

## November 12, 2020 Muse-ings

### *Intro:*

This month's Muse-ing comes from Sharon Folkenroth Hess, an Independent Collections Manager who offers some advice about engaging in the gig economy.

### *Piece by Sharon Hess:*

As many cultural institutions face shrinking budgets, fewer permanent, full-time career opportunities await emerging professionals. This constriction of hiring within the G.L.A.M. (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums) sector, while beneficial to the bottom line, often leaves current employees overburdened and overwhelmed.

Enter the “gig economy.”

Hiring short-term, temporary workers allows cultural institutions to ‘do more with less.’ By only paying for the time spent on a project, these organizations save money on taxes and employee benefits. This hiring model is problematic but is likely to continue. In 2017, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that approximately 34% of the U.S. workforce engaged in the gig economy, with a projected increase to 43% by the end of 2020. (1)

While opportunities are on the rise, freelance work is not for everyone. I have been an independent contractor since I graduated with my Master’s degree in 2018 because it allowed me to create a better work-life balance while having a young child at home. For those emerging professionals considering joining the gig economy, for whatever reason, here are some tips I wish I had known at the beginning:

- 1) **Have a Plan.** Income will be unpredictable. Building a financial safety net early on is crucial. Gigs are usually based on total project hours and not a weekly schedule, so having a part-time job in addition to the gig can provide some stability. Be prepared to set aside money for retirement, healthcare, and taxes. Learn about hourly rates and total number of hours for comparable, how grants (which pay for a lot of this work) categorize and count work hours, and, definitely, how to create an invoice.
- 2) **Network.** This is the single most important tool for anyone seeking employment, gig or otherwise. Not every gig is advertised. In fact, of the last four gigs I’ve worked, exactly zero of them were posted. Talk to everyone and anyone. Consider joining professional organizations like the Independent Museum Professionals Network for helpful resources. Other regional associations offer potential networking opportunities. Having business cards is handy as well.
- 3) **Know Thyself.** Evaluate your job skills and knowledge. Figure out what your strengths and talents are and create a brief introduction statement that expresses your unique ability to help solve a problem or complete a project. Think of it as your “elevator pitch.” For example, I am an independent collections management professional who specializes in processing large donations and previously mismanaged collections. As with any job search, it is important to know how ‘sell’ your skills.
- 4) **Look to the Future.** More and more cultural institutions are embracing technology to engage audiences. Many upcoming short-term gigs will demand workers who are knowledgeable in those areas. Be prepared. Your professional development will fall squarely on your shoulders.

Whether you are entering the gig economy for its flexibility long-term or just until you find that “dream job” on MuseWeekly, the key to freelancing is to keep growing. Grow your network, grow your skill set, and keep your resume current. Happy Hunting!

(1) [https://www.ilo.org/washington/WCMS\\_642303/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20Bureau%20of%20Lab%20or%20Statistics,to%2043%20percent%20in%202020](https://www.ilo.org/washington/WCMS_642303/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20Bureau%20of%20Lab%20or%20Statistics,to%2043%20percent%20in%202020)