employment. And it's no mystery why.

When asked what makes freelancing so rewarding, the top answer was clear: control. From setting their own schedules to choosing projects they actually want to work on, 86% of freelancers say flexibility, independence, and

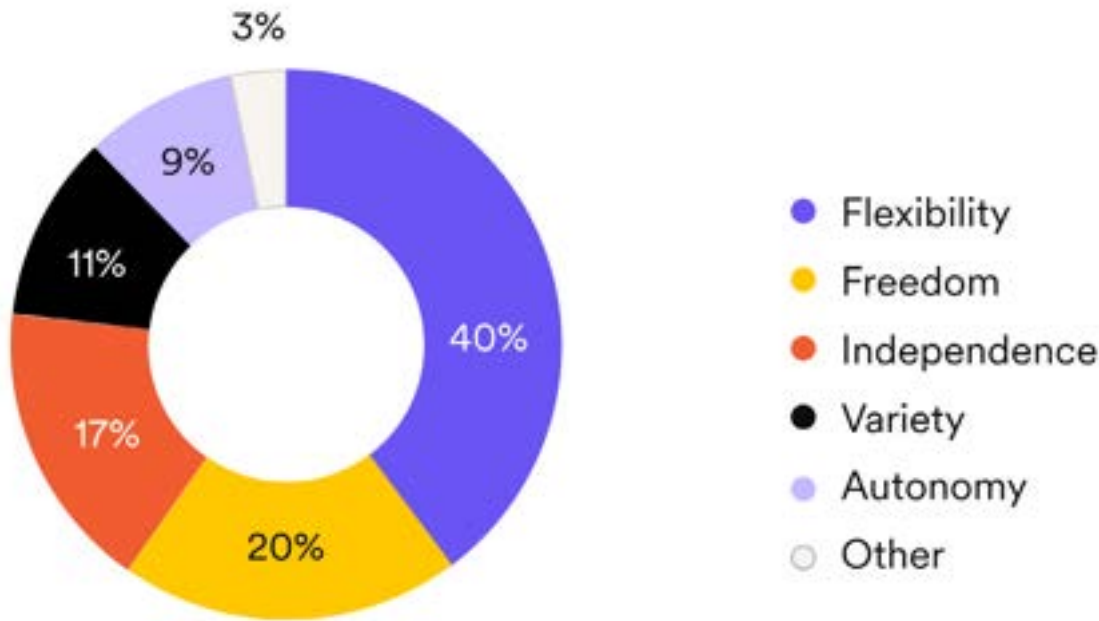
autonomy are the biggest perks. Plus, 84% rank having control over their work as important, very important, or absolutely essential.

Because at the end of the day, freelancing isn't just about making a living—it's about making work work for you.

How satisfied are you with freelancing?



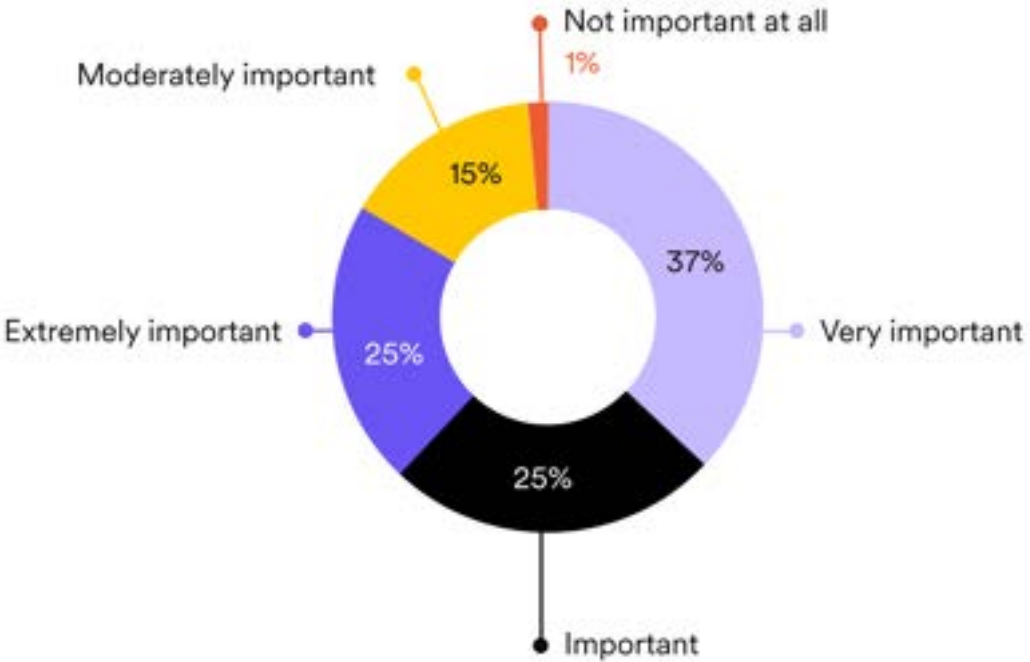
What is the best part about working as a freelancer?



“Freelancing requires a lot of skill, discipline, and self-management. If more people recognized the value freelancers bring to the table, it would lead to better respect, opportunities, and fairer treatment”

- Survey respondent

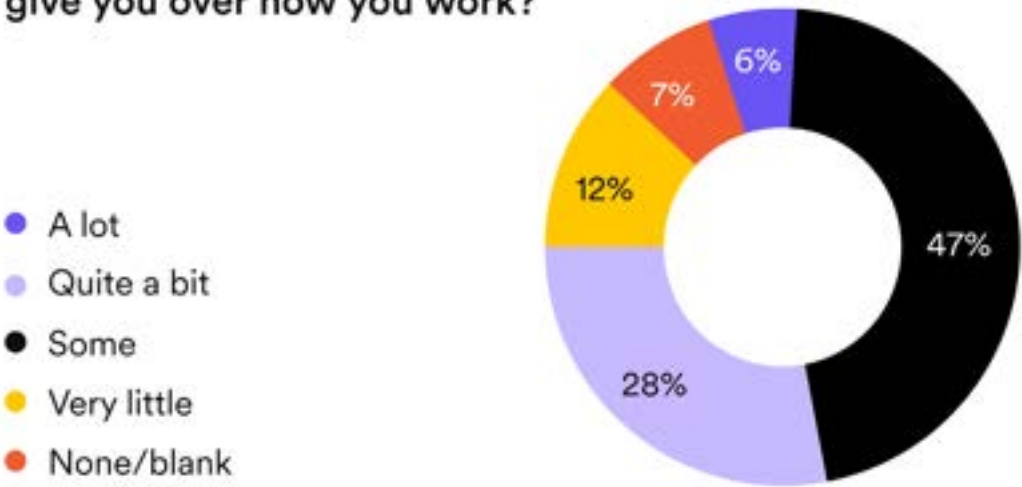
How important is having control over your work?



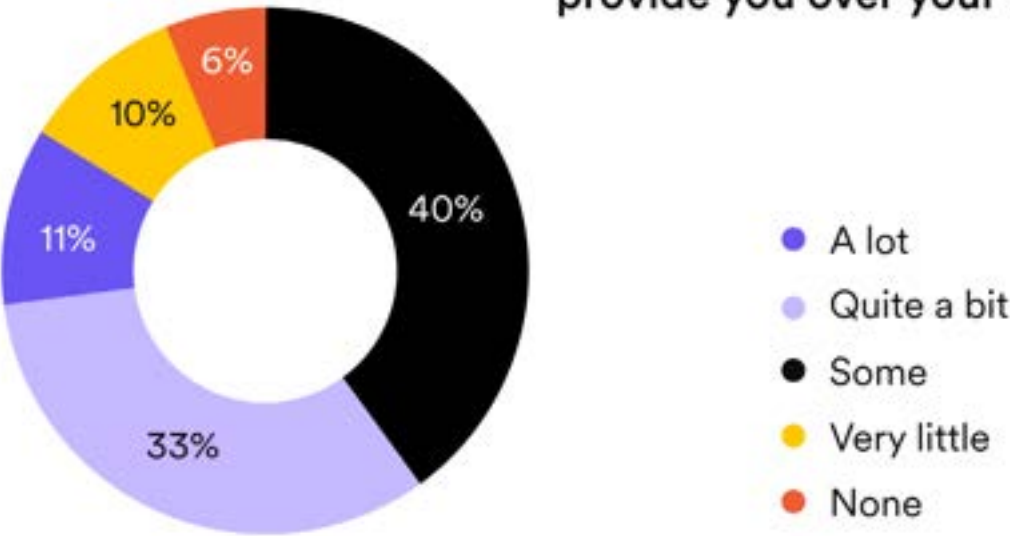
Survey results show that agencies and brands have room to give freelancers more of the freedom they value. Only **44% of freelancers** say the agencies they work with offer “quite a bit” or “a lot” of autonomy, and that number

drops to just **34%** for brands. The bottom line? There’s a clear gap between what freelancers want and what they’re getting—leaving plenty of room for improvement.

How much control do brands give you over how you work?



How much autonomy do agencies provide you over your work?



Key takeaway:

Freelancers’ desire for autonomy in their work creates a win-win situation for them and your organization. They thrive on the freedom that comes from independent work, while you benefit from their skills and expertise without the overhead expense and supervision often required for employees. To create an environment that emphasizes more flexibility and independence for freelancer talent, consider the following actions:

- Clearly define project goals and deliverables upfront while allowing freelancers the freedom to determine how they complete tasks.
- Set a reasonable schedule for check-ins to ensure alignment without micromanaging.
- Regularly seek feedback from freelancers and ask what they need from you to deliver their best work.

Insight 2

Freelancers seek fairness and fulfillment

Though respondents said freelancing presented several challenges, the top three cited were:

- Finding the right jobs – (81%)
- Using the right pricing – (49%)
- Taxes & accounts – (37%)
- Diverse projects with opportunities to develop new skills (37%)
- Creative collaboration (20%)
- Networking Opportunities (12%)

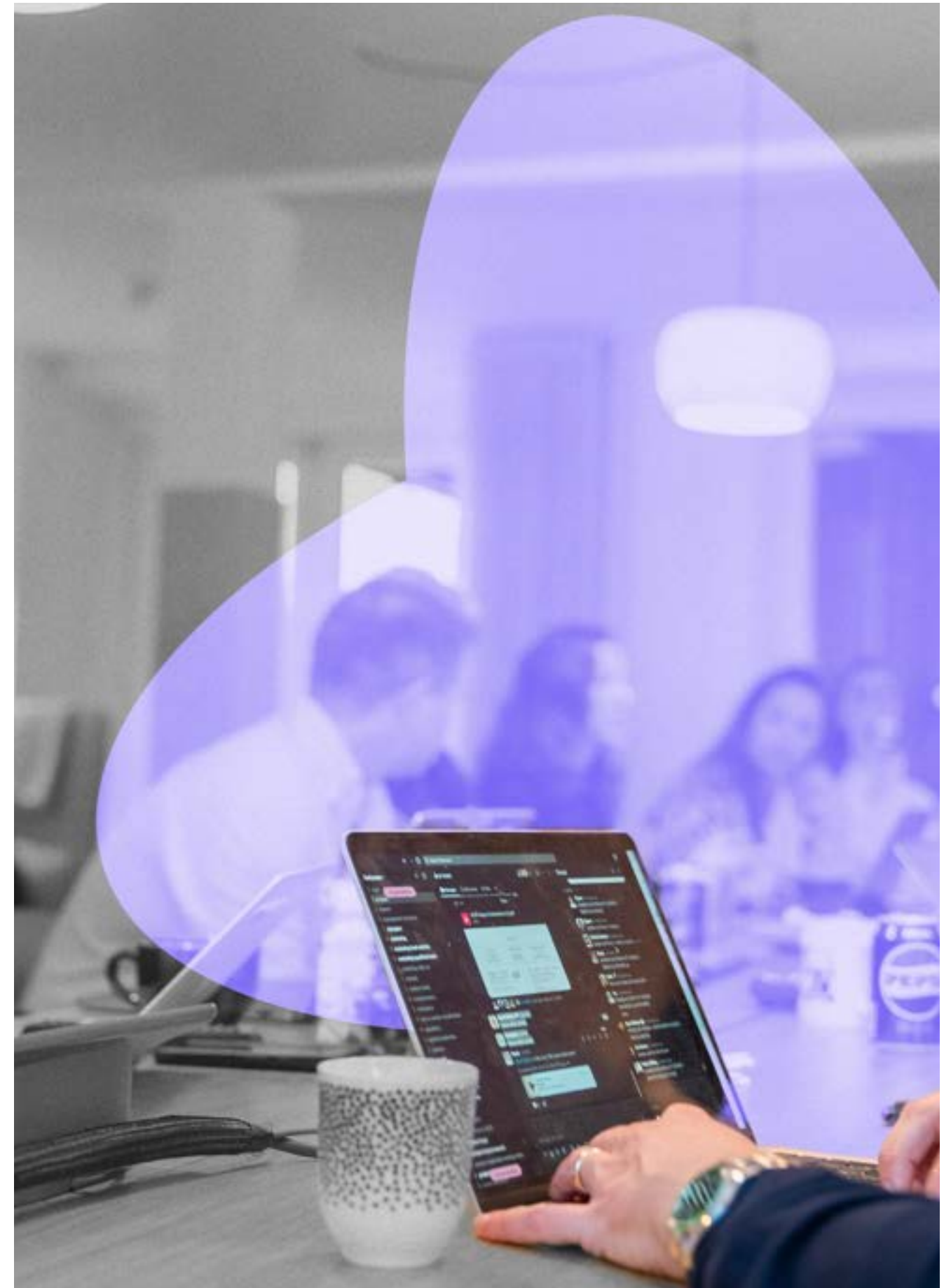
These findings indicate that freelancers place high value on predictable work and control over their schedules and also fair pricing and fulfilling projects. Additionally, their comments suggest they rely on agencies and brands to provide these elements. Freelancers reported that their work was most rewarding when agencies and brands offered:

Of course, engaging freelancers requires addressing practical elements such as project scope, rates, and deadlines. But our survey results suggest that these discussions should also focus on the nature of the work, the degree of collaboration and partnership, and how the work will be equally rewarding for freelancers and your organization.

Key takeaway:

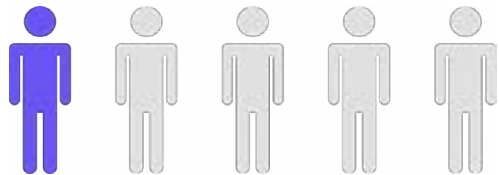
Rewarding and engaging work is essential to keep freelancers returning for more. To better understand their preferences and how to provide more fulfilling engagements, you can:

- Conduct freelancer satisfaction surveys to gather insights about their experiences and needs.
- Implement Net Promoter Score (NPS) surveys to measure freelancers' likelihood to recommend you to others in the broader freelancer community.
- Ask for feedback to understand how you can position your agency or brand as a preferred client among freelancers.



Insight 3

Only 1 in 5 freelancers said onboarding was effective

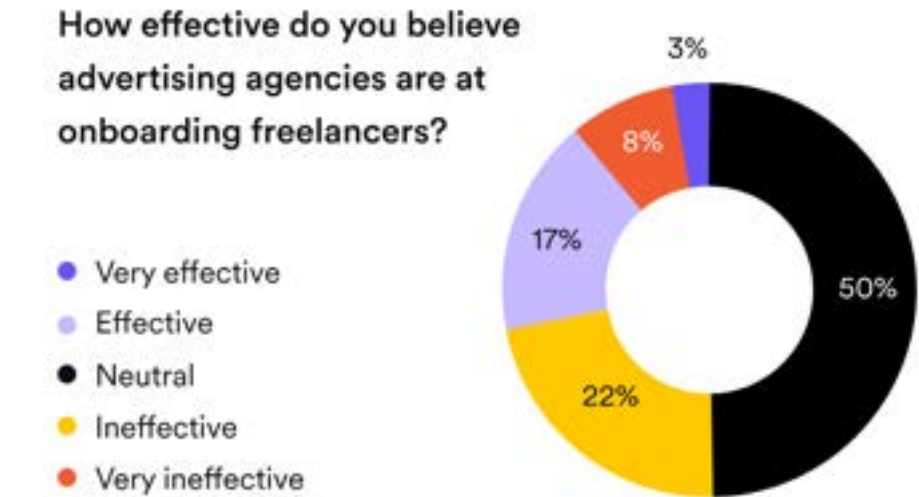
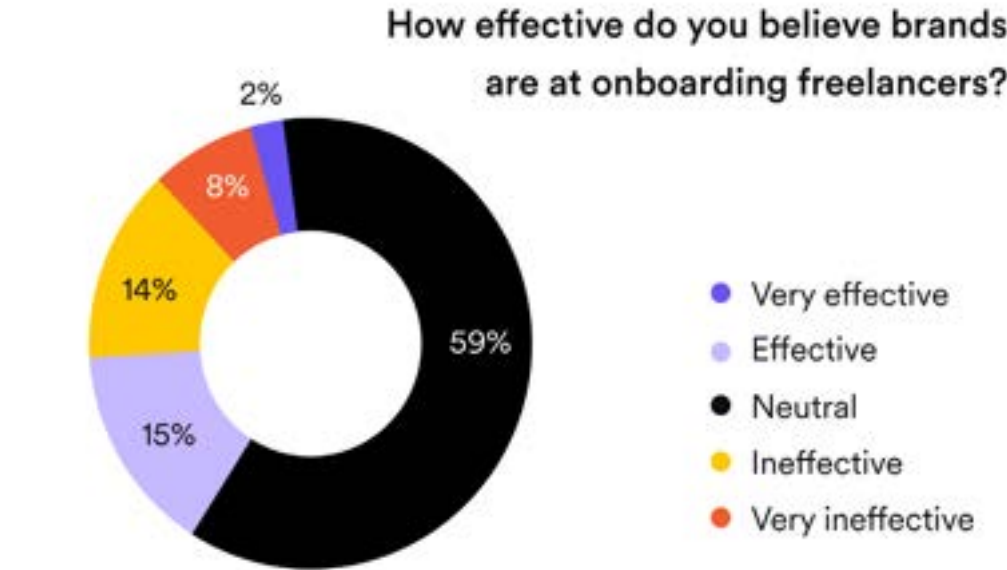


What makes for a smooth and effective freelancer onboarding? Its all about setting your freelancers up for success. This means clear communication, minimal administrative friction, timely contract and payment setup, and a process that ensures freelancers feel

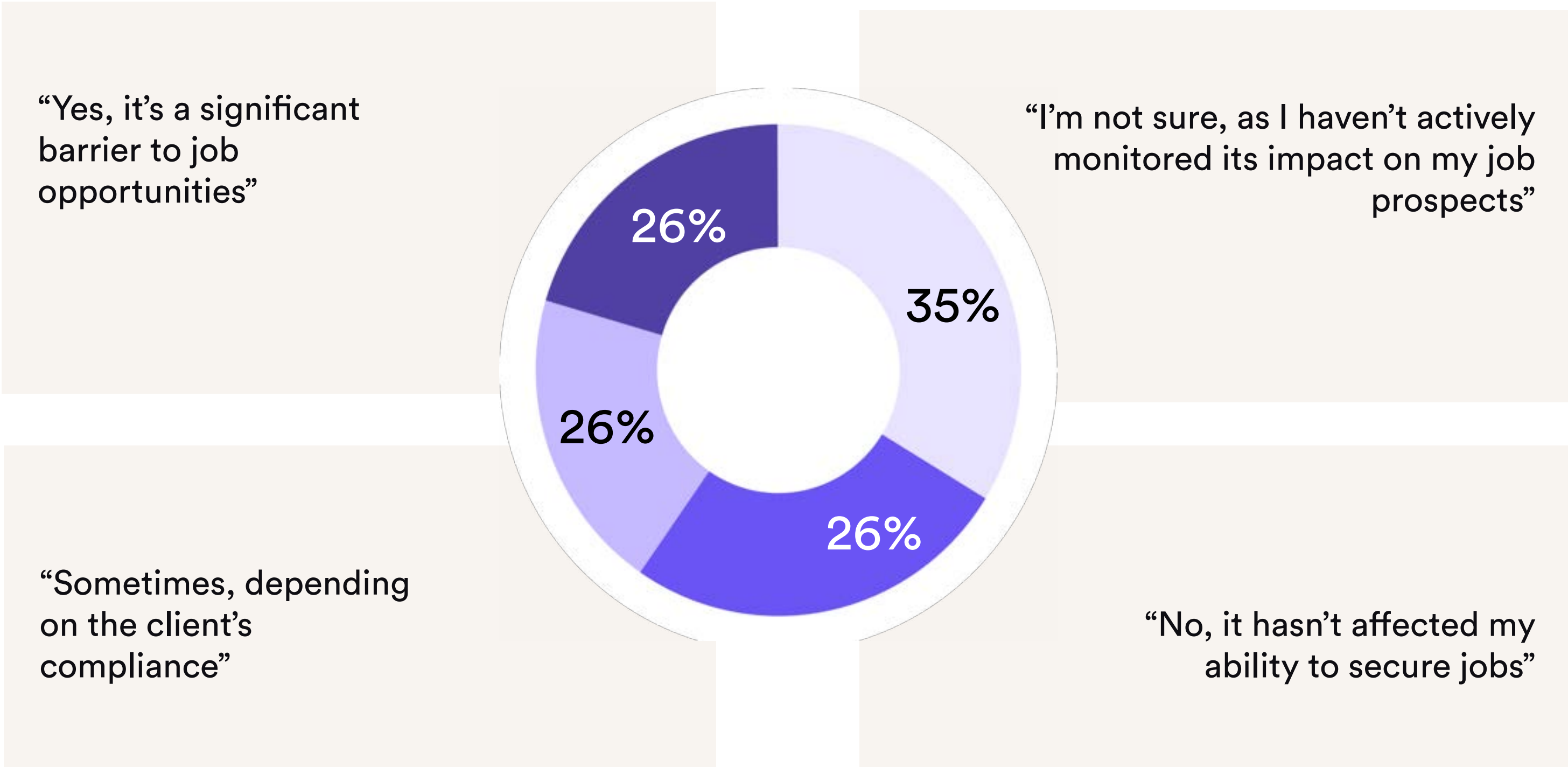
informed, integrated, and ready to start work without delays or confusion. In our survey, only 17% of those working with brands and 20% working with agencies say their onboarding was effective or very effective. That’s a lot of room for improvement.

“We are experts, not just self-employed people.”

- Survey respondent



Do you think 1099/IR35 compliance keeps you from getting jobs ?



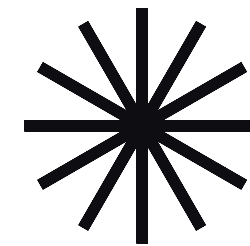
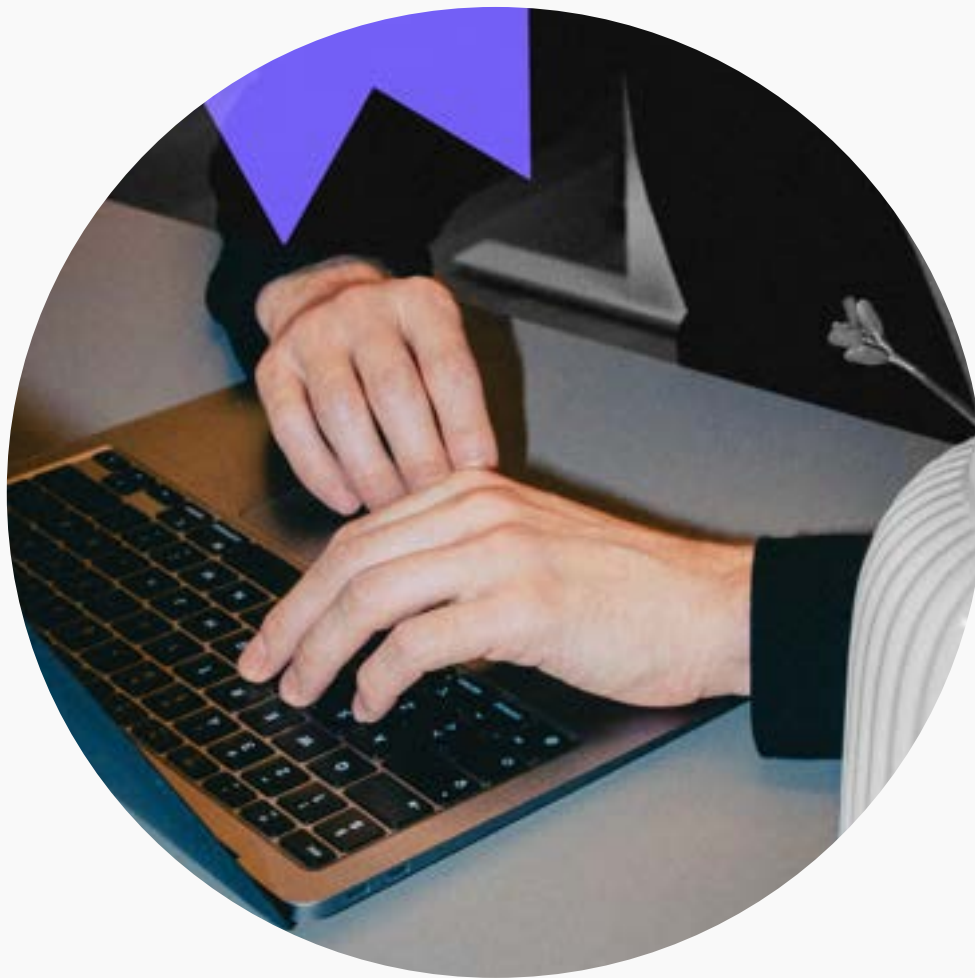
39% of freelancers say compliance regulations have blocked job opportunities

Compliance is another major hurdle. Navigating self-employment laws like 1099 and IR35 can be a headache, and 39% of freelancers say these regulations have blocked job opportunities at least some of the time. If agencies and brands want to attract top freelance talent, they need to make onboarding seamless and compliance stress-free.

Key takeaway:

Improving freelancer onboarding starts with an internal assessment. Take a step back and evaluate your current process—how does it compare to industry standards? Where are freelancers experiencing friction? Identifying inefficiencies and gaps is the first step toward a smoother, more efficient system.

By streamlining paperwork, automating approvals, and ensuring clear communication from day one, you can create an onboarding experience that feels seamless rather than stressful. The result? Faster ramp-up times, fewer drop-offs, and stronger freelancer relationships from the start.



Meeting 1099 and IR35 requirements can be tricky, but the best place to start is by assessing your current processes and freelancer experience. This means evaluating your compliance workflows, identifying gaps, and finding ways to streamline onboarding to reduce delays and prevent candidate drop-off.

It's also crucial to account for different worker classifications across countries and states. Ensuring compliance with regulations like IR35 in the UK and 1099 requirements in the US requires a tailored approach—one that keeps both legal risks and freelancer experience in check.

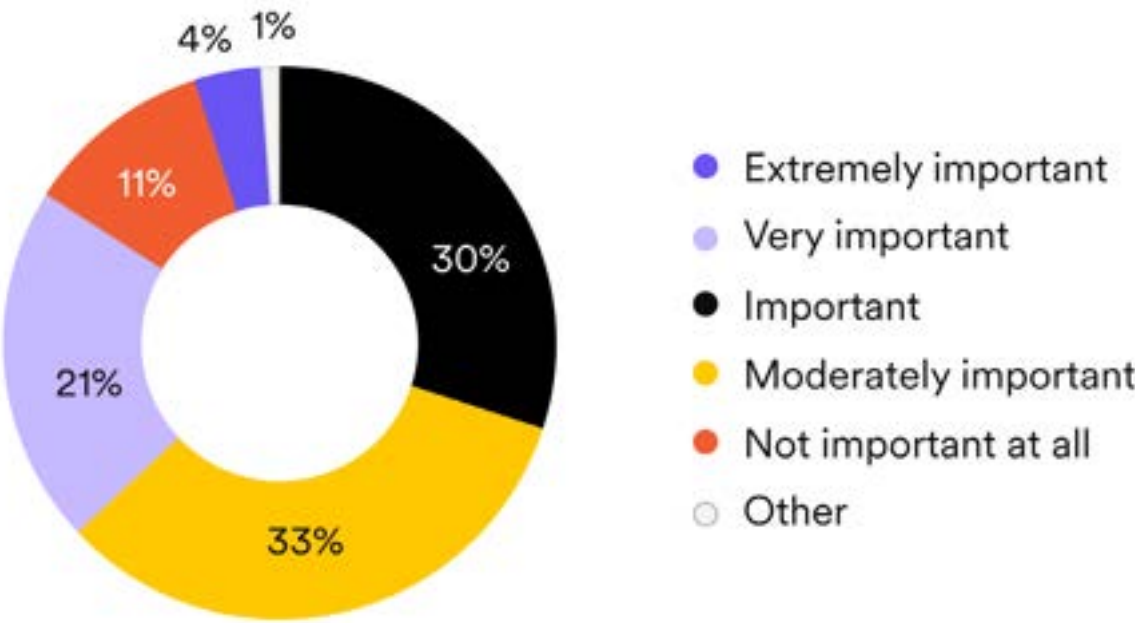
Insight 4

67% of freelancers said a sense of belonging with their clients is important but only 26% actually feel connected

When we asked freelancers what they’d change about how the world sees them, one theme stood out: recognition. Many feel undervalued and want to be seen as essential team members—not just temporary resources. They want their contributions to be measured by impact, not just day rates, and to be part of teams where communication and collaboration actually happen.

Beyond just working with clients, many freelancers want to feel like they belong. While it’s not the top priority, it still matters—a lot. In fact, 67% say feeling a sense of belonging with their clients is important, very important, or extremely important. It’s important to remember that the best freelancer relationships aren’t transactional—they’re built on mutual respect, collaboration, and real connection.

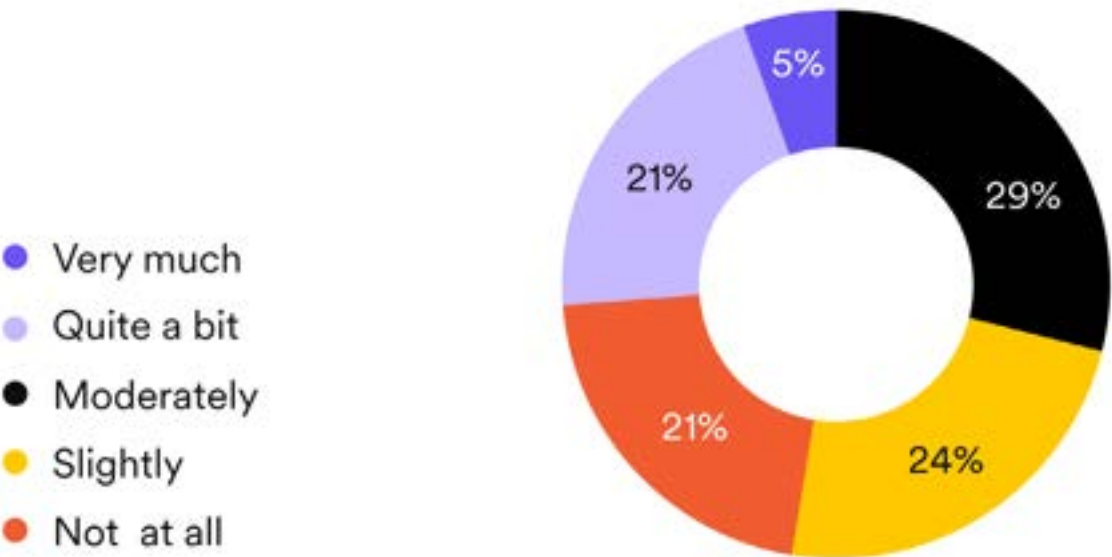
How important is a feeling of belonging in your working environment?



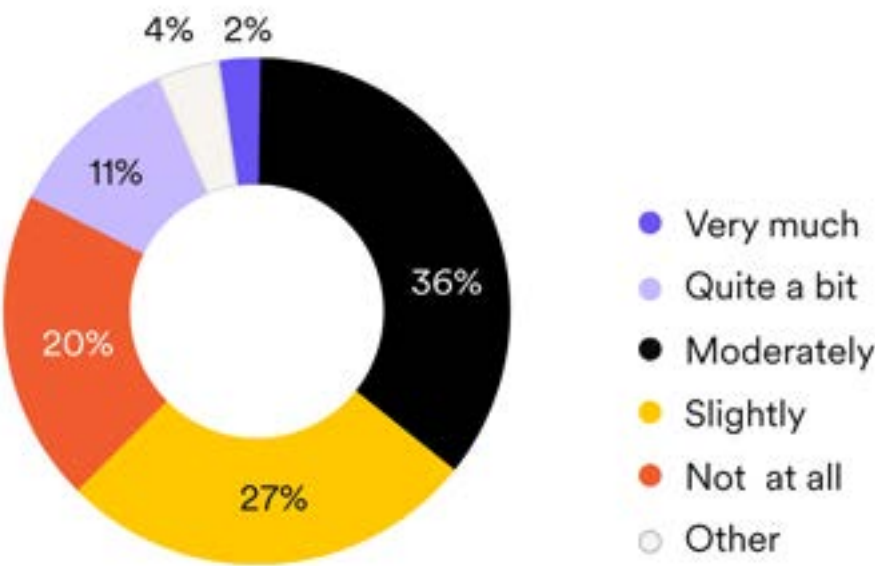
Looking ahead, agencies and brands can do more to foster an environment where freelancers feel a sense of belonging and are more likely to stay. When we asked freelancers about their

current sense of belonging with their clients, only 26% felt “quite a bit” or “very much” connected to their agency clients, and just 13% felt the same about the brands they work with.

How much do you feel a sense of belonging at the agencies you freelance for?

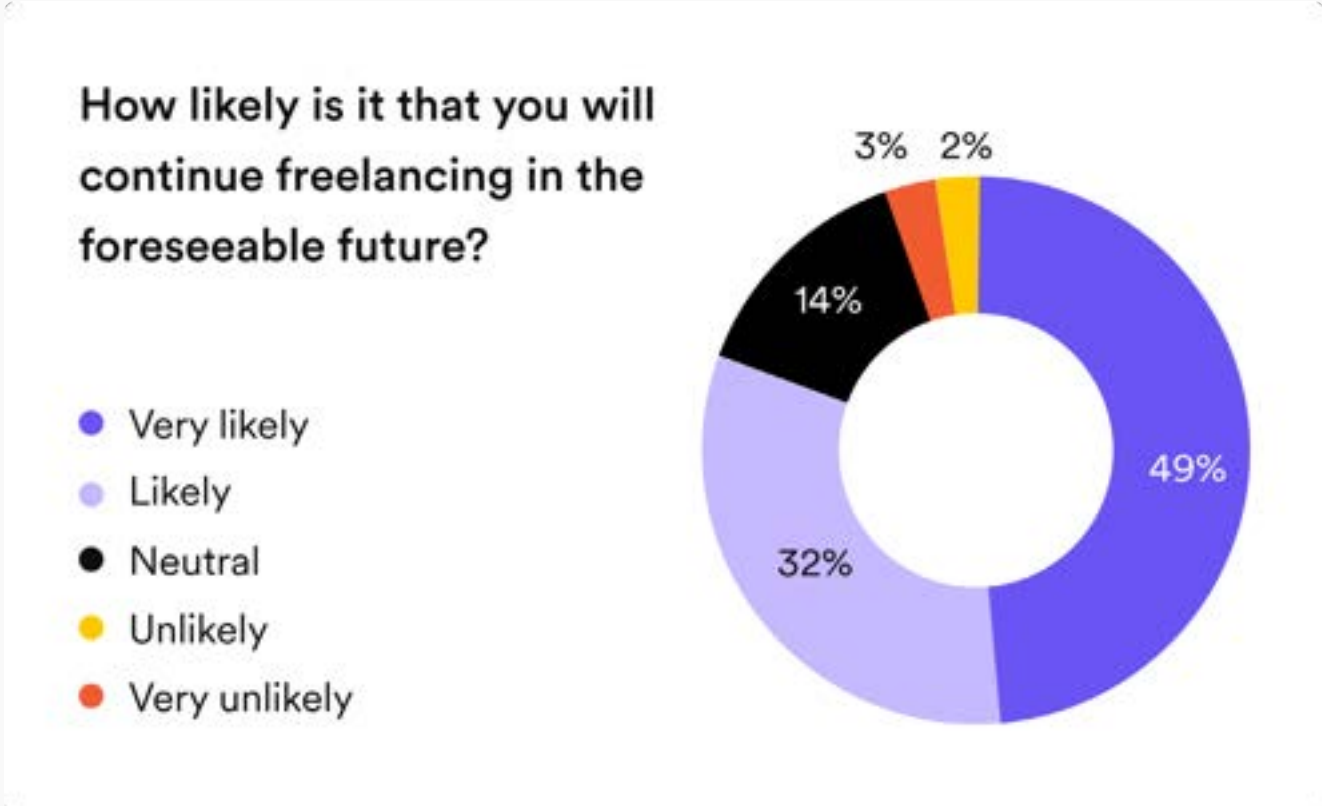


How much do you feel a sense of belonging at brands you freelance for?



While there is progress to be made in recognizing freelancers' contributions and creating a sense of belonging for them, freelancers show no signs of abandoning independent work. An impressive 81% of

freelancers indicated they are likely or very likely to continue in their roles, highlighting a future where freelancers remain dedicated to their independent careers.



Key takeaway:

Creating a sense of belonging and showing freelancers they are valued fosters stronger bonds and more committed working relationships. To achieve these outcomes, consider the following actions:

- Show appreciation to top-performing freelancers by offering a testimonial or LinkedIn recommendation.

- Establish a “freelancer spotlight” program to highlight their contributions and showcase their achievements to the wider business.
- Create opportunities for freelancers to engage with other parts of your business, potentially leading to new project opportunities.

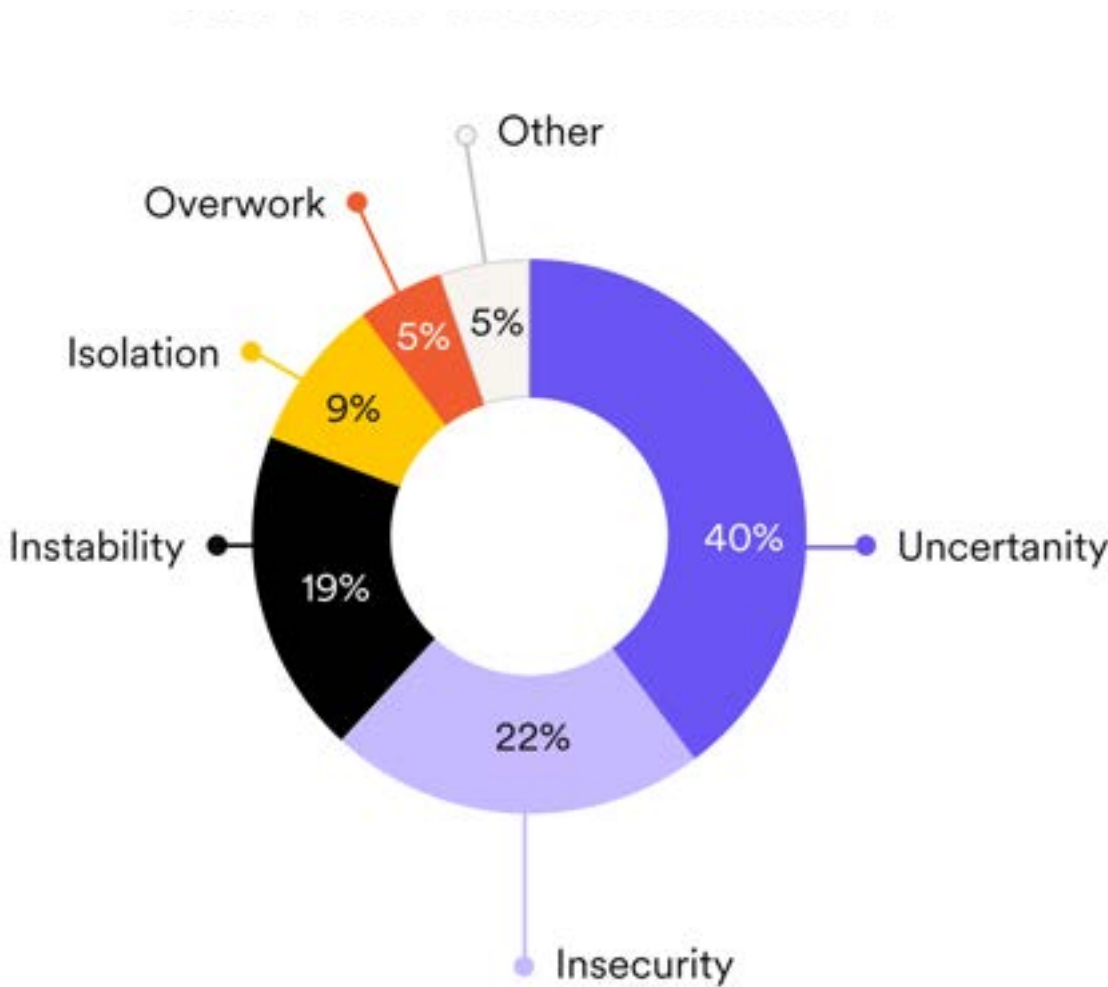
Insight #5

62% of freelancers say insecurity and instability are the biggest downsides

Working independently requires freelancers to always be searching for the next project or client. Therefore, it’s not surprising that over half of the respondents (62%) cited insecurity and instability as some of the worst things

about freelancing. Not only can unpredictable workloads and income be stressful for freelancers, but they can also be distracting and impact the quality of their work.

What is the top challenge you face as a freelancer?



Key takeaway:

Freelancers’ desire for stability and predictability are crucial for maintaining a successful partnership. You can deliver these benefits and keep freelancers motivated and eager to continue working with you by taking the following actions:

- Offer long-term projects or retainer arrangements to provide a stable and secure work experience.

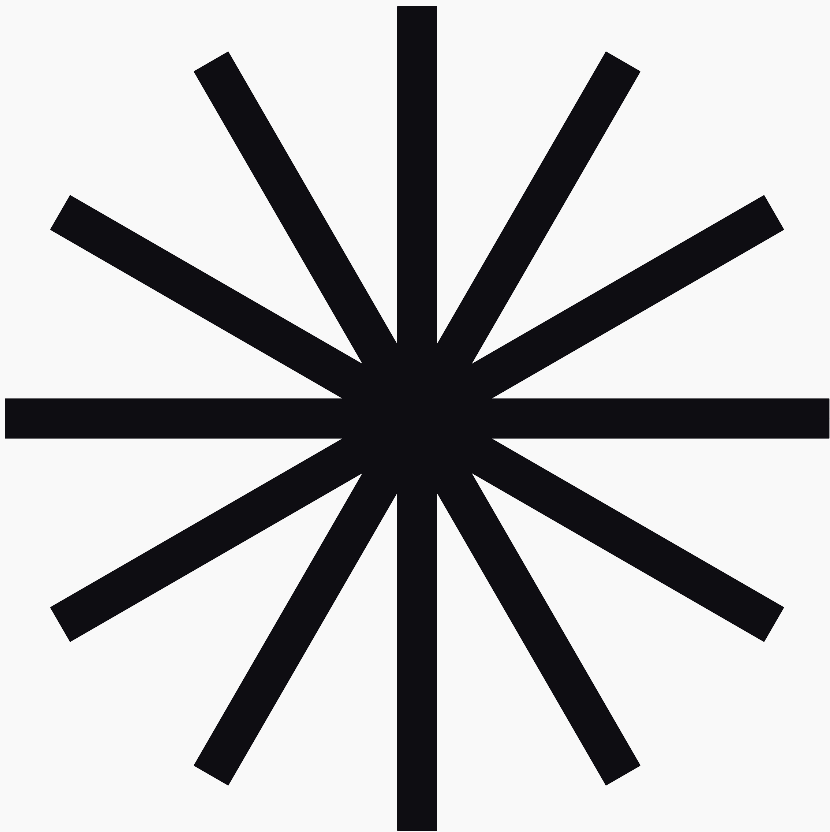
- Ensure a steady flow of work to keep freelancers engaged and focused.
- Provide [reliable and timely payments](#) to build trust and loyalty.
- Create a sense of community among your freelancers by supporting initiatives like a referral program.



Embrace the Freedom of Freelance Work

As the freelance workforce continues to expand, organizations have a unique opportunity to harness the potential of independent talent. By understanding the preferences and challenges of freelancers, you can create an environment that attracts and retains this powerful source of top talent. To achieve this goal, it will be necessary to address the practical aspects of hiring contractors, including properly classifying, paying, and onboarding them, while fostering a sense of belonging and recognizing their contributions.

With the significant majority of freelancers likely to continue in their roles, the future of freelancing is bright. It can also be bright for your organization. By embracing your freelance workforce and understanding what it takes to find and keep them, you can unlock new levels of success and stay competitive in an ever-evolving market.



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The Freedom Report 2025

A Freelancer Survey on the State of
Independent Work

Start improving your freelancers' experience
at www.worksome.com

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