Ontario Learning Development Foundation Inc.

# BUSINESS HUB

## RESILIENCE

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# PROMOTE. MOTIVATE. MENTOR.

Business Hub is an online magazine that aims to promote business excellence and highlight stories of interest for current or new small business owners. It releases bi-annually, with each issue focusing on stories surrounding business.

Business Hub is made up of young writers that have an interest in all avenues of business from marketing to technology to finance. Business Hub seeks to create stories that are helpful for business owners and address important issues within the business world, it is a hub for all things business.

# Meet The Team

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# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Business Hub acknowledges the Indigenous land on which we work that has been inhabited by Indigenous Peoples since the beginning.

As settlers, we're grateful for the opportunity to meet here and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land — for thousands of years and for those who fought to conserve their land.

We recognize that our work here would not be possible without the contribution of the Indigenous communities. We wish to acknowledge the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place.

As settlers, this acknowledgment is a small step to making the promise and challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities and to bring justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls across the country.

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# LETTER FROM EDITOR

**Dear readers,**

When you think of words relating to business, terms like revenue, investing and capital often come to mind. While these are all important, our team at BH wanted to explore a theme that goes beyond the conventional measures of success. As we brainstormed for this issue, one thing that came up was just how much businesses and individuals have had to overcome in the last few years. That's why we decided to centre this issue's stories around resilience.

Resilience can come in many different forms. This could be on a broad scale. For instance, a business may be resilient by coping in uncertain times or adapting to unplanned changes. However, resilience can also be at an individual level: learning to navigate changes, acquiring new skills and knowledge, and rising to new challenges. The past few years have highlighted the importance of resilience, from weathering a global pandemic to adapting to emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (which you can read more about on page 26).

In this issue, you'll find a range of articles related to resilience. You can check out tips and advice on dealing with job loss (page 8) and managing the stress of searching for a new job (page 20). Then, you can explore ways to improve your career skills online, which you can find on page 16. On page 22, you can read about the ups and downs of running an indie bookstore.

As you face challenges in your business, career or personal life, we hope our writers' words will inspire you to continue meeting hurdles with courage and optimism.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Happy reading!

Julia Tramontin **(Managing Editor) & the BH team**

# How to deal with job loss

By: GABBY ALTMAN

Illustration by FREEPIK

Losing a job can be one of the most challenging experiences in a person's life. Whether it comes unexpectedly or after a period of uncertainty, job loss can shake your confidence and disrupt your routine. However, with resilience and the right strategies, you can navigate this difficult time and come out of it stronger. This article provides practical steps and resources to help you cope emotionally as you plan your next steps after being laid off.

***Emotional resilience***

**Acknowledge your feelings**

Acknowledge and accept the emotions that come with job loss. It's normal to feel a range of emotions including shock, anger, sadness, and anxiety. Talking to a trusted friend, family member, or counselor can help you process these feelings. Organizations like the Ontario Psychological Association provide directories to find licensed psychologists who can offer professional support.

Phillip Newman, a 32-year-old in Toronto was laid off a month ago from his tech job. "At first, I was mad, then I was sad and anxious. I reached out to friends and family to gain their support and guidance. Finally, one month removed, I've been able to fix up my resume and start applying to jobs. I hope I will be able to find something soon, but just knowing I have my support system and network looking out for me really means the world to me," he says.

**Stay positive and practice self-care**

Maintaining a positive outlook during this

time is challenging but crucial. Engage in activities that bring you joy and reduce stress. Exercise, meditation, and hobbies can be effective ways to manage stress. The Canadian Mental Health Association offers resources and workshops on mental well-being and self-care strategies.

### *Taking next steps*

#### Assess your financial situation

Job loss can have significant financial implications. Start by assessing your financial situation and creating a budget to manage your expenses. The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada provides budgeting tools and advice on managing finances during unemployment.

"I was given a decent severance package from my job, so that has allowed for some leeway. But I have had to be more careful in terms of erroneous expenditures, like having to say no to going out to dinner with friends, or going on vacation until I land a new job," Newman explains. "Budgeting has been really helpful to keep me on track and not feel overwhelmed."

#### Update your resume and online profiles

Take the time to update your resume and LinkedIn profile. Highlight your skills, accomplishments, and any new training or certifications. Websites like Canada Job Bank offer resume writing tips and templates to help you create a strong resume.

Newman says, "It can feel embarrassing updating your Linkedin page, or notifying your network that you have been laid off. I have found that talking to people and sharing my news has meant more opportunities may arise."

#### Consider skill development and training

Unemployment may allow you the time to enhance your skills or learn new ones. The Ontario Skills Development Program offers various training programs to help you gain new qualifications and improve your employability. Additionally, platforms like Coursera and LinkedIn Learning provide a wide range of online courses that can boost your skills.

### *Job search strategies*

#### Utilize job search resources

Ontario has numerous resources to assist in your job search. The Ontario Job Bank and Service Canada websites list job openings across the province. Additionally, local employment centers, such as Employment Ontario, provide job search assistance, resume workshops, and interview preparation services.

#### Networking and professional associations

Networking can be a powerful tool in finding new job opportunities. Attend industry events, join professional associations, and connect with former colleagues and mentors. Organizations like the Ontario Chamber of Commerce host networking events and offer resources to expand your professional connections.

### *Moving forward*

#### Consider career counseling

Career counseling can provide guidance and support as you navigate your career transition. YMCA Employment Services offers career counseling and job search workshops to help you identify new career paths and job opportunities.

#### Stay open to new opportunities

Job loss can be an opportunity to explore new career directions. Consider temporary or freelance work, which can provide income and help you gain new experiences. Websites like Upwork and Indeed list freelance and temporary job opportunities.

Dealing with job loss is undoubtedly challenging, but with resilience, support, and proactive steps, you can overcome this difficult period. Utilize available Ontario-based resources to support your emotional well-being, enhance your skills, and find new job opportunities. Remember, every setback can be a setup for a comeback.

# Enhancing your small business with Adobe Creative Cloud

By: VINCENT TRAN

The Adobe Creative Cloud is a handy tool for furthering your career.

The software and applications can be used for many jobs and industries, such as social media, marketing and design. No matter what stage you are at in your career, Adobe Creative Cloud can be an essential tool.

It can be especially useful to understand if you are an owner of a small business. Apps in the Adobe Creative Cloud can drastically improve the quality of your work and draw new people towards your business.

There are many tools with different purposes available with the Adobe Creative Cloud. Here is how some of these applications can help enhance your small business.

**Photoshop + Lightroom**

Photoshop is one of the staples of the Adobe Creative Cloud and has a wide range of ways it can be used.

You can use Photoshop to edit, alter or modify different images and visual aspects and if you are comfortable working with the tool, it will greatly improve the quality of your small business.

If you run a restaurant or food business, you can use Photoshop to create graphics to market the food options available or adjust some images on your menu or catalogue.

Lightroom is also another tool you could use along with Photoshop to improve the quality of your images.

You could use Lightroom to further enhance any pictures you take by touching up and modifying details in a photo to make it stand out. Lightroom helps you remove flaws, add effects to images and edit individual aspects of an image for in-depth editing capability.

For example, in a food business, you can use Lightroom to make specific parts of a dish stand out like the main part from the sides or clean the image up by removing some imperfections from the picture.

Learning how to work with both Photoshop and Lightroom can help improve the quality of your visuals and the implementation of images in your business.

**InDesign**

If you want to create advertisements and market your business, Adobe InDesign is the tool for you.

InDesign is useful in creating posters, brochures or flyers. You can combine images with text seamlessly and use a specific layout while keeping everything organized.

InDesign is great for expanding your brand and business image by helping you create

a specific look and marketing direction you want. You can create informative content that will supplement your business and provide more background on what you offer.

**Audition**

If you run a social media account or are looking into doing audio content or podcasting, learning how to use Adobe Audition would be helpful.

Audition is used to work on audio content, allowing users to mix, edit or add effects to their audio. There are many ways the Adobe Audition can be used to help the content you make for your small business.

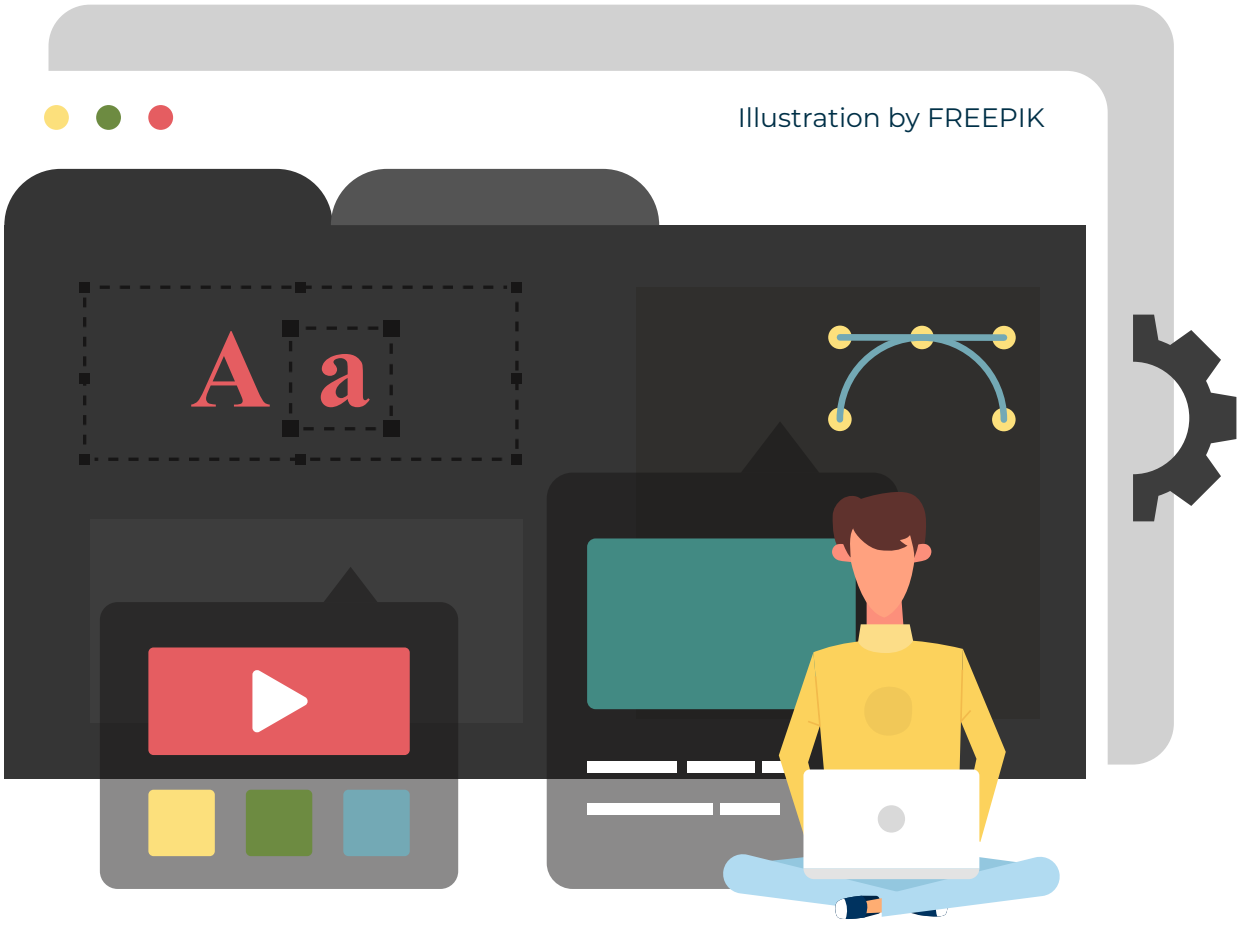
If you are doing voiceover for a tutorial video or other video content related to your business, you can edit and refine that voiceover audio in Audition. You can also adjust the audio levels to ensure you are heard well and edit the audio to remove pauses or mistakes.

For podcasts or short audio episodes, you can add in sound effects to engage the viewer or transition better from point to point with the use of fades and transitioning smoothly between audio clips. Adobe Audition is crucial to understand if you want to find another way to engage with your audience and create new content.

**Premiere Pro**

If you ever want to add video content to your small business, having some knowledge of Premiere Pro will improve its delivery of our small business.

Premiere Pro is a video editing software tool available with the Adobe Creative Cloud, and it has many features. You can cut, trim



or layer different video clips together and add text or graphics to the video as well.

You can also edit audio on Premiere Pro and even record voiceovers or audio directly on the software to add to your videos.

If you want to create short videos for your small business'social media, you can do that on Premiere Pro. You can add your video clips to the timeline and edit them with the available tools.

When you're done with your editing, Premiere Pro has export presets that make it easy for you to optimize your videos for different platforms and the quality and dimensions on those platforms.

**After Effects**

If you understand how to use Premiere Pro, you can use Adobe After Effects to further enhance your video content.

This tool offers users better and more specific video editing tools. You can get movie-like edits and effects with After Effects, which can transform your videos into professional-level content.

After Effects is used for motion graphics and animations to elevate your content and add another layer to your work. You can do things such as track individual elements in a video or remove specific content from a video clip. If you want to make better transitions or add unique titles or text in your videos, you can do that with After Effects as well.

Apart from video content, After Effects can also be used on static images and logos to bring life to them. You can make your business's logos or images more unique by editing them in After Effects and adding different animations.

Subscriptions and cost

Adobe offers users multiple packages and subscription options covering different areas and needs. But, if you want access to all the Creative Cloud apps, there are a few pricing points to consider.

**Four subscription options are available:** Individual, Business, Students & Teachers and Schools & Universities.

The Business and Schools & Universities options are meant for users who are part of an organization or enterprise.

The Individual plan costs $78.99/month or $863.88/year. If you have a student email address, it will cost $25.99/month or $352.42/year.

Learning how to use the Adobe Creative Cloud application can be a great way to enhance your business' content. With professional-level tools, learning how to use this software can offer new opportunities to upgrade your work and attract new clients.

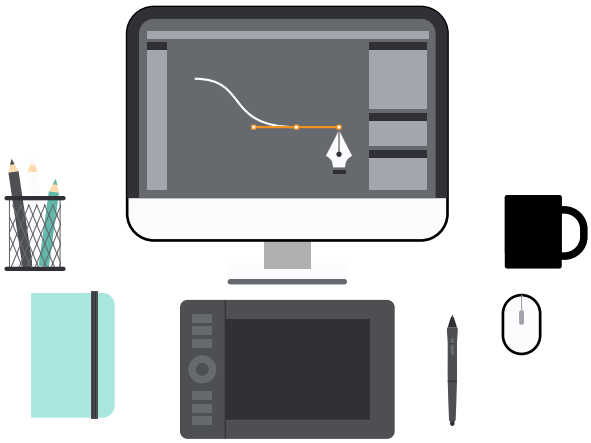


Illustration by FREEPIK

# FINANCIAL PROGRAMS

## COUNCIL OF CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATIONS BURSARY PROGRAM

Council of Caribbean Associations CANADA

To encourage and assist youth from **Caribbean countries** who are currently resident in **Ontario** to pursue their educational goals at the **university or college level.**

To recognize academic effort, community involvement and contributions to the Caribbean community in Ontario.

In 2023, **Twelve (12) $1,000.00** each Bursaries will be awarded. The value of each bursary is **CDN $1,000.00** and is used towards full courses leading to a **first diploma** or **first degree.**

## NEW PROGRAM - SCHOLARSHIP SPONSORED BY SENECA POLYTECHNIC

Seneca POLYTECHNIC

To encourage and assist youth from **Caribbean countries** who are currently resident in **Ontario** to pursue their educational goals at **Seneca Polytechnic**.

To recognize academic effort, community involvement and contributions to the Caribbean community in Ontario.

**One (1) Full Tuition Scholarship** valued up to **$6,000.00** per year for up to 4 years to a qualifying student for the duration of the program the student applied for and admitted into.

**Learn more:**
**http://bit.ly/44RfWt8**

## CANADA LEARNING BOND

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Receive $2000 to an RESP. $500 in Year 1.
Apprenticeship Programs, CEGEPs, Trade Schools, Colleges and Universities.

The Canada Learning Bond, popularly known as (CLB) is money that the Government adds to a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) for children from low-income families to assist them in paying for high education.

**Learn more:**
**https://bit.ly/44RBaqL**

# The rise of remote work

By: MEAGHAN FLOKSTRA

**More people are choosing to work from home, but it has its ups and downs.**

Illustration by FREEPIK

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a wave of workers globally transitioning to working remotely from the safety of their homes. This massive shift initially came with the expectation that workers would return to the office once the situation was under control and the level of danger had decreased. However, while most COVID-19 safety protocols have now been removed, remote work continues to be a popular option for workers in Canada.

A 2024 report published by Statistics Canada found that the percentage of Canadians working from home jumped from approximately 7 per cent before the pandemic to 40 per cent by April 2020. By November 2023, around 20 per cent of Canadians were working from home—a significant decrease from its peak at the pandemic's beginning but still a huge leap overall.

For many employees, remote work offers substantial advantages over working in person. Lisa S., a virtual customer service representative who works remotely from her home in Burlington, Ont., notes that switching to remote work has positively impacted her work-life balance. "Not having to commute to the office is a lifesaver," Lisa says. "It used to take me nearly two hours on the bus to work. Now, my 9-5 starts at nine and ends at five. That means I have more time for my personal life, and it also means I have more energy during working hours, so it's great for both me and my employer."

Remote work also offers more freedom of location for employees. For people who work in person, choosing a residence close to their workplace is often a top priority. Those who work remotely can instead focus on finding a home that meets their personal needs and goals, such as being close to family members or good schools. Amy C., a remote worker in Vaughan, Ont., shares, "I move around a lot, so I love that my job doesn't tie me down to one place. I also had to move to another province for a bit to take care of a sick family member, and I don't know what I would have done if I'd had to try to find a new job, too."

While there are many benefits to remote work, it does have some drawbacks as well. In particular, the lack of in-person contact with other employees can sometimes make communication difficult. However, employees have already begun to adapt to these obstacles. As many people continue to work from home, workers will continue to become better equipped to handle any unique challenges that remote work presents.

The option to work remotely not only allows workers more personal freedom but also makes workplaces more accessible and inclusive for those who face additional barriers in commuting to work or working in person. People work best when their personal needs are met, so a future where Canadians can choose to work remotely, in person or in a hybrid format, according to what best suits them individually, would improve the Ontario workforce.

# Online courses you can take to improve your digital skills

By: VINCENT TRAN

**Improving your digital literacy doesn't have to be hard, with access to learning right at your fingertips.**

Illustration by VECTORJUICE

With the increasing usage of and reliance on technological devices, knowing your way around the digital space is important, and even knowledge of basic information can make a difference.

Digital literacy can help you move up in your career by building upon the skills you already have or teaching you new abilities in different areas.

Almost every industry requires at least some knowledge of computers and digital skills. Improving these skills can help you in fields such as business, digital marketing or cybersecurity.

As long as you have a reliable computer and internet connection, it doesn't take much to acquire digital skills. Learning is as easy as enrolling in an online course and completing your tasks without the need to commute anywhere.

Here are some websites and online courses you can enrol in that can help you improve and grow your digital skills.

### Coursera

Coursera is an online learning program that offers various online courses across the world. They work with universities, organizations and companies to deliver online lessons, degrees and certifications to users.

Some of the course subjects available on Coursera include business, physical science, engineering and social sciences.

In addition to all the subjects offered, you can learn digital tools such as the Microsoft Office suite, programming, social media and computer science.

If you're interested in learning about web development, you could take this beginner course offered by the University of Leeds as an introduction to web development to get you started.

There are various course levels on offer, from beginner, intermediate, advanced and mixed, allowing people at different stages to learn at their own pace and comfort level.

Users are given a seven-day free trial to start, after which they must pay $67 per month to continue taking an individual course. You could also pay for Coursera Plus, which costs $80 per month or around $545 annually. These subscriptions give users access to over 7,000 courses and professional certificates.

### Skillshare

Skillshare essentially is what its name entails. It's a platform where professionals and experienced instructors share their skills and knowledge with users through video-based lessons. Users can enrol in an online class, watch video lessons and create projects. Skillshare is more geared towards the creative side of digital learning, with many lessons on graphic design, social media, video creation, and others.

If you ever want to learn more about YouTube and how to be more successful on the platform, you should check out the lesson taught by Marques Brownlee, a tech YouTuber with over 19 million subscribers.

Skillshare costs $10.75 monthly or $129 a year for the individual premium plan that gives users unlimited access to over 35,000 classes. You will get a one-month free trial to start before getting billed after that month is finished unless you cancel before then.

### LinkedIn Learning

LinkedIn offers online courses for people

to advance their careers through LinkedIn Learning—a perk of being a LinkedIn Premium subscriber. Many of the courses are taught in video form, with much of the content broken up into separate videos.

LinkedIn Premium costs around $50 a month. If you're willing to pay that amount, you'll have access to over 21,000 courses on a wide range of subjects, including marketing, data analysis and engineering. There are even lessons that give you advice on how to listen to customers or get what you want in your career. If you want to improve your digital skills and your basic knowledge of computers and software, you could take this beginner-level course on working with computers.

You can learn many things through LinkedIn Learning courses and improve your skills on a wide range of topics. Just browse through the course offerings and find out what suits you at this stage.

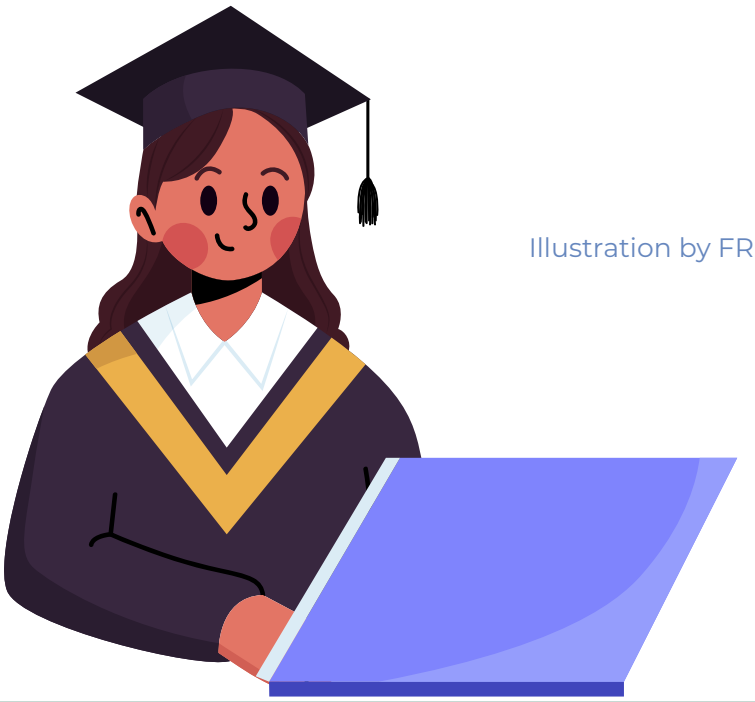
**Udemy, Inc.**

According to their website, Udemy is an online learning and teaching marketplace with over 220,000 courses and 70 million students across the world. There is plenty of content and different subjects available with Udemy, including courses on IT and software, design, and photography and video.

If you're interested in learning about the Adobe Creative Suite, there is a course that will teach you more about Photoshop, Illustrator, Adobe XD and InDesign. Similarly, you could learn to get better with other software, such as this course on Microsoft Excel.

While Udemy offers many courses compared to other websites, not all of them are available within a singular subscription like other online learning sites.

Udemy's personal plan for individuals will cost you $25.83 a month, giving you access to a curated list of over 11,000 courses. Some of the courses you're interested in might not be available to you within your subscription, and for the most part, you'll have to pay separately for a course you're interested in.



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OLDF PRESENTS

# FREE TUTORING

## Subjects:

- English
- French
- Math
- Science

Our High School Tutoring program provides **comprehensive social and educational activities** throughout the school year for students in **grades 8-12**. We are providing virtual high school tutoring for **free** for academic support.

An after-school High School Tutoring program would provide the necessary, safe space, tutoring, and support to inspire students to excel, including but not limited to completing assignments and reading/literacy activities.

At the end of the school year, the management team of OLDF, along with the tutors, will evaluate to assess the milestones, accomplishments, and areas of improvement for the High School Tutoring program to rerun it successfully for the following school year and beyond.

**Coming Soon: Sept. 2024 & March 2025**

**Registration opens each fall and goes through until the end of the school year.**

# Finding balance: managing a side hustle while working full-time

By: GABBY ALTMAN

## Tips to successfully pursue your job and side gig without burning out.

In today's fast-paced world, many individuals pursue side hustles to boost their income or satisfy personal passions while working full-time. Balancing a full-time job with a side hustle can be challenging, but with proper time management, it is achievable. Thankfully, there are many tips and tricks to help successfully manage the two commitments.

### Set clear boundaries

First off, it is important to set clear boundaries. You should allocate specific hours for your side hustle and stick to them to avoid burnout.

Evan Kossman, a full-time web developer and part-time freelancer in Ontario, says that he works 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., takes an hour break for dinner, and works on his side projects for two hours before taking his down time.

"I communicate my schedule to my clients, so they understand that they may not get a response back from me during standard working hours," Kossman says.

Clear communication and boundaries are key to his success. Developing a consistent routine that accommodates both your job and side hustle will help you juggle both.

### Prioritize tasks

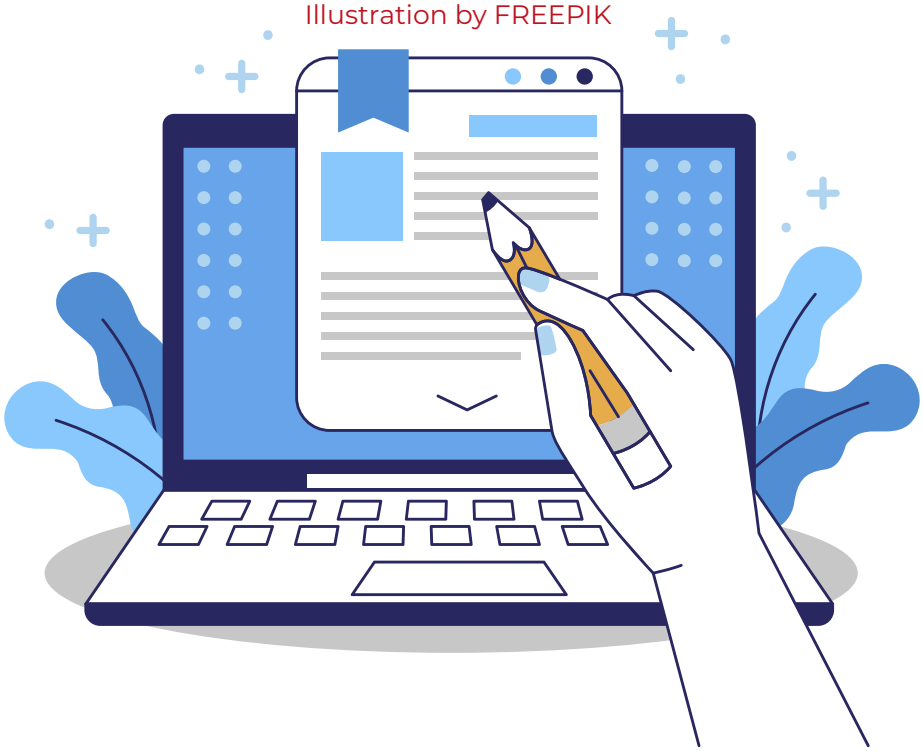
Prioritizing tasks is essential for balancing a full-time job and a side hustle. Utilizing tools like to-do lists or digital planners can help organize your workload so that you meet deadlines and manage your time effectively. By breaking down tasks and setting clear priorities, you can focus on the most important activities for both your primary job and side hustle, reducing stress and increasing productivity.

### Stay motivated and organized

Staying motivated and organized is crucial for success. Danielle Altra, a teacher in Ontario manages her own tutoring side business. Altra says that "my calendar is imperative to managing my time and prioritizing tasks."

Altra prioritizes her daytime teaching job

Illustration by FREEPIK



and sets specific hours throughout the week for her tutoring. Ensuring everything is organized in her calendar helps her understand when she has extra time or needs to focus on one task over another.

“Working two jobs can be exhausting, but I try to stay positive and motivated as I love teaching and it is my true passion. In the end, it is worth it!” Altra explains.

## Schedule downtime

Scheduling time for relaxation and hobbies is necessary to avoid burnout. Perhaps you watch a favourite TV show every week or attend yoga classes. Setting time for yourself to decompress is important.

“I like to set aside time to go to the gym and take time for myself. Spending time with my friends and family also helps me relax and not get too overwhelmed when thinking about the tasks I need to complete,” Kossman shares.

## Goalsetting

Set short-term and long-term goals for your side hustle. Short-term goals track immediate progress and help you stay engaged, while long-term goals provide a clear vision of where you want your side hustle to go. This dual approach facilitates steady progress and motivation to reach your overarching objectives.

“I keep a journal and make sure to set daily, weekly and monthly goals. It can be anything from how many hours I want to tutor in a week, to how I want to grow my side hustle in the future. Writing down my goals and keeping myself accountable helps me stay on track,” Altra says .

With the right strategies, balancing a full-time job and a side hustle is possible. Whether you’re looking to earn extra income or pursue a passion, implementing these tips can help you manage both effectively.

# Creating and selling handmade decor

By: MEAGHAN FLOKSTRA

## A small business owner shares her experience overcoming challenges and launching her successful decor shop.

Illustration by MACROVECTOR

For many artists, starting a business and making a living off your creative works is the ultimate dream. Transforming fantasies into a practical business model can be difficult and daunting, but there are lots of creators who have achieved incredible success after taking the leap.

Emily, the owner of Fandom Decor, a small business based in Ontario, creates and sells decor pieces themed around books and other media. Since launching Fandom Decor in 2020, Emily's business has skyrocketed in popularity, gaining thousands of followers on Instagram and regularly selling out of products. In addition to her 3D decor pieces, such as reading trackers, Emily recently introduced acrylic signs into the lineup.

Though the journey to success hasn't always been easy, Emily says she loves running her business and that it's well worth it to put in the work since she loves

what she does and is passionate about the products she creates. “Just the whole process from laser to finished product when making new designs is so much fun,” she says. She added that she loves interacting with customers and talking to them about both her products and their interests, and one of the highlights of her experience is “responding to comments and seeing all the reactions when I launch a new design.”

Today, social media is a huge factor for small businesses. Emily noted that maintaining an active social media presence has been a major contributor to the success of Fandom Decor. “Pretty much all of my marketing and advertising is on Instagram,” she explained. “It’s just a great way to post and share my products, as well as interact with the book community. Plus, my follower growth and engagement directly correlates to restock and launch success.”

Another key to her success has been establishing a consistent routine for creating and distributing physical products to avoid becoming stressed and overwhelmed. She has a typical weekly schedule of cutting the designs out with the laser on Sundays and Mondays, painting them on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, assembling everything on Thursdays and Fridays and packing orders on Saturdays so they can be sent out on the following Monday. “Figuring out this routine has been a great way to help me still enjoy what I do but keep myself disciplined and on schedule,” she says.

The biggest challenge Emily has faced in her career is imposter syndrome. “I wouldn’t even say I’ve overcome it yet, and frankly, I don’t think I ever will. With so many other creators and businesses, it’s very easy to start thinking you’re not good enough. Plus, with the added pressure of my success and, honestly, my paycheque being based on how well something is received on social media, it adds a lot of pressure and stress. This can very easily turn into self-doubt and thinking you’re not good enough.”

However, while impostor syndrome tends to be an ongoing struggle, Emily noted that there have been challenges that she has managed to overcome over the years, such as getting the perfect paint finish with white paint. “That was a big pain near the beginning when I would have paint cracking, and now, thankfully, I don’t.” Trying new products and techniques and going through the process of trial and error can be time-consuming, but it pays off in the end through enhanced quality and efficiency.

Starting and running a small business is far from simple, but that certainly doesn’t mean it’s not an achievable goal for those willing to put in the work. Emily shared that she hopes that other aspiring creators are encouraged by the success of Fandom Decor and feel inspired to start selling their own work. “I never thought when I started this business in 2020 that by 2024, it would be my full-time job. Constantly seeing how much love and support I get from my followers blows me away,” she stated. “I have big hopes and dreams for my shop, and I’m slowly seeing them come to life, which is such an incredible thing.”

Illustration by FREEPIK

# The ins and outs of vegan leather

By: KYLE QUILATAN

## Vegan leather has become a popular leather alternative, but there may be more to it than just being animal-free.

Faux leather has been in the fashion industry for a while, but the “vegan leather” label did not gain prominence until around 2010. At the time, some celebrity designers began basing their clothing lines on the concept of being animal-free. Thus, traditional animal leather was replaced with synthetic alternatives, which came to be known as vegan leather.

### Types of vegan leathers

As the name suggests, vegan leather is manufactured without any animal byproducts. There are three main types of vegan leather: faux, plastic-free and plant-based.

Faux leather is mostly made of a cotton or polyester base which is then bound by synthetic materials like polyurethane (PU) or polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Since this material is mostly plastic-based, it is also commonly called “pleather” (plastic leather). Being almost entirely plastic, this kind of leather is not environmentally friendly and is often not grouped into what is typically considered “vegan leather.”

Plastic-free leather is not as common in the current fashion industry due to a lack of manufacturers. This material is relatively new compared to the other two vegan leathers. Plastic-free leather is sometimes not even considered leather, but its own material because of its unique properties.

Plant-based leather is what most people think of first when they think of vegan leather. This kind of leather uses materials like cactus leav es and pineapple. The fruit’s byproducts are often ignored or discarded after it is harvested. To ensure the leather’s durability and water resistance, the plant base is often combined with plastic, typically PU.

### Does “vegan leather” mean eco-friendly?

A common misconception among consumers is that the term “vegan” is synonymous with “sustainable” or “eco-

Illustration by FREEPIK

friendly." Unfortunately, this is not always the case, especially with many plant-based leathers. The plastic components of these materials are non-biodegradable, which entirely contradicts the point of making them out of plant byproducts in the first place.

Despite the questionable composition of many plant-based types of leather, many consumers remain unaware of the environmental impact of these materials, partially because of the "vegan" label. According to *Forbes*, the term "vegan" has largely become a marketing buzzword instead of being used to describe the ingredients behind a product. When customers see this term on a label, their first thought is usually that the product is made of plants. The reality is that "vegan" simply means "not made of animals."

A survey conducted by Atomic Research on behalf of Leather UK found that out of 2,000 respondents, 74 per cent were unaware of the composition of vegan leather. Fifty per cent thought that animals were raised specifically to make leather, and another 24 per cent did not know that the hides and skins used to make animal leather were simply byproducts of the food industry that would otherwise be discarded. Of course, this does not undo the unethical nature of many practices in the animal leather industry, but it does dispel the common notion that animal leather is always bad and vegan leather is always good.

It is important to also note that Leather UK is a trade association in the animal leather industry. They partner with various companies to promote their own industry, so they will naturally be biased towards the animal leather products they endorse. However, this does not change the findings of their survey as well as the confusing labelling of vegan leather products.

### The future of vegan leather

Despite the confusion, some promising advancements are being made in the vegan leather industry with fully biodegradable plastic-free leathers that are eco-friendlier than their plastic-hybrid counterparts. GoodOnYou's list of leather alternatives outlines some of these plastic-free options. These include Mirum (made of natural rubber, plant-based oil and minerals), Malai (manufactured with wastewater from coconut processing) and MuSkin (made from the fungus Phellinus ellipsoideus). While these are interesting prospects, they do not come without their own problems. Plastic-free leathers are often weaker and more expensive than regular leather. Additionally, since many are relatively new, they have received little investment for further development.

Much more nuance exists in the leather industry than meets the eye. There are pros and cons to both animal and vegan compositions, and neither type of product is inherently better than the other. If your business chooses to sell either of these leather products, be transparent about what goes into them. Consumers should be aware of what they are purchasing by being able to easily determine the makeup of these products. Continue to do more research to see if leather products are a good investment for your business.

# What jobs will generative AI replace?

By: CALLUM DENAULT

## What to know about how this technology may affect future careers.

In discussions about the rise in AI-generated content, one prevailing question looms above all others:  Will this technology threaten to put me out of work?

According to computer technology company IBM, generative AI is any artificial intelligence that creates new pieces of media based on user input. These pieces of artificially generated media include text, images, videos, audio recordings or even lines of software code.

What generative AI, or gen AI for short, lacks in real creativity, it makes up for in its ability to remember massive amounts of images, videos, sounds, and writing. This period of a generative AI consuming existing media is known as “training.” Training allows generative AI programs to make new creations that are heavily inspired by everything the AI has seen before.

For instance, if someone were to tell Midjourney, an independent research lab, to create a realistic-looking picture of a horse, that AI would draw upon the countless photos of horses it has seen in the past to make a new image that should more or less resemble a horse. All generative AI programs go through training in order to give appropriate responses to user requests.

Generative AI has the frightening potential to produce high-quality media, but it has limitations in fully replacing human artists. Even so, many may wonder about the impact of generative AI, particularly on creative industries.

### AI journalism: can robots replace reporters?

For better or worse, AI-generated news is not something that awaits us in the near future—it is already here. In 2023, NewsGuard reported that it found 49 websites filled with articles that seemed AI-generated. These websites were published in seven different languages: English, Chinese, Czech, French, Portuguese, Tagalog and Thai.

Though these websites churn out dozens to hundreds of articles a day with AI, many of them promoted false narratives or even made up stories entirely on their own.

Illustration by PCH.VECTOR

Additionally, they had what NewsGuard referred to as “hallmarks of artificial intelligence,” such as bland language and repetitive phrases. Many of these websites were littered with advertisements as a way of making easy money.

For this reason, media analyst Mauricio Cabrera told Poynter that the future of newspapers and magazines will see them making less content overall to focus on quality instead. In the same article, technology leader Ben Werdmuller echoed the same concept, saying newsrooms that treat AI as a way to cut costs will drown themselves in a sea of similarly mass-produced and equally dull publications. Werdmuller also advised newsrooms against sticking to traditional search engine optimization and social media tactics for the same reason: to avoid blending in with AI-produced copies.

AI’s limitations in journalism carry over into other fields of media as well. Artists worried about competition from machines should remember to focus on quality over quantity.

## AI artists: why AI art looks so real … until it doesn’t

Just like with news reporting, generative AI has started to become a reality in the art world. In March of 2024, an official Batman comic published by DC Comics was criticized for supposedly using AI-generated imagery. Lego met similar criticism over some of their recent advertisements.

In both cases, critics pointed out unusual mistakes in the artworks, like unnecessary details that a human artist would not add. For instance, in the Batman comic, there is a megaphone sticking out of a horse for no apparent reason. Likewise, the seemingly intricate trees seen in the background of a Lego ad are, on closer inspection, not only growing their branches at odd angles but also fusing with streetlights.

AI art has come a long way, but many of its creations are filled with odd design choices. Even when users give the AI a very detailed prompt that avoids graphical glitches—or perhaps manually edit the generated photos to remove any mistakes—there are still some things AI cannot draw properly.

Hands are infamously hard for generative AI to draw properly. This is because—unlike human artists—AI has no real understanding of what a hand actually is.

Because AI illustrates our appendages, such as hands, using a bunch of randomly gathered images for inspiration, it does not understand how a hand would realistically look when holding something, clenching a fist, pointing or doing any other complex action. This also applies to animal body parts. While AI can generate a hyper-realistic photo of, say, an octopus, it has no clue how many tentacles an octopus has or what exactly they would look like.

The uncanny valley is one of AI's biggest obstacles. It's the reason why so many AI-generated images of people look fake. The uncanny valley comes from an evolutionary response that developed as a way of avoiding contagious diseases because a seriously ill or dead person looks almost like a normal person who is "off" in some way. Humans are really good at recognizing each other based on instinctive knowledge of a person's features.

AI's inability to accurately depict body parts like hands, teeth and eyes falls into this uncanny valley because people are way better at recognizing these features than we realize. For artists wanting to stay in business alongside AI generators, it may be worthwhile to get good at drawing body parts that machines struggle with.

## AI music: will human singers still be relevant?

Unfortunately, things don't look so optimistic for human musicians in the wake of generative AI. Seventy-five per cent of producers believe they might eventually be replaced by AI music generators, as reported by MusicRadar. However, only 17.3 per cent of those interviewed claimed to hold a negative opinion of AI in the music industry. How audiences react to AI will make or break the success of AI music generators since they cannot thrive without public support.

In the worst-case scenario, where robots have near-perfect accuracy and become mainstream, there's still hope that these very tools can be used to enhance human music instead of replacing it entirely. Musicians can benefit from using AI to automate repetitive tasks like sampling sounds, and still have enough creative input to create their own music.

While AI demonstrates impressive capabilities across various sectors, its limitations in creativity highlight the importance of human imagination and originality. Artists, journalists and musicians can harness AI as a tool while emphasizing the importance of maintaining creative authenticity.

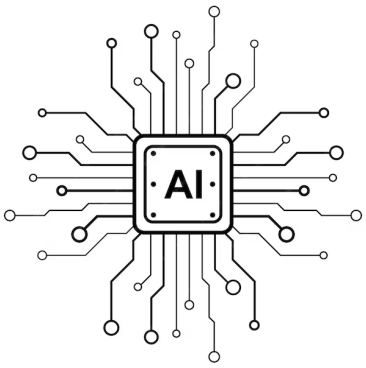



Illustration by AWKSEJAHTERA

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