

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 22 of compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Do you have a difficult time maintaining client relationships once the job is over? In today's episode Christina Gawlik and I talk about that and more when we discuss becoming a math writer. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course, we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. Christina, welcome to the show.

Christina: Thank you.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Christina: I was definitely interested in becoming a teacher and I had, just some really good experiences in school as a young child and so I definitely then ended up following that path over time.

Kathryn: So had it changed at all by the time you left high school or were you still pretty focused?

Christina: Yeah, actually high school was very influential for my decision in going into education. I had a really positive math teacher who was also a female teacher and she was the drill team coach and I was into dancing and I made the team, for three of my four years in high school. And so she was a big influence in my future career because I had an interest in teaching high school math as well. And I wasn't quite sure what age group I wanted to work with. So when I did go to university, I started out seeking degrees in elementary and middle school education and quickly through some classroom experience with observing students. I learned that the younger ages or not my cup of tea, so I did end up pursuing a high school math degree so I could teach high school math, which was where I started out when I did graduate.

Kathryn: And how did you get into being location independent?

Christina: I have really advanced my career within math education over time. So I taught high school math for about three years and then I decided to go back and seek a second master's. I already had a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, which is an education degree and I was seeking a second master's in pure mathematics so I could teach the local junior college. And it was through business networking through the universities that I got connected with some professors at a different institution and they had kind of recruited me out to work on a PhD instead of getting a second master's. Through that PhD, it is blended in mathematics and education and technology, that afforded me the opportunity to teach full time at a university level, which I did in a couple of different states and I enjoyed all of that. I wasn't a huge fan of the research and writing portion of it, which is kind of funny now because I write now, but at the time it wasn't really my passion.

Christina: So I left the classroom and I found some careers where I was writing curriculum and developing curriculum for middle school STEM fields, so science, technology,

engineering and, mathematics. And then I became a manager of professional development for a different education technology company that also focused in mathematics and sciences. So it was just kind of a nice progression. Then I started learning that there are many different types of careers within education, specifically math education and ultimately two years ago to this July this coming July, I will have been fully self employed and 100% location independent for two years. So I'm still working in math education, but I'm developing the resources that college students, university level students would be using in their primarily undergraduate math courses.

Kathryn: When you describe your work to people who are just being polite, what do you say?

Christina: Sometimes I say I'm a mathematician. Sometimes I say I develop resources for math courses. It kind of depends maybe where I am and who I'm chatting with. Sometimes I just say I'm a consultant. I do still feel like I struggle a little bit to explain what I do because I have had the opportunity to do, to dabble in many different aspects. So I think I'm leaning a little bit more towards saying I'm a consultant in the math education field. I think that that's kind of a brief statement I can use to kind of blanket what I do and then kind of get into the details from there.

Kathryn: When you're talking to someone who really wants to know how much more detail do you give?

Christina: We'll talk about specific types of projects that I'm doing and the variances of my clients because I work with clients that are kind of self employed and they might be working by themselves or one other person all the way up to, actually my largest client is the number one textbook publisher in the world. So, working from small businesses to large businesses in the math space is quite interesting in my point of view, and I'll kind of break down some of the different projects, which for example, today I'm working on some power points that are tied to a specific math course, also university level and the author has created them but they want certain animations to go with it. So I'm working on the animation., Which in essence doesn't really sound like you need to know a lot of the mathematics, but the content I'm working with is math. And so today I was able to find some errors in the files I was working with. And so I'm kind of correcting it, kind of like when we read somebody's paper, we might check it for grammar. I'm kind of the grammar checker of mathematics, if you will, but looking more for accuracy when I'm doing some of my projects.

Kathryn: How did you transition into your consulting work?

Christina: Thankfully, when I started as an assistant professor, that was back in 2009 I was in Texas at the time. I got connected to an editor at this particular textbook publisher through a sales rep that had come into my office and talking about the books that was using in the courses I was teaching and through our conversations she thought I would be a great fit to connect with this particular editor and she made that connection and the editor needed some small projects done. I believe if I recall, I was writing some assessment questions. They had some new animated materials that were web based and they wanted questions, assessment questions paired to them. So I would create that and I just got into doing some smaller projects over time. So when I decided to leave the last

company, that kind of full time corporate job I was doing to start my own business, I reached back out to that particular editor and was seeing if there is anything similar to that that I could do.

Christina: And she didn't have anything immediately for me that she passed my name along to some other people that she that she works with. And they approached me and my, my first big contract as being self employed was creating, I think it was almost 500 short video tutorials that were paired to a specific math book. And I would just show students how to solve the problem based on the methods in the book using PowerPoint and voice overs. So the technology isn't too daunting. I didn't have to learn really anything new. I kind of already knew how to use the technology to create the videos. And yeah, that was an amazing opportunity. And through that, that person that I was working with passed my name on and now I'm working with about a dozen different editors, project managers, production directors and whatnot at that publishing company. And it's been really rewarding.

Christina: I truly love it and the smaller clients I've connected with, I actually pick them up through upwork.com so a freelancing site and I really enjoyed my relationship with them. They might not have the volume of work or large scale of work that I would be working on. However they've been repeat clients and one of them actually has been giving me smaller projects that are always ongoing. So when I do finish it, I turn it in. I've been writing some SAT and ACT type question, so more standardized questions and then they give me a new batch. So it's always nice to know I will always have incoming work from one client to another.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Christina: For me, it wasn't obtaining the work. I feel like I lucked out in that aspect because I do understand that it's a big struggle for many. I would say though, it is the technical side of things. So I learned with my equipment, although I understand how to use PowerPoint, I still googled and tried to learn the tips and hints for making the videos that I was doing or even these animations in the PowerPoint better and more engaging. And then for me, it was the audio. I, I bought a really nice microphone and I had read the manual for it and tried to work on the settings, but it was finding the right room in the place I was staying at the time that wouldn't pick up the echo in the room. So kind of simple. But it was interesting, I was moving around and trying, you know, bathrooms in living rooms and bedrooms and this and that, because I didn't have a sound room that was fully soundproof.

Christina: And, and in my last main home that I had, I found that my master bedroom closet was the best place to record video. It was the hottest room in the house, but it was the quietest and all the clothing kind of padded the room. So, a technical struggle. But it was one that I learned about from now, sometimes fully on the road moving. I have learned that if I don't have a closet like that to use, I lay on the bed and I pile the pillows around the microphone and that's worked so far.

Kathryn: Yeah. The number of podcasters who work in their bedroom closets or with a blanket over their heads is much higher than we'd like to imagine.

Christina: Right, right. I haven't done the blanket over the head, but I'll keep that in mind because I can definitely see how that could help.

Kathryn: I have, I have done recordings like that in the past. It gets very hot very quickly.

Christina: Right, right.

Kathryn: And how about your first major success?

Christina: I feel my first major success started after I had finished my first large project and my name got passed on in this large company and I had multiple people contact me at once to start doing projects for them. That was my big hurrah. I felt really good because I knew, I obviously did really good work, if a number of people in the same company want me to do work for them too across different departments. So I was really proud of myself and I still am, my name is still being passed on and, and I'm at the point now where I have to start waitlisting my clients. Where my first year, you know, I'd finish a project and I didn't have anything else coming in. So I'd kinda just wait to see if I'd hear from someone in a week or so. And by week two I would start reaching out and now I have so much work coming to me. I want to make sure I keep those relationships with the different people I've been working with over time. But I'm not reaching out to them as frequently to check in, because I know the volume of work that I can handle as a single individual.

Kathryn: If you could start today knowing everything you already know, is there anything you'd do differently?

Christina: I don't think so. One, one area that I'm really proud about is it was frightening to quit a full time job that had wonderful benefits and this and that. I wasn't happy in that last position and so I was looking for something different. I actually was looking to work for another company in a similar role and it just didn't happen and I was so unhappy that I did just decide to quit. And you know, of course it's very smart to have something lined up before just quitting your job. I am fortunate that I did have savings, so that gave me some comfort and some peace of mind that I would be okay while I was looking for another job. And it was when I reached out to that connection, that first editor that I, I knew from back in the day and, and she was able to get me connected with somebody else that could give me work that that was the weight off my shoulders.

Christina: It was a solid contract right out of the gate. And I could just tell in my gut, you know, this is going to work out. Plus, I really loved what I was, you know, getting into and doing, loved the different projects that have come my way. I've learned some projects I liked better than others so we'll sit down and work on them longer. But I am really proud of my work ethic and keeping at it and I know I'm doing a good job. Because all my clients are coming back and asking for more and I think that that's what's most important. So I'm, I'm very pleased with my track right now, but I did, before selling my house and going a hundred percent location independent, I did a lot of research so I made sure my company was going and I'm getting enough work and income and I did a lot of research

about the different types of places I wanted to go and why I think I want to go there. And the financial aspect of it honestly is of high importance to my travel.

Kathryn: Odds are, there's no such thing as a typical day for you. Do you want to give us what a random day looks like?

Christina: Sure. I'm down in Mexico right now and I'm a block from the beach. So the past couple days I've been getting up in the morning and I've been going for a walk. I try and get about a mile, mile and a half in, in the morning. So I've been walking down the beach and meandering around the flow of small town and then I come back and make my cup of coffee and fire up my computers and kind of look at the scope of work that I wanted to get done in a week and partition it up. So I have my goals for each day on how much I'd like to get done. And so I try and stay in kind of like for breakfast and lunch and hunker down, work during the day when it's also the hottest too. And then in the late afternoon, early evening, I'll put myself together and I'll walk around and find a new place to go have dinner and hopefully meet some locals and some expats and chit chat before I come back and kick my feet up for the evening.

Kathryn: Well, what would you say is the lowest level of education you could have and still do what you do? Do you need a master's degree?

Christina: I think having a master's or a doctorate would be very helpful. However, I think that if you had, well and even most K-12 teachers in general often have to have a master's degree anyways today before it, you could just have your bachelor's degree and be fine. But a lot of the, there's just differences in education now. Highly qualified status often requires a another degree in education, but I do feel that if you have a bachelor's degree, you could easily do what I'm doing. And there's also the teachers out there that have an alternative certification, so they went through a different type of program. But I think the background of the, I know the content and I understand education, I understand how to teach the content. I understand the resources that I've used over the years being in the classroom and out of the classroom.

Christina: That I'm able to tie all of that together and through many of the different Facebook groups that I belong to, I've been kind of advising other people that have been in education, not necessarily math education, kind of how I got into doing what I'm doing and some steps that they could take to see if they couldn't cross over into being a freelancer for education as well. There's a lot of people out there that are looking for various resources to be created because everybody wants to make sure that kids are going through a good education system no matter what. So we know education and healthcare is, you know, just two primary things that are so important to make the world function as a whole. So I definitely think it's an area to be in.

Kathryn: So what are you excited about right now in your field?

Christina: I am excited for various new projects that are coming my way. Having been connected with some different people. There's just always a new opportunity lurking around the corner and I don't have a problem with change so I'm okay to try something new and

see how it works and I really appreciate that when I get connected with new clients, they often will give me a small project to, you know, kind of test the waters. I can see if it's something I really want to do. They can see if they like the quality of my work. So I think that that's something really exciting that I'm always looking forward to moving forward. I don't feel like I'm in the mundane situation with the work that I do. I think it's ever evolving

Kathryn: And now it's time for us to get into the numbers. What would you say your salary range is and how long have you been doing this work?

Christina: I have been fully self employed for two years, but I have been in education since about when I started college the first time in 1997 and I was in the classroom full time starting in 2003 so 16-17 years, you know, full time coming on and my salary now I am on par to hit between about \$100,000 to \$120,000 I have already cleared \$60,000 for the year, so I'm really proud of myself for that. I've been quite pleased that I've been able to hit \$10,000 or more a month of every month this year. So I'm pretty proud of that.

Kathryn: That's US dollars?

Christina: US, yeah.

Kathryn: What would you say the beginning salary range would be?

Christina: I would probably say \$50,000 or \$60,000 on the low end because it's all contract work. I would be careful with saying the word salary, because it really is based on, well how much do you want to take on? Of course you have to get started too, so you have to get clients and work coming to you. But I feel that if somebody was really trying to get started and and was working hard at it, they could easily make \$50,000-60,000 out of the gate, their first year if they put that effort into it and starting to build their name and and getting those referrals and those repeat customers.

Kathryn: And where do you see it topping out?

Christina: I think for me is keeping all the work, just for myself as a one woman show, I do feel this \$100,000 to \$120,000 is probably going to be fairly consistent. I know I can grow my company by hiring subcontractors. I have a couple friends from my past experiences, my doctoral programs and past teaching that have similar backgrounds to me and similar work experiences and knowledge of the technology that I have to use. And they are actually quite a bit older than me and semi retired so they would be interested in taking up from smaller projects, so I could farm out some of my projects to subcontractors. So, I also feel that as I've been asked by my clients, like repeat clients, I try and bump up the rate that we have already agreed to as well as new projects come in. And typically my pitch on that is I'll make sure that I'll exceed your deadline and you know, my quality of work. So, so far it's been good. I, I don't try and increase any of my prices too dramatically, but continuing to add another, you know, \$15, \$25 here or there on top of whatever I'm getting. Often I get, my pay is based on the number of files and a rate per

file. So by increasing that rate per file, that has been helping out a lot, but I'm also fully comfortable at a \$100,000 salary as well.

Kathryn: How do you decide what to charge? Like what, what goes into that process?

Christina: Well, my initial thought was I really did take a \$100,000 and I divided it by, I dunno, like 48 to 50 weeks thinking how many weeks in a year would I like to work? And, and would be fairly reasonable to somebody with like a full time career position. And then I took that number and I divided it by 40 the number of hours in the standard work week for most people. And I understood that that value right there was the bare minimum that I need to charge. And, and really I, I have to charge more than that because I need to take into account health care and retirement and those benefits that come with working with a, you know, full time company and whatnot. So I also kind of figured out how much my health care is. I found a global health plan and I paid just under \$3,000 for a full year. I went ahead and paid it up front cause I got a larger discount. And so if I divide that by 12 then you know, I can add that on to what my monthly expenditures are and so on. And also just keeping in mind my retirement, I know I want to be making something so I just kind of finagled the numbers way. But that's how I kind of got started on figuring out how much I can charge.

Kathryn: Is there anything you do to keep your income stable?

Christina: No, but yes. I am lucky that one of my clients that I got connected with on upwork, we, anytime I get a new client, I do see it as a two way interview. They're interviewing me to see if I have the skills and the qualifications to get their projects done. But I'm interviewing them to make sure I want to work with them, you know, am I gonna like what I'm doing for them and are they going to be difficult or space? It would be easy to work with. Are they gonna give me everything that I need to get the job done well and by their deadline, if not earlier. And I did find one gentleman through Upwork that he wanted to build an ongoing relationship for about three years and he said I would always have consistent work, so I'm actually getting paid an hourly rate for him.

Christina: It is lower than what I would prefer. And we had discussed that. So I let them know that I'm happy to do this and, and I will continue to work with him weekly. But if I have a large project with a higher paying client, I'm going to devote more of my time to that. But I'll still be taking care of the stuff he sends me. And any time I don't have a large project going on with somebody else, then I'll pick up more hours for him. So I feel like I have a really nice kind of safety net that no matter what, I have a client that is always willing to throw work my way. And it, the more I work, the more money I'll make. But that's nice peace of mind for me. And then really just to kind of secure that other projects are coming in, I would be reaching out to my clients, but as I mentioned before, my clients are coming to me before I'm even done with a project for them. They're already lining up more work that they have in the pipeline. So I am able to kind of wait list it, let them know when I can get started. So I can take a little break here or there and it's working out really well so far.

Kathryn: Are there any tools you recommend beginners would start with?

Christina: I use Microsoft Office, Microsoft PowerPoint daily, which I find interesting. That's kind of like the basics, right. And I do have a microphone. It is a Yeti blue microphone and that's, I use that just for creating the audio for my videos. The videos I create. Um, it's not a camera video. They're not seeing me, they're just hearing my voice over a PowerPoint that's animating how to solve math problems. So that's kind of nice that I don't have to worry about background and putting myself together and whatnot. But for me, I have clients that want work done on a Mac versus on a PC. So I do have two different laptops. I have a Dell and a Macbook air. And so depending on the client and what they require, I have to use one product over the other. So, that can be a little pricey.

Christina: However, it's worked out for me. If anything it's just heavy to carry two laptops and the chargers in my backpack cause when I am relocating from one place to another I want my technology on my person so I've kind of given up a little control and I, I did put my microphone because it is fairly big and it has some weight to it. I did put that in a carry on bag but I have two laptops. I do have an iPad pro as well, mainly as a second monitor but I haven't needed it recently because I'm tethered to a large television in the room that I'm in right now for my second monitor. But that's kind of the equipment. And I do have, I like, I have two wireless mice, batteries for them. I do have a graphing calculator that you would have seen back in high school and college. I still carry that with me, so, oh and I have a power strip and two extension cords. Those are very important to me too. As opposed to the technical software or not, it's more about the actual hardware that I'm carrying around and the devices.

Kathryn: And if you, if you decided to only carry one, I guess, platform of stuff, how much do you think that would affect your income?

Christina: Interestingly enough, the majority, I had my Macbook air, that's what I went out and bought when I quit my other job and started on my own because I'm a Mac person. I just like how it functions and I absolutely love my Apple phone and you know, this, that and the other. So I'm, my iPhone, excuse me. So I'm all about apple products, however, that, that very first large project that I got, they required me to use a PC because the Microsoft PowerPoint on a PC is different from Microsoft PowerPoint on a Mac. And there's an special add on that I have to use on the PC that it's called Office Mix. And that's what actually renders the video, sticks the audio in there and renders the video. And they wanted me to use that. They didn't want me to use Camtasia or anything else.

Christina: So for me, the majority of my clients have me working on a PC versus a Mac. So if you had to go with one over the other. But the other thing is, there are few programs I have had to buy over the past year too graphing tools and whatnot that are online based, that have certain colors and this, that, and the other. And so if a client requires something like that, I add that in to the invoice and I have a discussion about it. Normally a product is like \$100 and it's a license, an ongoing license. It's not like an annual subscription or anything like that. So they will add it to their budget and their line items and I'll get reimbursed for that. But just starting out, I dunno, for me, a lot of stuff is more so on, on the Dell. Although I had, I'd probably say 75% of my work is on my Dell and 25% is on my Mac. But at the physical moment, I've got two projects that I



have to do with my Mac and one on my Dell, but that's just at this moment and that's been quite different in the past few years. So it's normally the other way around.

Kathryn: And if you did end up having to go to one platform, do you think there is enough work available to make up for what you'd be losing?

Christina: Yes. I would forego the Mac just because I haven't had as many people on there, but somebody would have to have a gun to my head. [laughter] Well, because one of my clients, I really am doing more consulting work for her and she has online math courses, written in iBook, so that is Mac only. And so in order for me to open the files, I have to have a Mac. Now, I feel like she could probably save it as a pdf and we could work in a different way because I do have to be very cautious. And I have my backup plans that God forbid, something horrible happened to any of my technology, what would I do? And thankfully everything I do is saved to two clouds. I have Google drive for most of my business I have Dropbox for most of my personal and so everything that I do is always sinking and being pushed to a cloud. So I'm not worried about an actual hard drive, like dying on me. I am actually, since I am beach side, I'm a little bit nervous about the humidity and the kind of like salt in the air. I'm not taking my computers down to the beach.

Christina: That's not my style. I work from the privacy of my condo very specifically. I don't want people to know that I'm working and what I'm doing as I'm traveling, unless it's just in passive conversation that I don't want them to see what I do. But yeah, my, my worst case scenario is if one of my technologies really died one of my computers really died and I could not buy something where I was, that would work for me. The closest us major airport for where I'm going to be for quite a, it's going to be Dallas, Texas, and I have friends with family that lived 15 minutes from the airport. So I would order something online, have it shipped to their house, and then I'd have them meet me at the airport. So we've already talked about it. So that's my like absolute worst case scenario, backup plan. If my technology did die while I'm on the road traveling somewhere.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for women looking to become math writers?

Christina: I would say do your due diligence on reaching out and contacting people. So what's interesting is if you have been in the classroom and you were teaching math, grab whatever textbook you were using to teach from, open it up, look at the front matter and it has the information about the copyright and you're gonna look for the line that says editor and then that editor's name. And then you want to Google that person. More than likely they're going to be on LinkedIn or you will find them. You might have to add some more keywords like the title of the book or the author name or this and that. But getting in contact with the editor of the book, that is kind of the highest person on the totem pole and introducing yourself and saying, I'm, you know, "I'm so and so and I'm passionate about this and I've used your book and, and I was wondering if you had any projects that I could assist in?"

Christina: "I would really like to become a, you know, a writer or a developer of resources for products in the math classroom." So it's both, you know, it's really, it's sales, you know,

being a good salesperson for yourself and an advocate and go getter and don't be afraid to just reach out and connect with somebody and ask, "do you have any work?" They'll be tickled pink that you look them up and even say, you know, "I use this book I saw you're the editor and I wanted to reach out." You can reach out to the authors as well. But the editors kind of like the main person that's in charge of like all the products that can go with a book and kind of the highest person on the totem pole, which might sound a little funny, but authors are great and they do a lot of the grunt work but they're not in charge of the budget and the other resources that kind of get tied to their major texts. So I've learned that over the past several years.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Christina: My next steps, I still want to make sure I'm developing really strong relationships with my clients. I'm kind of trying to learn if there's certain ebbs and flows or cycles with the volume of work. Cause I can definitely tell, like right now it's kind of slow for me. I had a whole bunch of other projects the past couple months and now I don't have that many from my bigger players, if you will. So I'm trying to write that down so I can remember for next summer and now since I have left my home country and I really am traveling full time now, I am proud of myself for balancing my time well. I think that that's important and I really want to experience the places that I'm traveling to. I want to meet locals, I want to enjoy the local cuisine and I also want to do sightseeing.

Christina: But not necessarily with all the tourists. You know, I think that that's fun at certain times, but that's why I really want to get to know locals and other expats and they can kind of give me the, what locals do to see things in their community and the nearby one. And I'm traveling kind of flow very purposefully on that so I can unpack and get settled and meet people and enjoy my time and not feel rushed so I can have a healthy work life and enjoy the social aspect of a new community too.

Kathryn: Where can listeners find you?

Christina: I have a LinkedIn profile. That's primarily my business profile. It is under my full name. Christina Gawlik and I have a website that I did build for my business, if you will. I have an LLC, so that's how I've been doing things. So I use my initials C L G Consulting LLC. So I do have a website and I really only list that on my LinkedIn page. I haven't been directing anyone there because I haven't needed it. I've had so much work coming in off of referrals and my Facebook is under my nickname, which I spell C R I S. So Cris Gawlik and that's really just my personal, I don't really talk a whole lot about work on there. Maybe just some of my, you know, quick successes. Like, I got another contract today, but I don't really do anything in detail with work there. That's more about my fun and my travels and experiencing new things just in life. But I appreciate being on LinkedIn and reading the different articles to kind of staying up to date on business stuff. I do have an Instagram account, I just haven't really fully joined that bandwagon a whole lot, but I'm trying to do a better job of posting more pictures there. But I've been on Facebook for a long time, so that's just my natural goto at this point.

Kathryn: Christina, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Christina: You're welcome.

Kathryn: If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in compass insiders where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at [compasspod.com/insiders](https://compasspod.com/insiders) Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find their direction too. Thank you for listening to Compass. You can find today's show notes at [compasspod.com/022](https://compasspod.com/022), that's [compasspod.com/022](https://compasspod.com/022). Next week we'll be talking with Mary Tomasso, content creator.