



Completing the journey from self employment to a salaried position can sometimes be a challenge. Picture / Fotopress

Back to having a boss

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By ANGELA McCARTHY

While some companies are interested in hiring people who have been self-employed because of their entrepreneurial skills, others are wary.

Some employers worry that people who have been their own boss will tend to be too independent and huge risk-takers, says Career Analyst director Anne Fulton.

Chris Robson, recruitment manager for Frog Recruitment, always carefully discusses the reasons behind an application for a full-time position from someone self-employed.

"I'd want to know why they want to make the move. If it is for reasons such as support of a team, better access to training and development opportunities or a desire to specialise, then I believe they are changing for good reasons that will be positive to employers."

Sky City learning and development manager Cate Lyon is an example of someone who has re-entered the salaried workforce after seven years' self-employment as a training contractor. She started contracting for flexibility over work hours because of her three children. As her children became older, Lyon began considering a change of focus.

"I decided I wanted to add more value to my work and felt that could best be done by working full-time within an organisation. As a contractor you can run a great course and get everyone

enthused but then you walk out and don't see it move any further."

Her first move into a salaried position was a learning and development role at Fletcher Building Steel Group. Lyon says some of the transition was difficult. She initially found the company hierarchy frustrating, particularly having to ask permission to do things after seven years of making her own decisions.

"I also had a limited understanding of company politics. As a contractor you stay away from it."

Managing frustrations about constraints is a biggie for people used to being in charge, says Fulton. She suggests to clients struggling with this that they focus on smaller interim goals in another area of life to provide a sense of momentum or challenge (running a half-marathon, for example) until they are settled in the new role.

"I also suggest you give yourself six months in the new role before you judge it. Think how newly appointed CEOs and managing directors will usually wait a while before making lots of changes."

There is definitely potential for people who have been their own boss to want to take over, be involved in everything and be intolerant of inefficient practices, says Fulton.

"It may be necessary to restrain yourself and pick the issues that are really appropriate for you to tackle, rather than just being responsive to every frustration or inefficiency as you do."

Initial frustrations aside, Lyon feels she had a lot to offer because of the diverse skills she'd developed.

"When self-employed you have to influence and persuade people and have a can-do attitude. I became really good at making things happen for myself."

Networking is another vital skill in self-employment that transfers well.

"You have to network a lot for yourself so you bring all those

contacts and ideas into the organisation and that can be very beneficial."

Vern Pilkington took up a salaried position two years ago as ICO-Courtenay human relations manager after 25 years of self-employment, initially as electrical contractor and then in training and development. He was attracted by the challenge and potential of the role.

"I still walk around grinning internally at having been offered this role at 50," says the now 52-year-old. Pilkington also liked the idea of regular income and being able to go home and switch off from the office.

He feels self-employment developed strong strategic skills and a questioning approach to status quo - skills that are definitely of benefit now.

"Running your own business is very satisfying but hard because you have to become a Jack of all trades, doing the accounts, marketing and door-knocking," says Pilkington.

A common reason why people leave self-employment for a salary is that they realise they prefer to concentrate on their special abilities, says Massey University lecturer in entrepreneurship, Dr Andrew Cardow.

"A lot of people get confused with the concept of self-employment. They have a good idea and make very good technicians - indeed are specialists in what they do - but don't like interacting with the public and don't like selling. They don't seem to realise that whatever business they're starting - transport, IT, biomedical research, they need to sell."

Flexibility - traditionally a strong motivator of self employment - is now also a strong motivator back to a salary, says Robson.

"There has been quite a shift in attitude around flexibility of hours in the workplace due to the tight labour market and workforce trends. For people working long hours in their own business, this can look appealing."

Fulton lists daily contact with others, the need to have colleagues to bounce ideas off and financial insecurity as other reasons for

re-entering the corporate world.

She says now is a "perfect" time to be looking at transitioning back because there is such a shortage of candidates. "But you need to target a company that will fulfil all your needs, not just give you a job and pay packet. For some people, it is appropriate to test the waters with a short-term contract or small company before hitting the corporates."

So once the decision is made to transition, what can be done to create a good impression to potential employers?

You need to assess your strengths to get a better understanding of the new skills you've developed and what you have to offer an employer, points out Fulton.

"You have to reposition yourself and be aware of your increased marketability. For example, broad business knowledge is a huge asset in the workplace.

"You've moved out of the silo that sometimes exist in the corporate world, and broadened your thinking. Highlight this in interviews."

Other key selling points are the ability to understand the importance of managing costs, of not losing sight of the end user and the value of having all functions of a business running smoothly from marketing to debt collection, she adds.

Robson says self-employed applicants will be asked by employers how they feel about making decisions collectively, being managed by other people and working in a team. Examples of how you have worked collaboratively in the past are important to emphasise.

Great qualities

Passion: Show potential employers how the passion you had for your venture can be channelled into theirs by researching their vision and strategy and demonstrating the same enthusiasm for them that you had for yours.

Persistence: Provide strong evidence of the obstacles you overcame in your business and be prepared to talk through what

you did and why.

Time conscious: A self-employed person has to be smart with their time. Point this time management out in your CV.

Forward thinking: You probably generated a vision when self-employed and a business strategy so prepare examples of how forward thinking capability will benefit their business.

Flexibility: Someone self-employed can do everything from office cleaning to selling to the accounts. Highlight this flexibility and willingness to do what it takes in your CV.

Decision makers: Self-employed people need to be fast, confident decision makers. Give examples of decisions you made and be prepared to explain how you came to your decision. Choose decisions that "fit" the job you're applying for.

- Anne Fulton, director, Career Analyst