Unit 4 – Reading practice: Who wants to be a sofapreneur?

Who wants to be a sofapreneur?

By Sarah O'Connor



Alibaba is used by hundreds of millions of people around the world. Thanks to e-commerce sites like this anyone can be an import–export magnate* without leaving the sofa. Thanks to Airbnb, anyone can be a hotel manager. Today there is a growing number of 'sofapreneurs' making money from websites like Alibaba, eBay and Airbnb, and many of them are not even doing it full time. Freelancer sites like PeoplePerHour say many of their users are office staff who log on after work.

It is estimated that one percent of U.S. adults earn money from these websites. JPMorgan Chase says of this group that most of them rely on the sites for less than a quarter of their income. Still, that is valuable in a world of weak economic growth, low wages and insecure employment. In some cases, these sites are giving people who might have difficulties doing a traditional job a way to earn money, for instance because of health reasons or caring responsibilities. They can also offer lower prices to consumers. However, governments will have to make sure sofapreneurs cannot compete unfairly with other small businesses by simply avoiding tax.

One of the biggest benefits is the hardest to measure. Many of the people I've interviewed who sell products on these sites say that it gives them a sense of satisfaction they do not have in their day jobs. Last year I spoke to Einar Parker, who spent his days working on the production line at a car seat factory. He began making jewellery in his spare time and set up his own shop on Etsy. The site was started twelve years ago to sell homemade goods. 'You don't think a lot when you're on an assembly line, but I've got something to think of, coming up with ideas,' he explained. 'That is my escape.' Sofapreneurship seems to be making people a little richer and a little happier, and that is no bad thing.

*rich and powerful person in business

3 **Read the headline and the article again and answer the questions.**

1 What is a 'sofapreneur'? Someone who ...
   - **a** earns money online while working from home.
   - **b** spends a lot of time sitting on his/her sofa.
   - **c** runs an online business which sells furniture.

2 What two employment statistics are mentioned from the USA?

3 Which two groups have difficulties doing traditional jobs?

4 What is the risk to other small businesses from sofapreneurs?

5 What does the writer think governments must do? Why?

6 How does Einar Parker feel about his full-time job?

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7 Why does he enjoy his jewellery business?

8 Is the writer in general positive or negative about sofapreneurs?

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