

# Ready to exchange the boardroom for the studio?

By  Catherine Milward-Bridges

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Are you charged with the adrenalin from having endured more than your fair share of 'flack' in your job? Then you may feel justified in diving headlong into the abyss of perceived 'instant freedom' of the self-employed. But first read on, before you hand over 'The Letter'.

Having myself relinquished the 'comforts' of corporate bliss to explore the arduous but oh-so rewarding plains of self-employment, I had some questions for local, trailblazing photographer, [Danie Nel](#).

## It's what I do

For Nel, photography has seamlessly advanced from being a mere pastime in his childhood to a sustainable career, after obtaining a National Diploma as well as a Bachelor of Technology degree in photography.

As a one-man operation he regularly pulls 10-hour shifts - not to mention working during weekends, - but is pleased to be able to call his craft a true labour of love.



"There was never a time in my adult life when photography was merely a hobby. It's what I do and I do it well." he says.

## Ask yourself

While Nel stresses the importance of following one's passion, he cautions against impulsiveness when it comes to one's career moves.

Before going it alone, answer these questions honestly:



### 1. What are the perks in my current job?

Perks - every job has them. They vary from monetary rewards, to discounted memberships, subsidised housing and childcare facilities, and other trappings.

Consider carefully if you'll be happy to relinquish these; or have the capital to replace them on your own steam.

### 2. Are you up for 100% accountability?

When going it alone, you assume complete responsibility for *everything* to do with your 'new venture', without *any* entitlements. Bearing in mind that there are no labour laws or unions to turn to. Not to mention no guarantee of a consistent income, or any income at all, at the end of each month.

Thinking this through is vital, especially if the stability of earning a salary has caused you to become accustomed to a certain lifestyle.



### 3. Will you make the grade?

Competition in the modern day business landscape is relentless; and consumers are the most discerning they've ever been.



This means that service providers need to do more than just up the ante - they need to stand out amongst their competitors, to grab and hold the attention of their targeted customers.

Will your offering generate an adequate income?

#### 4. How will you remain stimulated?

Repetition has a way of dousing the passion that once characterised a craft.



When turning your trade into an income-yielding career, you'll go from practising at whim, to having to produce on demand. While this has the potential of bringing you boundless satisfaction, it will also produce untold stress.

Ask yourself if you'll be able to maintain a certain standard of quality when having to juggle productivity and creativity.

Nel continues by dispelling some of the misconceptions around photography:

- Work extends beyond just a shoot: it includes photo editing, admin, delivery, marketing, research, proposal writing and prop sourcing.
- It takes *years* to establish oneself in this trade: that's if you want to generate a sustainable income.
- Photography is not only about creativity and self-expression: in commercial photography, for example, adhering to a brief supersedes creativity.
- There's no preferential treatment when it comes to buying equipment: I pay the same prices as everyone else.
- A day's work can often involve extensive physical labour: it's not all glamour and glitz.

On remaining grounded and relevant, he advises:

- Accept that you'll never be the best, because this trade is cloaked in subjectivity.
- Create a marketable package with service excellence, a distinct style, honed skills and amicability.
- Stay informed through regular reading, research and attending workshops.

"When all is said and done, my craft brings me an inexplicable sense of self-sufficiency and fulfilment; especially, knowing that I'm part of the 10% of self-employed in the SA workforce.

Of course, the fact that I'm also contributing to the GDP of our country is the absolute cherry on top!"

He concludes with what he deems his best advice: Do not lose the clients you already have - look after them first.

#### ABOUT CATHERINE MILWARD-BRIDGES

Catherine Milward-Bridges is a passionate communication specialist and founder of simplyput.co.za. Catherine guides her clients in taking their engagement efforts from good to great; and helps them optimise social media with strategic know-how.

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