

HOW REMOTE WORK SAVED ME!

Conquering All Odds



LinkedIn: [shahzadyaqoob/](#)
Facebook: [shahzad.yaqoob.125](#)
Upwork: [shahzadyaqoob](#)
Email: shahzade@osbprovider.com



Shahzad Yaqoob (aka Nick) is an entrepreneur, a philanthropist, a family man, and a human being with a strong resolve. He is an avid reader, a keen sports fan, and loves to spend time with his kids.

He has travelled across the oceans and built a remote career for himself, which no one believed could work out. He has been successful in establishing an [award-winning](#) company that not only offers a professional and flexible work environment but is productive and rewarding for all those involved—the IdeasUnlimited Family.

He is the founder and CEO of [IdeasUnlimited](#), a business support services providing firm that is headquartered in Houston.

Self-discipline and a strong drive can help you overcome any situation and Shahzad proved that in quite a short time.

He has become an inspiration for all those who know him in a professional capacity.

A chat with him revealed much more about his struggles and relentless efforts to gain a reputable position for himself and help others see the light at the tunnel's end.



Here is a detailed question and answer session I had with the CEO of IdeasUnlimited. It is a story of his perseverance and personal struggles that have led to the success of many. If you feel like sharing this message of HOPE with someone who might be looking for some motivation, then do share this and let us know your thoughts in the comments below.

Q: How did you decide to start a company of your own even when you faced problems in a regular work environment?

The company started unexpectedly, or I can say, "Fate decided its course!"

I had been suffering from social anxiety since I was a teenager and early 2010 was the peak, which brought me close to hopelessness; I wanted to quit everything. I left my regular call center job, started avoiding relatives, got on pills (anxiety pills), and even thought about ending my life!

I would sit on the computer for many hours, searching for ways to cure my anxiety and for ways to solve my worries. Some of my worries were keeping up with regular life expectations (income, image, life partner, and so on) while suffering with extreme social anxiety. It was this time when a part-time remote work opportunity (making outbound calls) landed in my Facebook inbox. I grasped onto this opportunity as it gave me a little bit of hope in terms of income. This was a Canadian client who hired me to make outbound calls for his IT staffing firm, and I worked with him for about four months. These four months opened my eyes to a phenomenon that was just taking-off at that time: "Remote work". I joined online freelancing platforms like oDesk and Elance (back then these were the top two freelancing platforms) and started working with a few clients. I found a lot of success initially due to my communication skills as well as call center and marketing experience. Some of those remote jobs/projects expanded and I asked a few of my friends to help me out ... This developed into a routine, extending to more projects ... more workers and that is how it all started!

By the mid of 2010, I had gained a bit of confidence back in life and started envisioning all the possibilities of what I could do with this business for myself and for others. I started thinking that if I provided remote opportunities to other sufferers, it could help them in a similar manner. I discussed my vision (except social anxiety) with my elder brother (a US citizen and someone I have always looked up to), and he advised and helped me to register the company in the US for the ease of conducting business and to achieve my vision.

Q: How did things go in the beginning as you had little experience and no one to support you except your brother in the USA?

Things were not as sweet and smooth as I had initially thought. I had to work hard, deal with many challenges on both ends (clients and workers), and still cope with my SA (social anxiety). I also had

to work at night (as I was living in Pakistan at that time) and that did not make things any easier. From late 2010 till early 2015, I worked during night hours, put in about 80+ hours on a weekly basis and made a lot of compromises in my schedule to achieve my vision/goals. The only week I took off was for my own wedding in 2013, which included the days of the events and the three days of my honeymoon (you can ask my wife if you don't believe me) 😊

In April 2015, I moved back to the US and started working during day hours, which made things a little better, enabling me to more productive. During the course of those four and a half years, I ended up making lots of positive connections, employing workers in various different countries (Philippines, USA, Pakistan, India, and South American and European countries), resolving many online work challenges, and having established a decent small business in "IdeasUnlimited".

Q: How difficult was it to build trust with your remote workers? Please give a few examples of worker troubles and difficult business decisions you faced.

Building trust was a major challenge because of the below common pitfalls of the remote work industry:

- **Disloyal workers:** Workers who would be blatantly dishonest to get what they wanted.
- **Global perception/image:** People expect you to be a certain way when employing them and I just could not deliver that "image" due to my social anxiety. Thus, a lot of people just did not understand or believe in what I was trying to do.
- **Inconsistency in discipline:** Consistency in anything cannot be attained without being disciplined and working remotely means that you must learn to "self-discipline". This can be the hardest thing to accomplish and teach someone to do. I faced the same challenge myself (I was working hard but not smartly and in a disciplined manner, which was the key that was missing) and with the workers as well. Sometimes even the most honest and committed workers would go through such an undisciplined phase, which impacted their ability to produce the best work.

It was very tough dealing with all these issues (especially since I had social anxiety), but I am grateful for the advice of my brother, the love of my family members, and the last but most important: support of the workers who believed in me!

Difficult business decisions I faced

I started this business at an early age (25), so I have surely made some decisions I am not so proud of. One of those poor decisions though, came later in the journey. In 2017 (when I had finally settled in the US personally and professionally), I decided to rush into opening call centers around the world and ended up opening too many, simultaneously. In that year alone, I opened four call center locations: one in Houston (USA) and another one in Karachi personally and two locations in the Philippines with partners. This decision was made in the light of a few promising projects coming our way and in the continuous effort to grow the current projects. However, it did not go according to the plan due to several struggles and most of my year ended up in chaos: travelling here and there,

financial struggles, and so on. My personal life also took a bit of hit as I did not have time to focus on it (my wife and two kids and I was taking care of my elderly parents). Thus, by the beginning of 2018, I had to close two of the four call center locations and suffered a heavy financial loss. I did keep some of the good workers, who continued to work for our company remotely.

Having said the above, I would like to add that it was during this time that one of my Filipino call center partners (Allena Cruz) brought the idea of providing call center opportunities to the underprivileged at her location and I found that our goals and vision were parallel. This location hit off big time in 2018.

Apart from this, I faced plenty of difficult decisions that any other business owner would and I am listing some of those briefly below:

- Somewhere in 2012, there was a time when we lost a few major clients all together and were left with a challenging financial situation. I started getting suggestions from the senior workers (at that time) that I should sell off the business, should focus on other industries, should go back to work and so on. However, I kept at it, worked even harder and got more clients. I am proud that I made that decision.
- I had partnered up with a small home-based IT company from India in 2012 and even though the relationship was great at the start, we faced a few major bumps later in the working relationship. This was majorly since I had no IT background and their team was inexperienced in decision making ... thus, I had to decide to part ways with them respectfully to be able to focus on the core services.

Q: During the ups and downs, did your social anxiety resurface? Did you consider quitting?

Social anxiety has always been around ... I have had ups and downs ... Specially from 2010-2018 but in the last two years or so, I have started to train myself to "stay calm", do less things that make me anxious (trigger points in my control), meditate, focus on the positive side of things, follow a disciplined lifestyle (still need work on this), and become closer to my faith than I was previously. These things combined have helped me get better and I could now say that I am 70% social anxiety free. I still need a lot of work and I am moving in that direction.

By quitting, if you mean "quitting life" ... NO ... that never crossed my mind after early 2010. If you mean "quitting business" ... absolutely not! Even through major downfalls, I never wanted to quit. I cannot quit when I have something that provides for so many good people around the world and can provide even more!

Q: What kept you going?

My passion, my goals! The love of my wife, my kids ... My mother, whose prayers and love have saved me so many times ... just pure magic ... Mothers are irreplaceable.

Also, some brilliant workers who believed in me ... Khurram, Mehwish, Kanwal, and Allena (great person who wants to do great things for her people) are some of the people that have believed in me for a long time!

The senior workers, including but not limited to, Maricar, Erwin, Katie, Remarie, Aidyl, Christina, Michael, and other wonderful Filipino workers (there are so many awesome Filipino workers), Shakira (amazing), Unaiza, Sairah, Sana, Camille, Walaa, Ahmed, Maria, Catherine, Kerrian, Lorena, Lorraine, Rene, Alrick, and others ... I am sorry for mentioning so many names, but I really want to give credit where it is needed and thank all of them for their support and belief in me.

My brother, Shahid Yaqoob, has been the most positive influence in my life as well as my mentor.

And last but the biggest reason is that I want to do so much for myself, my family, and for others ... I want to get better with social anxiety, teach others how to get better, build a larger house for my mother, go on numerous vacations with my family and friends, be better at providing opportunities to those who are socially anxious, those who are partially disabled, those who are underprivileged, and many others ... get more finances to sponsor education for poor children all around the world, sponsor orphans all around the world, and think of ways to tackle our current world's suffering and challenges. There is so much more that can be done if we all come together ... This positive synergy can help so many good people.

Maybe once I get to a point where I have sponsored a thousand children and provided opportunities to a few hundred sufferers, I can finally rest in peace. lol 😊

Q: One common criticism on remote work is that it worsens social anxiety issues. So please elaborate on how remote work empowered and helped you.

Well, it gave me hope and that was a big thing. Socially anxious people tend to lose hope very fast since there is really no quick cure for it, be it medicine or therapy. You must put in a lot of hard work towards it, self-learn many things, and keep at it consistently. While doing all of this, if you are unable to manage your financial situation, it could be devastating, so remote work can give you time to settle. Once you have bought yourself some time and money, you can explore other possibilities of tackling social anxiety and living the life you want. In this way, I do not think it worsens social anxiety. However, I am not a psychologist, so I highly advise everyone to seek a professional opinion before making such decisions.

Q: How do you manage remote work so that it does not exacerbate your anxiety? What advice would you give to other remote workers?

For those working remotely and suffering with social anxiety, I would advise using "remote work" opportunities as the way get their confidence back in life. I would highly discourage just sitting at home, working, and not doing anything else. The remote work opportunity should be looked at as a "hope/hook" to get your confidence back in life ... you will then have time on your hands, you will also be earning a decent income, so please start working on your issues ... find a good

doctor/therapist, start to meditate, join a social anxiety meetup or hang out group and that would help you connect with other likeminded individuals, find your passion, work out, and just be at it until you are better. Life is tough, no matter what we do ... if we keep searching for an "easy life" and think that will make us happy, our search will never be over, and we will always be suffering ... Find happiness within every tough situation, learn to stay calm, learn to stay positive, and you will be happy.

As a tip for working night shifts, I would not advise anyone to work at night continuously for over three years unless they are very young (18-30). Once you are 30+, you should switch it up a bit or it will hamper your mental ability and productivity in the long run.

Q: How important is it for you give back to the society? Why is it so important for you to help others avail the benefits of remote work?

People who are suffering from a condition like social anxiety feel helpless and hopeless. It is tough for them to manage routine things like doing grocery, school, job, and social interaction. Imagine having to go through the same anxiety, fear, and nerves daily. I went through this and got better and now I have the chance to tell others that it is possible, and to show them the same path ... I cannot just sit back and not do it.

Apart from that, remote work opportunities can also be a solution to many other social and economic issues.

Q. How do you find the best resources for a client's requirements?

Through the IU recruitment process, which constitutes different recruitment programs, strategies, and steps. This is a result of nine years of hard work, experimenting and testing, along with the hard work of our HR team.

We are an equal opportunity employer and we are proud of the diversity of our team. We welcome everyone irrespective of their background, race, color, religion, and preference if they have the right skillset and intentions to work for our company. We have people from different backgrounds coming together and working as a one happy family: the IU family!

This was also part of my initial vision and I am glad that I have been able to pull that off with the help of an awesome HR team, led by Mehwish Naeem (the good, good lady, lol).

Q. How has IU ensured quality client engagement and service delivery in these years?

Through IU project management and quality assurance processes that have a variety of different modules and steps to deliver the results the clients expect from us.

I would like to mention Shakira, our Operations Manager, who has really helped me take this department to the next level - Kudos to her!

Q. According to you what is the key factor that clients keep coming back to IdeasUnlimited?

Most of the issues that were discussed earlier were experienced at the early stage of the business. Even while experiencing those issues, we were able to grow two small companies to a much larger scale and managed to satisfy many clients. We are now more experienced, have highly professional and trained teams, along with precisely tested processes to assure top productivity and efficiency!

Clients keep coming back for the above!

Q. How do you see the future of remote industry?

The remote work industry has so much potential in it but with power comes responsibility (yes, not my quote ... I am a spider man fan, lol), so there are risks involved. Some of these risks are related to the ill-tendencies of the remote workers and some are just plain scams or money-making attempts. If you are a client, looking to hire a remote worker, I highly suggest that you do your due diligence before doing so. If you do not have a large enough HR/Recruitment team for this and the time to manage the worker(s) afterwards, you can sign up with a company like ours as one of our services is "operations support".

There is a big need of an entity that regulates everything in the digital world or perhaps regional entities under one digital umbrella to manage the risks and the punishments of digital wrongdoings.

In five years from now, I could see the "remote work industry" doubling in size and as technology gets better, smaller cities will get into the game, which is going to make the reach even bigger and better!

Q. What is your vision for IdeasUnlimited in the remote industry?

Tough question! I surely need to continue to work hard for those who have believed in me (to take them higher) and for the remainder of my goals as stated earlier.

I want my company to be better at creating "remote career opportunities" for those who are socially anxious, partially disabled, senior citizens, and the underprivileged ... Basically, anyone who is suffering in life and can benefit from these opportunities. I want IU to continue to be an equal opportunity employer and set the standards of a diversified remote culture.

Time will tell if I am able to do so or not, but I will surely continue trying!