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**B3**

## The rise of the gig economy

They can work in their pajamas if they want to. They never have to dread Mondays, or heave a sigh of relief when it's Friday.

They slow down when they're tired and burned out. They rarely get to endure the daily rush hour. And they never have to do time in and time out on a Bundy clock.

Sometimes, they can rake in a million in just one day, or can be as poor as a pauper on dry days.

They are the country's freelancers and they live and work on their own terms.

### EYES WIDE OPEN



**IRIS GONZALES**

eographer.

He makes P50,000 to P80,000 a month, more than three times than what he used to earn as an employee. He loves it and most of all, he has more time on his hands.

Alanah T., an independent journalist, is also a freelancer. She is known as a photographer, but she also writes stories.

When I asked how much is the usual rate for writers in local publications, she said it could be as low as P1,500 for a long form article and P250 per photograph in newspapers. Still, it's a set-up that works for her.

And then there's Sonia G., an accountant who asks for P900 for every piece of document she works on. It seems small, but she already has a pool of clients who keeps her business good.

There's no doubt the gig economy is growing. And thriving, too. It is becoming an alternative to the usual 8 to 5 jobs, not only in the Philippines, but also in other countries.

The gig economy, a term coined just in recent years, is defined as a market wherein people accept short-term contracts.

In the gig economy, jobs are more flexible. Individuals can take several gigs and earn more. It's different from the traditional corporate set up wherein workers take jobs as part of a long planned career path.

I don't really know when it started, but I suspect that its popularity in recent years has a lot to do with the restlessness of millennials. Employers say millennials don't stay long in their jobs anymore and are easily bored – but that's another story.

Whatever it is that is pushing the growth of the gig economy, I think it's likely to stay. It's made easier by technology and new ways of doing things.

The older generations may have been raised with the "study hard and work in a good company" aspiration, but history has shown that the corporate setting and traditional economy do not always work.

There have been one crisis after another – the Asian financial crisis, the global financial meltdown of 2007 and the US housing lending crisis.

Or perhaps I shouldn't even look too far. Maybe, the worsening traffic in Metro Manila will be enough reason to encourage more and more people to quit their 8 to 5 jobs and have better quality of life.

According to a *Time* magazine survey in 2016, 71 percent of Americans in the gig economy were happy.

I can imagine how liberating it must be. While I am a regular employee, the nature of my work is also different from an 8 to 5 job.

I don't have fixed working hours and my daily "office" is as varied as it is exciting. Sometimes, I'm in a tycoon's swanky abode or gate crashing a business meeting while in some rare moments, I'm audaciously waiting for a source outside the men's room.

I am sure the gig economy is much more varied, liberating and flexible as I imagine.

But unfortunately, it's not perfect.

It can be a problem when freelancers settle for measly pay just to get by.

Here in the Philippines, it's called diving – bringing down rates below industry standards to get more gigs.

Those who settle for measly pay bring down a whole industry with them.

If nobody accepts low rates, employers hiring freelancers will realize that they need to pay more. Trust me, they can afford your rate because they've already saved so much as they don't need to pay for health and other benefits.

So yes, the gig economy may just be the perfect remedy to stay sane in this land of mayhem. One does not have to endure the traffic, the hellish MRT rides, the corporate intrigues, or live a lifeless life where the only highlight of the day is when one finally gets to swipe the Bundy clock to time out.

But freelancers have to respect their craft and talent well enough to say no to measly rates.

As my favorite freelancer once said, "free love is good but alienation of labor is not."

\*EMPLOYMENT