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*Phil Burnell: barristers' clerk
turned freelance tennis coach*



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IRECTION

FM meets two people for whom freelancing has provided an opportunity for them to follow their passion

Phil Burnell

→ From barristers' clerk to freelance tennis coach

Freelance tennis coach Phil Burnell signs off the welcome page of his website with a jovial 'see you on court'. It's a well-intentioned statement, but also works as a tactful reference to the 20 years he spent working as a barristers' clerk.

"Like many clerks, I started in chambers as a junior and progressed to a position that was relatively well-paid, and secure," says Burnell. "There was also a tried and tested career path."

However, a combination of events ignited a long-held interest. "I'd played tennis as a junior and it had always been a passion since watching Bjorn Borg win Wimbledon," says Burnell.

"In 2001, I spent three months travelling around Australia, then I worked for three years at a private school in Poland teaching English as a foreign language. The nature of my job in Poland gave me free time to play tennis regularly

so I got back into it in a big way."

However, believing that you needed to be a top player to consider becoming a tennis coach, Burnell went back to clerking on his return to the UK. Fortunately, a 70-year-old vicar was on hand.

"Here was a recently retired vicar who was now my brother's tennis coach," says Burnell. "He was a keen player but had taken his coaching badges only after retiring. He was a real inspiration. If he could do it then so could I."

Now in his second year as a freelance tennis coach, licensed by the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and qualified through the Professional Tennis Registry (PTR), how does it feel?

"I'm still building up my business, but any sense of insecurity is far outweighed by the sense of freedom I have," says Burnell. "This job makes me happy."

"It's great to plan my own week. I might have a private lesson starting at 7.30am, followed by a kids' club and coaching sessions for ESG (England Sports Group).

I coach anyone from five years of age, through to teenagers and adults. In fact, my legal training and teaching still come in useful. I'm organised, well-prepared and believe I can build a good rapport with students of any age."

But what about the constant application required to find new clients?

"As a barristers' clerk, work finished at 6pm and you didn't think about it until the next morning. Now, I'm preparing lessons in the evenings and working out ways to develop my business," he says. "My website's been up for a few months now although I need to get higher up on Google. Search for 'tennis coach London' and I'm nowhere to be found. Funnily enough, search 'freelance tennis coach' and I'm on the first page."

"I got a good response from an ad on Gumtree and I'm starting to tap into the legal connections I've got and build it from there. It's a lot of work. But I've no regrets."

www.burnelltennis.co.uk

Abby Rhodes

→ From head of corporate comms to freelance singer and teacher

Despite singing in concerts around the UK and Europe over the past 10 years, Abby Rhodes never thought of making music her career. "Well, maybe once or twice I'd wonder whether I could do this professionally," she says. "But life overtakes, and it goes back in its box."

That said, Rhodes had managed to combine music with her role as head of corporate communications at BECTA – the former government agency. That is, until 24 May 2010, when it was announced that BECTA would close within the year.

"Closure was a shock," says Rhodes, who had worked at the agency for 11 years. "Fortunately, it wasn't going to be a quick

process which gave me the chance to think about what I actually wanted to do."

By the end of summer 2010, she'd decided to set up on her own in music. "I'd spoken to professional opera singers about my voice and was delighted that they believed I'd got what it takes," she says.

But with two young sons, the Rhodes family needed financial stability.

"Although I may have been a bit green to start with, I've been able to use my marketing and communication skills to get some freelance consultancy projects off the ground," says Rhodes. "I've also got a great mentor."

"I'm blessed to have such a varied and interesting career opening up in front of me. This week, I'll be coaching singing at a stage school as well as some private



tuition. I'm also managing an awards scheme – using the skills I learned in events management at BECTA.

"Beyond that, performance is where my heart lies. It's seasonal work, but summer looks busy and I've got material I haven't been asked to do before which is very exciting."

www.abigailrhodes.co.uk