



The Free Agent

How Diverse Career Motivations Affect Career Decisions

Deep down, we all approach our work in different ways, depending on our history, personality type and the many decisions that we have made during our lives. Our behaviors at work might look very much like those of others, but only we know the reasons why we perform the tasks and responsibilities of our jobs. And these reasons affect our work satisfaction most deeply, causing us to draw energy from our work or—if our motivations are not being met—to find disappointment at work.

The FutureWork Institute has researched and developed a series of categories to help explain these deep-seated motivations. We call them “career archetypes,” because research shows they are constant among many individuals.

There are five career archetypes and, it seems, one is almost always dominant in individuals, possibly from an early age:

- **The Fast Tracker** — a person who values individual contributions above all else
- **The Experimenter** — a person whose deepest motivation is to build a portfolio of skills to enable that person to discover the job or company that “fits.”
- **The Fast Tracker** — a person who sees tangible career success as a gauge of personal success in life
- **The Company-dedicated Careerist** — a person comfortable in his or her job and company because it enables that person to “dig in” and understand how “this place really works”
- **The Balanced Careerist** — a person who values life outside work as much as time spent on the job.

Each archetype is “normal,” a valid way of approaching work and career, but each is very different. Read more now to discover what motivates the Fast Tracker.



What Free Agents Are All About

Free Agents like to be free; it’s as simple as that! They are free from any deep connection to the company itself or the people in it. They use this freedom to produce top quality work, their personal contribution to the enterprise. They do not make much contribution to the company in their social connections or a desire to see this particular company succeed. Their work stands as a testament to their contribution.

In order to be successful as Free Agents, the people who share this archetype must be very good at what they do. And they are, or else they will not be Free Agents very long!

Many are independent contractors whose particular expertise is required to get a specific job done. Some work inside companies, but almost always at arm’s length from the social and political interactions that go on.

Free Agents are not anti-social; they are simply not very interested in the daily goings on. They tend to concentrate almost exclusively on their work, knowing that—for them—the work itself guarantees them a continuous career.

Managing the Free Agent

Free Agents like the lightest possible management touch. Their mantra is: “Give me the objectives for this task and leave me alone to get it done.” They seldom see their manager as a mentor or career advisor. They have already found their career: the work they expertly do. Just as they prefer to concentrate on their work, they tend

to like short, to-the-point meetings (for which they almost always come prepared), few interruptions in their routine, and project work, as opposed to ongoing maintenance.

Their one desire from managers, in addition to leaving them alone to do their work, is the opportunity to attack new and challenging projects. Free Agents love challenges because challenges enable them to both learn new skills and show their expertise.

Working on Teams with Free Agents

To other career archetypes Free Agents might seem anti-team, but they have an important and necessary place on team projects. Their work expertise allows them to act as gurus, the “go-to” persons who can figure out what the project requires. They hold an “expert” place on teams.

But Free Agents tend to make clear distinctions between work and personal or social life. One of their objections is when groups conduct “team building exercises,” and the quickest and most effective ways to exasperate them is to allow team meetings to become personal sharing sessions. As long as teams concentrate on the task at hand, Free Agents will add their invaluable expertise to projects.

Questions and Answers on Free Agents

Q. *Are Free Agents anti-social?*

A. No, they might appear so to others with a different career archetype, but Free Agents clearly separate work from social life. They might see the type of social activities engaged in at work by others as “time wasting.”

Q. *Will Free Agents stay with the company?*

A. Free Agents will remain anywhere their work adds value and is appreciated. If the success profile at a company or an individual manager does not understand or respect their work motivations, they will leave. Many become independent contractors.

Q. *Do Free Agents want to be promoted?*

A. Free agents want the same compensation and recognition that other career archetypes want, but they tend to avoid management responsibilities. Management interferes with their first love: the work itself.

Q. *How can we get the best out of our Free Agents?*

A. In conversations with them, focus on tasks. Give them room to “warm up,” and don’t be afraid to ask their opinions on what’s going on around them. They tend to be keen observers.

Above all, appreciate the work they perform. Their career goal is to become expert at what they do.

The Special Value Free Agents Bring to Work

In an era of continuous specialization, Free Agents add immeasurable value to organizations. They are the functional experts, the people who know how to get the job done and done well. As long as depth of expertise is needed in some function, the Free Agent will thrive.

Above all, Free Agents want their work to speak for them. The best compliment a Free Agent can get is “Nice job!”