

The background of the entire page is a large, dense crowd of people, rendered in a monochromatic blue and white color scheme. The crowd is out of focus, creating a sense of a vast, anonymous group. In the foreground, three individuals are clearly visible: a man on the left in a dark suit and light blue tie, a woman in the center with short brown hair wearing a purple shirt under a dark jacket, and a woman on the right with long dark hair wearing sunglasses and a striped shirt. They appear to be walking through the crowd.

Is SELF- EMPLOYMENT *for* YOU?

ANYONE *can start a business...*
only FEW *can SUSTAIN a business.*

PAUL E. CASEY

(1,047 words)

Are you thinking about taking the plunge into the world of self-employment? The following excerpt on “Free Agency” is a passage from the book, “Is Self-Employment for You?” This book goes beyond the ABC’s of how to write a business plan but examines the potential entrepreneur’s personality traits and emotional readiness that ultimately make the difference between success and failure. “Is Self-Employment for You?” Author Paul Casey has been successfully sustaining his communications business for over fifteen years. The book costs \$15.95 and can be purchased by visiting Amazon.com and inputting Is Self-Employment for You?

THINK LIKE A FREE AGENT

By Paul Casey

As a self-employed business owner, I operate under what I call *the free agency perspective*. Being a free agent basically means that you are in business for yourself, even if you happen to work for other people. It means that you are always trying to do your best possible work on your current job or project, and that you are always looking for your *next* job or project as well. You are in the service of many, but your loyalty and devotion are to yourself and your family.

By the power invested in me, I hereby declare you a “*free-agent.*” You are now: **Your Name-Inc.** So write down your first and last name on this line:

_____INC.

"Free agency" is not just another catch-phrase to describe the entrepreneurial spirit. The self-employed free agent is like the Undercover Agent of the business world, working for several clients at once, instead of one single employer. These clients can

include everyone from individual customers to small and medium-sized businesses to billion-dollar corporations.

Self-employed free agents have the freedom to conduct their business anytime, anywhere, often beneath the clumsy and predictable radar of Big Business. They are not hampered by the outdated business models, lack of effective communication, and slow decision-making processes that often plague large companies. In fact, the corporate disadvantages that slow the progress of Big Business often work to the advantage of self-employed free agents. Many large companies will pay self-employed free agents to perform specialized tasks that they themselves cannot handle. Self-employed free agents are comfortable in the age of rapid information exchange, and can conduct business with a speed and efficiency that is often not possible in large companies.

The self-employed free agent often works with other free agents. My own company has no employees, but at any give time I employ up to seventeen part-time people of various wide-ranging skills to handle the needs of my clients. I refer to these people as "*free agents*," never as "contractors" or "consultants."

Competition among self-employed free agents is varied and stimulating. It fosters a creative process and fair market trade that recalls a more meaningful time, when one person's ideas often became a reality. This is no dream or wishful thinking; it is a practical and very real way to do business. My free agency perspective has helped me to sustain a successful, independent business for over fifteen years.

CORPORATE EMPLOYMENT AND THE FREE AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

The best thing about the free agency perspective is, *you don't have to be self-employed to adopt it*. You can think of yourself a "free agent" even if you work for a

mega-conglomerate, a corporation, a small business, in government service, or are unemployed. In fact, even if you ultimately decide *not* to start your own business and to stick with a full-time job, it's still a good idea to adopt the free-agent mentality.

It used to be that people would work for one company all their lives. They would be hired by that company just out of high school or college, and would work there until they retired. But job security is fast becoming a thing of the past. Companies regularly lay off employees and eliminate jobs to cut costs and to keep their stockholders happy. It is probable that you will make five or six job or career changes during your lifetime. This may not be fair, but if you *accept* that this is the way things are, it becomes easier to see yourself in the free-agent mentality.

At the moment, you may be lending your expertise to Acme, Inc., and being compensated for your work. As long as this arrangement remains mutually beneficial, your relationship will continue.

Even if you never start your own business, adopting the free agency perspective will give you an advantage. As a free agent, you assume the responsibility for your own success and well-being. If you accept the fact that nothing is permanent in today's job market, it becomes easier to anticipate and prepare for the transition points in your career. You will no longer see your long-term success as being dependent on your current employer. You will see *yourself* as the ultimate master of your own destiny.

FREE AGENCY: BASEBALL HOLDS THE KEY

The concept of being a free agent is nothing new. Major League Baseball introduced free agency in the 1970's. A player no longer plays for the San Francisco

Giants, the Cleveland Indians, or the New York Yankees. The baseball player now lends his talents to a baseball team for a certain agreed-upon period of time. When that time expires, the player bids his talents to the next-highest bidder. I now look at a player like Jason Giambi as Jason Giambi, Inc. He lent his talents to the Oakland A's for several years, until a better deal came along, and he moved to the New York Yankees.

The entertainment industry is also loaded with free agents. In Hollywood's Golden Age, actors like Humphrey Bogart, Bette Davis, and Jimmy Stewart were "under contract" with a certain movie studio, such as Paramount or Universal, to appear in a certain number of films for that studio per year. Now, stars like Julia Roberts, Jim Carrey, Scarlet Johansson, and Tom Hanks work for different studios, and negotiate each movie deal separately.

Always look at yourself as free agent. It's a mindset that you must have if you wish to start a successful business. If you are working with a company, view yourself as a free agent who is lending your expertise to that company for a period of time. You are Steve Jackson, Inc. or Pamela Olsen, Inc.