

A Comparison of “Professional Modes”

“Professional modes” offer a way to examine the roles and opportunities we engage in during our careers. These modes extend beyond the activities of earning an income, but definitely include regular employment, self-employment, and running a business. Although not all professional modes produce income, those that don’t can provide some of the most rewarding learning and proficiency-building experiences of all. **To be effective in any mode, be sure that your abilities and interests are visible to colleagues and prospective clients in your professional network.**

For many reasons, no single mode will necessarily satisfy all of one’s professional needs for an entire career. Thus, we may benefit from exploring different modes at different times. The table below suggests a way of comparing the benefits and challenges of various professional modes. Please note that this list merely scratches the surface of the many considerations involved!

Professional Mode	Income Producing?*	Benefits	Challenges
<p>Learner or Volunteer</p> <p>Engaging in learning and professional skill development, volunteering, taking a sabbatical, or working on personal projects.</p>	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An excellent way to learn and apply new skills with low risk. • Can set the stage for more interesting and better opportunities, either paid or unpaid. 	Typically unpaid; thus opportunities may be limited or may need to occur in parallel with paid activities.
<p>Employee</p> <p>Working for a company as a “regular employee” with a W-2 status. The position may be part-time or full-time and/or temporary.</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A predictable income stream and benefits for some period. • Possible advancement & professional growth opportunities. 	Not permanent , and it may be very difficult to foresee when the need for a job no longer exists and a layoff will occur.
<p>Contractor</p> <p>Offering services for hire based on client or project needs, usually with a 1099 tax reporting status. Some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sole proprietor of a freelance business. • A member of one or more virtual project development teams. 	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracting on site can help one “test drive” a company before committing to regular employment. • The project focus can help avoid problems with office politics. • May work from home full- or part-time. • Much variety possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not permanent. However, project-driven work has defined limits or visible ebbs and flows that make it easier to predict an ending point. • Typically few or no benefits. • Sporadic work.
<p>Business Owner</p> <p>Running an organization such as a consulting group, agency, or product/service company with partners or employees.</p>	Yes	Can be financially lucrative and professionally rewarding — with the right collaborators and sufficient resources.	Requires many skills beyond one’s primary area of expertise to be successful in the long run.

*“Income producing” refers here to the active generation of earnings as opposed to passive or investment income.